APPLIED DISSERTATION RESEARCH:
Self-Determination for Whom?

Gwen Reimer
McMaster University

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which issues of community-based development and proposed participatory research parallel each other in terms of the question of self-determination. Each of these types of participatory activity are ideals which in reality are subject to political and ethical constraints. The author also investigates the difficulties inherent in conducting 'applied' research for 'academic' (Ph.D. dissertation) purposes and the need for a *praxis* approach in anthropological training. These issues are situated in a proposed collaborative evaluation of community-based tourism development in Pangnirtung, Northwest Territories.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les parallèles, concernant l'auto-determination autochtone, entre le développement communautaire et la recherche communautaire. En tant qu'idéaux ces deux types d'activité participatoire sont limités par des contraintes politiques, économiques et sociales. En réalité, ni le développement ni la recherche communautaire sont néccessairement dirigés vers l'autonomie. Par contre, ils impliquent une pratique de négotiations et de compromis. Cet article addresse aussi, partiellement, les problèmes et les opportunités concernant la recherche appliquée dans un programme d'études académique (de dissertation doctorale). Ces sujets font l'objet d'un projet d'evaluation collaboratoire du développement touristique communautaire à Pangnirtung, NWT.

INTRODUCTION

About a month ago I presented my Ph.D. research proposal to interested faculty and students of the Department of Anthropology at McMaster University.[1]

The presentation was all about how I *anticipate* doing an evaluation of tourism development in Pangnirtung, Northwest Territories. It was, and is, very 'applied' and peppered with politically correct jargon like 'community-based', 'participatory', 'emancipation' and 'self-

determination'. However, as I was preparing the proposal and as I presented it to my colleagues, a nagging question kept lurking at the back of my mind: Exactly WHO is this research FOR? As I described how my methods and theories were aimed at native self-determination, I began to wonder to what extent this was true. How can a detailed twenty-five page academic agenda of research belong to anyone but myself?

It is time to openly admit that despite my anthropological altruism -- which I take very seriously -- I am also determined, that come hell or high water, I will get a Ph.D. degree out of this research. Consequently, I find myself preparing not only for the emotional and pragmatic requirements of the imminent field season, but also for the ethical and political contradictions of applied research. I suspect that my dilemma is familiar to most applied anthropologists, who, as professionals, must continually reconcile themselves to this fact: Knowledge is as much a commodity for our own consumption and advancement, as it is a useful resource for the emancipation of those for whom we profess to work (cf. Hall 1979).

Part of what excites me about my upcoming fieldwork is that I believe my methodological approach -- based on a participatory model -- and the theoretical premise of community-based development complement each other in terms of their common goals of self-determination. The problem is that each is based on an ideal of participation that is assumed to be representative if not complete, and which in turn is assumed to lead to control by yet another ideal, the 'community'. Cohen and Uphoff (1980:213) recognize a real danger in the 'growing faddishness' and 'lip service' that participation is currently subject to in both academic and bureaucratic circles. As a fad, participation becomes an end only, rather than a means as well, and the promotion of participation becomes "good by definition" (ibid).

The problematic reality that confounds the idea of community participation in development and research lies in its limitation of always being partial, factionalist, or in danger of manipulation and co-optation. That is, participation is "inescapably political" (ibid:228).[2] In dissertation research, this problem of participation and control is compounded by its intrinsically academic nature and goals. As a Ph.D. candidate, I am required to pre-plan a project to fit within a particular time period and geographic setting -- my 'year' in 'the field'. It must be appropriate to and contribute to current theoretical and methodological frameworks, and it must be worthy of funding. In other words, I have had to purposefully seek out an applied research project that is amenable to my academic requirements. I cannot wait for the people of Pangnirtung or the Government of Northwest Territories [hereafter shortened to GNWT] to contract me to do research for them; nor can I afford to offer exclusive

use of the data toward Inuit needs. This, I believe, has serious implications for the control and ownership of the research, which, in this sense, continues to smack of a neo-colonial exploitation of indigenous knowledge (cf. Warry 1990:6).
Allow me now to 'deconstruct' a few passages from my proposal. As I root out some of my own assumptions, I hope to demonstrate the issues I have just raised.[3]

COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT

My dissertation research will be 'applied' in that it aims to address a social need -- that of greater economic self-sufficiency in an Arctic community. In 1980, Pangnirtung was chosen by GNWT Economic Development and Tourism as the 'pilot project' site for a new policy of community-based tourism development in the Eastern Arctic. In 1989 I spent two months in Pangnirtung conducting preliminary research into residents' attitudes toward tourism development in their community. Now, after ten years of tourist activity, GNWT and the people of Pangnirtung would like to see the project evaluated in terms of its goals of increased local economic and political control. Through a series of circumstance and negotiation, I have been fortunate enough to 'land' this evaluation project in conjunction with my Ph.D. fieldwork.
My research will be 'academic' in that I hope to collect data that will critically examine development practices in the North while adding to theories of decentralized community-based development. I propose that:

Theoretically, community-based initiatives are the best means by which underdeveloped regions can achieve both economic and political self-sufficiency.

Several case studies in the development literature demonstrate a greater degree of success when local participation is a genuine component of development projects; they advocate "fitting projects to people" (cf. Uphoff 1985; Cohen & Uphoff 1980:217-18; Hall 1979:404).
Hence, I have inherited the assumption that:

While community-based development may not be *sufficient* for success in view of political and economic constraints, it appears to be *necessary* for successful results. Community-based development initiatives [...] have the advantage of addressing both subsistence and wage elements of an Inuit mixed economy. As such, it is *culturally-appropriate* development. In terms of *locally-controlled*

development, community-based initiatives are necessary with regard to the Inuit political call and action for self-determination and self-government...

Nevertheless, there is a constant and hidden danger I need to be aware of here: the danger of seeing community-based efforts and participation as a panacea.

As I see it, my job -- in both applied and academic respects -- is to evaluate the extent and meaning of the "community-basis" of tourism development in Pangnirtung. Consequently, I list the following research priority:

> In order to define to what degree and in what ways tourism development in Pangnirtung is "community-based", priority will be given to a critical examination of the process of decision-making, development planning, and implementation. [This will entail an analysis of the kinds of participation, of who has participated and of how the process of participation has taken place with regard to tourism development in Pangnirtung.] ...

The concept of 'community' is the magic key to my analysis, because the way in which it is defined will greatly influence how one measures the success or failure of the project. But who IS the community? GNWT may be content to conceptualize community participation in terms of a few successful local individual entrepreneurs. The Pangnirtung Hamlet Council, on the other hand, may judge community participation in broader terms that include a greater percentage of resident involvement, benefit and control. In my view, social-scientific criteria to measure participation [as outlined by Cohen and Uphoff (1980)] is critical because it forces me as a researcher to be explicit about WHO 'the community' is.

This means that I must be critical of whatever obstacles stand in the way of Inuit participation in development planning. Other development case studies have shown that participation is sometimes used as an instrument by which to ratify bureaucratic domination of indigenous community modernization processes (IN Cohen & Uphoff 1980:227). This is because the consequences of participation are percieved to be, and indeed can be, a potential threat to administrative structures and control (Krefetz 1973:371). Under the influence of such impressive publications, I have a particular tendency to be critical of government policy as an obstacle to participation, as my proposal demonstrates:

[A] brief historical overview of Canadian economic policy in the Arctic indicates the weakening of and lack of attention to local economies that lay in the wake of boom and bust types of development projects. *Paternalistic* policies of centralized development planning [...] proved beneficial only in the short-term.

I am also critical, for example, of the historical problem of northerners' general mistrust of governmental structures, of southerners, and of non-native northerners. My proposal correlates the refusal or reluctance to give local Inuit people power over matters most important to them, with a significant degree of withdrawal and indifference (cf.Brody 1975:120-1). I go on to say:

These obstacles stand in the way of community-based tourism development in Pangnirtung primarily because, despite the fact it preaches local participation and control over planning, it continues to be initiated from outside the community. Consequently, local people are hesitant to commit time and energy to committee work they are *told* will be good for the community [...], in a project over which they have little authority.

