

Respecting Traditional Ecological Knowledges (TEK) or Unlearning the Methodologies of Collecting

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Traditional Ecological Knowledges

- Traditional (a working definition) - that which resides in cultural traditions: material, non-material and behavioral features of the life-ways of a People. Ways of making and doing things that are passed down often through custom and habit, as a way of life.

Traditional Ecological Knowledges

- Ecological (a working definition) – that which pertains to relationships and processes in an environment and ecosystems, including human interaction with an ecosystem. *Ecological* describes the characteristic of something, especially knowledge, which is emergent from unique landscapes and seascapes.

Traditional Ecological Knowledges

- Knowledges (a working definition) – a body of practices and ideas that are useful and practical in the context of life-ways. These knowledges (plural) must be many for they capture the unique long-standing relationships between Peoples and Places. These knowledges are the expression of specific deep spatial “know-how” regarding the symbiotic interaction between a People and a Place that constitutes a Way of Knowing.

Traditional Ecological Knowledges (TEK)

- Hypothesis 1 – Given our working definition of TEK, one can acknowledge that TEK defies a one-size-fits all approach to the application of knowledge and solutions.
- Hypothesis 2 – Given TEK is intergenerational in character and the fact that it is literally and figuratively situated in a Peoples life-ways in a particular landscape or seascape, it is impossible to collect per se – but rather necessary to respect *in situ*.

Nature-Culture Nexus

- The symbiotic relationship that gave tribal Peoples their Indigenous cultures and knowledges.
- Cultures large emergent from the landscapes and ecosystems that consisted the places they called home or homelands.

Moving from Collecting to Respecting TEK ∞

- The NCN concept: nature-culture nexus. The NCN is where we sit, work, live, etc. It is a concept describing our human interaction with the balance of nature beyond our human selves. It expresses our interaction NOT in the abstract, but at an experiential and phenomenal level.
- Another way of thinking about TEK is to approach these knowledges as emergent from inter-generation transmission of a sense of place through life-ways.

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- Because TEK is understood and applied by People of a Place, these processes and relationships are impossible to collect – they are not artifacts but rather useful insights gained only through experience and respect for the indigenous 'experts' on the ground.

∞∞Moving from Collecting to Respecting TEK ∞∞

- Acquiring TEK is ultimately an issue of earning respect by building working relationships built on honesty.
- This is a time consuming activity - one best accomplished by listening to what the indigenous tribal experts want to share with you.
- Pay Attention.

∞∞Moving from Collecting to Respecting TEK ∞∞

- Ultimately, those wanting to make use of TEK must establish good relationships with the People who possess the knowledge our technological tools cannot capture.

A modest guideline working with the TEK:

- * H honesty
- * A accountability
- * R relationships
- *R respect
- *T trust

TEK use is a best community practice

- By forming respectful relationships with communities – we move from the bad old imperialist tradition of collecting 'all things Indian' or indigenous to a new paradigm of respecting long-standing local knowledges that may hold the key to addressing the incredible challenges to tribal or community sustainability we will face with climate change.

Intellectual Property Rights

- As we focus on TEK in the context of this project/training it must be respected as the possession, and often the cultural patrimony, and even property of the Peoples (Nations) that hold the knowledge.
- This 'ownership' and authorship - if these knowledges are recorded - must be respected with those we choose to work with when using TEKs addressing the impacts of climate change.

Honoring our Tribal Institutions

- Us our own institutions, policies, procedures, processes and protocols to establish ways to respectfully use TEKs in addressing environmental, especially climate change, issues.
- If these institutions , policies, etc. are not in place – use the opportunity to create these as a community exercise.

Why Indigenous TEKs are Important - 1.

- The environmental crises we now face were shaped to a large extent by some of us not knowing what they were doing. These crises and the looming climate catastrophe can be addressed by knowing contained in doing. The examination of knowledges embodied in the life-ways of indigenous Peoples offer hope. The separation of knowing and doing so widely accepted today can be addressed if we recognize knowledge resides in our living in this world, not controlling it. By paying attention to our human conduct and the life beyond our own in the world surrounding us – a complex dynamic system – where we, humankind, are not in control, we will find humility and wisdom. For those paying attention knowledge resides in life.

Why Indigenous TEKs are Important - 2.

- Many humans accept the fact that knowledge is essentially a social enterprise. Many indigenous knowledge systems extend the notion of knowledge construction to a cooperative activity involving the "other-than-human" life that surrounds us. Planet Earth – a living being, known to many indigenous Peoples today as Mother Earth - is trying to tell us something in her language. The language of the Earth, her mother tongue, is one best understood through the many dialects known by indigenous Peoples around the world. Because indigenous Peoples have paid attention to our mother the earth, it is important to listen to what we can share with humankind. These knowledges are bound in unique life-ways – customs, habits, behaviors, material and symbolic features of culture emergent from the land and sea - and therefore have practical implications for those of humankind wanting to cooperatively and sustainably live within a place, as opposed to at an address.

Oscar Kawagley - Yupiak

- "So the cold and the culture that it made: it gave us the characteristics of our identity. It gave us the characteristics of ingenuity, adaptability, belief, and persistence. These are characteristics that were given to us by the cold. My clothing, my shelter, my food and my technology were all engendered by the cold—and it is a very simple technology, and the technology that is best kept in the mind. Not so the modern technology that we have—I don't know what to do with the computer. I am a technological dunce and very proud of it. What if we have a major solar flare? And it knocks out the satellites, knocks out the astronauts, and knocks out the energy grids, and all of a sudden your cellular phones are useless and your computers are useless and everything else is useless. And it is my cold-based native knowledge that will give me hope to make a life and to make a living."

Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Inuit activist and 2007 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee

"I am here today to talk to you about how global warming and climate change are affecting the basic survival in many vulnerable regions and, in particular, of indigenous cultures throughout the Americas.

Of course, what I know best is from my own region -- the Arctic, which happens to be the hardest hit by climate change. As such, many of the impacts that I will refer to will come from my own homelands. However, you can consider similar impacts on most indigenous peoples who remain integrated with their ecosystems. Inuit and other indigenous peoples continue to be an integral part, and not separate, from the ecosystems in which we live. Climate change brings into question the basic survival of indigenous people and indigenous cultures throughout the Americas."