

Tla-o-qui-aht Knowledge Systems

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Research undertaken with Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation and the Traditional Resource Committee situate the core questions of FishWIKS within *Hahuuti* and querying how enquiries about knowledge systems, fisheries, governance and scale can provide opportunities for the on-going reinvigoration of the *hawit*, *hakum* and *hahuuti*. As such, the findings of this research address the following core FishWIKS research questions:

1. How and to what extent are different knowledge systems incorporated into fisheries governance and processes by indigenous nations in Canada at national, regional and local scales?
2. Can varied IKSs be used to improve the effectiveness of fisheries governance at national, regional, and local scales in Canada and internationally?
3. Can various IKSs be used to inform and enhance an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management in Canada and internationally, given the complexities of ecosystems and additional uncertainties posed by climate-induced changes?

A brief introduction on the specific issue being addressed

Exploring how Tla-o-qui-aht research co-participants and Nuu-chah-nulth-aht practice *haahuupa* (teaching and stories) provides an

entry point to discuss knowledge systems (use, transfer and understanding), illustrate sites of governance and provide insight on notions of space and place.



Tla-o-qui-aht, B.C.

Why it was important to address this issue?

An exploration of ontologies¹ of knowledge systems may assist in developing fisheries management approaches that stave off social and political conflict that seemingly stem from epistemological differences (as in Indigenous knowledge systems versus western knowledge system).

What are the key findings from the research?

Findings suggest that political ontologies and the multiverse provide conceptual frameworks to do two things: work within a conceptually consistent indigenous framework and take seriously their world-making practices.

¹ Ontology is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as the philosophical study of *being*. It explores concepts that directly relate to *being*, such as existence and reality. I have chosen to look at ontology, “interactions between the world as-it-is and ideas or conceptions about the world” (Gregory, 2009, p. 511), because focusing solely on indigenous

epistemologies, which is a common practice among ecologists (Berkes, F., Colding, J., & Folke, C. [2000]), may eclipse the effects of hierarchical or developmental classifications of characteristics of the knowledge systems themselves.

What are some of the main policy Implications arising from the findings (e.g. for the government, for indigenous nations (as a whole, or individually), for other relevant stakeholders, etc.)

National and Pacific Canadian policy instruments (Oceans Act 1996, Canada’s Ocean Strategy 2002, Canada’s Action Plan 2005 and the Wild Salmon Policy 2005) all target forms of governance and decision making that are participatory, include the desire to incorporate indigenous knowledge as data for decision making. These instruments identify gaps including knowledge availability, integration for decision-making and bridging discourses. Tla-o-qui-aht Knowledge Systems research focuses on exploring how an ontological focus contributes to bridging discourses.

From a fisheries governance perspective, this research’s focus on understanding ontologies provides policy-relevant knowledge that contributes to enhanced decision-making. Examples of such knowledge include:

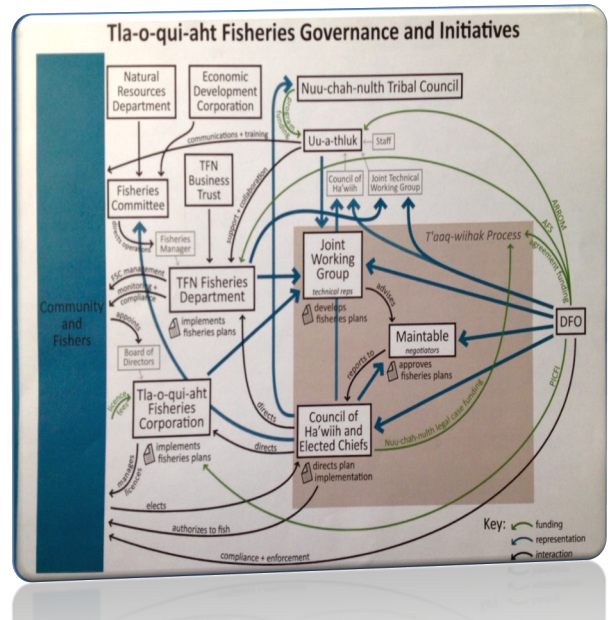
What are salmon - As a held value, salmon are a symbol of the social situatedness of individuals, their interdependence, and a symbol of desirable values.

Values and well-being – A focus on pluralities allows us to ask if the individual or subject holds the same sorts of status across pluralities. We are seeing signs that the individual is not the primary unit of description. What we are seeing in Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation is the individual as a piece of a larger collective identity of the family. It is the family or families that constitute the unit that expresses values either held or assigned. For policy this means, amongst other things, that there is need to focus on relationships rather than just abundance.

Knowledge systems and decision-making -

These are nested in a set of multipart sites at the community scale and involve;

- an intact hawit that are responsible for the hahuufi
- An Elected Chief and Council
- An Aboriginal Aquatic Resource And Oceans Management agreement with other Nuu-chah-nulth-aht through the Uu-a-thluk Program (Taking Care of)
- Aboriginal Fishing Strategy (AFS) Manager, Hatchery Manager
- Commercial Fishing Enterprise
- T’aaq-wiihak rights based fishery (fishing with the permission of the chiefs), an AFS funded program
- Chairing local Salmon Roundtables (multi-sector committee)
- Operating a Tribal Park
- Operating a hatchery
- and provincial, federal, NGO and private partnerships to restore salmon habitat



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