Statements such as this demonstrate a blatant political contradiction between my proposition to conduct collaborative research which includes the government, and my obvious bias toward criticizing government policy.

Within the context of community-based development, I have, to this point, touched on a few thorny assumptions underlying issues of participation and the community, of control and criticism. I would like to look now at how these same issues are paralleled within the context of participatory research.

PARTICIPATORY MODEL OF RESEARCH

I begin where I left off by asking whether I am as critical of my own need to control the research as I am of the bureaucratic need to control development. Take, for example, the following passage from my proposal:

While the agenda for research cannot be determined without the direct input of concerned community and governmental personnel, I anticipate three key areas of inquiry in the evaluation of this

development project. These include economic impact, cultural and social effects, and political empowerment.

If you were to read my entire proposal, you would find that my assertion that research objectives must be formulated within a participatory environment, is immediately followed by a detailed four-page, single-spaced outline of what I believe those objectives to be.[4] In part, this is because I have been fortunate enough as a student to spend research time in Pangnirtung, and thus have an idea of what the community is like and of some of its needs. Nevertheless, this research, like tourism development, is still initiated from outside the community of Pangnirtung. Consequently, I wonder how much opportunity there is, as I propose, for Inuit to *formulate* rather than merely *ratify* the decisions of this supposedly participatory research process. That is, am I as cognizant of the problem of controlled versus genuine participation in research, as I am about guided versus self-determined models of indigenous economic development (cf. Krefetz *et al.* 1973:373; Stiles 1982)? I want to believe that my adoption of a "self-determination model of research reflects a *learning process* that provides local groups with new decision-making tools", but I fear that most pertinent decisions have already been made to fit in with the restrictions and responsibilities of my academic requirements (cf. Barger & Reza 1989; Uphoff 1985).

In light of these questions, I think it important to define the parameters of a participatory model of research by the same standards I propose to measure community participation in development. What really are the boundaries of what may be considered 'participatory'? Must it be "full" as Hall (1979:404) suggests? Or perhaps it is not a single thing, but rather a plural entity that varies in its dimensions and contexts, as Cohen and Uphoff (1980:214) suggest. Whatever the case -- and I tend to agree with the latter definition -- what seems crucial is that participation *be* defined and that my research goals be *explicitly consistent* with that definition.

Hence, I question whether in fact I have already 'chosen' the participants -- the 'subject' -- when I say that?:

> I envision this research to be collaborative in nature, involving a full-time local Inuit co-investigator [dependent upon GNWT funding], local organizations such as the Pangnirtung Tourism Committee and the Hamlet Council, and GNWT officials.

Have I already precluded "full partnership in the research process" by designating *who* those partners will be (cf. Warry 1990:2)? Have I excluded women by concentrating on local organizations dominated by

men? Throughout the process, there will be a need for critical self-examination of the extent to which my applied dissertation research limits the parameters of participation or continues to relegate participants to merely an *informant role*. Does the simple fact that my research is applied and participatory, band-aid over the possibility that it might also maintain the status quo, a crime of which 'pure' research has been accused (cf. Hall 1979:399)?

Related to this issue of who is doing the participating, is the perhaps misleading assumption that native community leaders or front-line workers always represent the research priorities of the rest of the community (cf. Warry 1990:7,10). I do not mean to imply that "key Inuit women and men in local organizations" are not representative; indeed, my proposal hints at precisely this point.[5] But what I have ignored is the fundamental importance of the nature of the relationship between the participants and those whom they represent (cf. Krefetz *et al.* 1973:375). For example, there is the danger that the research process will be co-opted by a community faction.[6] By not being fully and consciously aware of this relationship of representation, there is a dangerous tendency to label research as participatory, when in reality it might be characterized by "pseudo-participation" (Uphoff 1985:369).

I suspect that one of the reasons we as anthropologists tend not to question the validity of community participation *per se*, is because our training explicitly and implicitly develops an 'underdog bias' in each of us. While this is honourable, it does create problems for those of us who attempt to collaborate with both indigenous peoples and government agencies in applied research. While I do not mind being public about my bias in front of fellow anthropologists, I must admit that the following passage was NOT included in the proposal I sent to GNWT Department of Economic Development and Tourism:

> [M]y own participation indicates a clear value position and active involvement in favour of the people of Pangnirtung ...

Upon more careful reflection, I have come to believe that research honesty requires me to be open and to convince GNWT collaborators that this biased approach does *not* mean a less than accurate and scientifically sound ethic of research. This is in spite of the fact that it demonstrates a sharp divergence from basic research 'value-free' and 'objective' priorities. Rather, participation research of this sort necessitates a conscious and explicit control of bias and value positions.

In fact, a conscious and explicit value position may be a necessary condition of objectivity (cf. Freeman 1977:151). This is nothing new to

students today who are likely thoroughly familiar with the reflexive movement within anthropology over the past few years (Scholte 1974; cf. Clifford & Marcus 1986). Unfortunately, most of the discussion about self-reflexivity has concentrated upon our role as ethnographers, rather than as consultants or facilitators. This means we have nurtured a scientific ethic of representation, but not necessarily of action and application. To my mind, there is a need for greater emphasis in our education on the matter of the political pragmatics of research, whether applied or basic. My own 'traditional anthropological training' has done its best to teach me theory, but now as I prepare for 'my year in the field', I find myself wanting in terms of application and practice. I conclude now by briefly addressing the need for 'a special understanding', particularly in my attempt to make applied dissertation research more than just an oxymoron (cf. Chambers 1985).

CONCLUSION

As I contemplate applied dissertation research, I require more than the ability to contribute to development theory or to the solution of social problems in the North. I also require the skills to collaboratively generate knowledge toward ethical and political ends (cf. Partridge 1987:216-17). At the graduate level, of course, it becomes my own responsibility in part to seek out those skills necessary to fulfil these goals. However, I think that applied understandings of anthropological theory and method need to be seriously and systematically incorporated into our basic training. Whether you prefer to do 'pure' or applied research, is less important than the fact that we likely share the desire for our anthropological knowledge to be useful, either directly or indirectly (cf. Rylko-Bauer 1989).

My research proposal can do no more than remain at the level of what Partridge calls, *theoria*: it is based on inherited knowledge and the participatory research experience as related by other practising anthropologists. This is *objective* knowledge. The only *subjective* element in the proposal is my own; hence, my proposal is more about me than it is about Inuit people, GNWT officials, or native self-determination. What is yet required is for this research to reach the level of *praxis*. By this I mean that the theory and objectified knowledge of community-based development and participatory research, must become integrated with the subjective knowledge and practical experiences and decisions of the people in Pangnirtung, the government officials, and myself as an applied researcher. This, I believe, will begin to happen only when I arrive in 'the field.'

My question is why this 'field' experience, this element of practice as an anthropologist and the application of the knowledge we help to generate, is a relatively under-encouraged element of our education. It is in the realm of *praxis* that our anthropological training has let us down. We need to develop that distinct way of thinking about the cultural world which incorporates objective knowledge, subjective experience, and the contingencies of social reality (Partridge 1987:218). As students, our super-saturated immersion in the contingencies of social theory, prevents us from cultivating pragmatic strategies based in practical knowledge as an avenue to ethical and political effectiveness. That most of us in the Canadian/American system of academia are required to spend at least seven years *thinking* about anthropology before being allowed to *do* anthropology, is likely the most clear demonstration of our lack of a truly *praxis* approach.

For me, *praxis* demands an *ethics of action* that stands in contrast to the basic sciences *ethic of noninvolvement* (cf. Partridge 1987:230-1). Hence, *praxis* implies a new way of teaching and learning anthropology. For example, an ethics of action necessarily bears upon the ambiguities inherent in participatory methods. This means that we as applied researchers must learn to be scientifically rigorous in our definition of what participation means in specific contexts. Moreover, it means that we must also debate the possibility that theory-making is no longer our exclusive prerogative, but may belong also to "native scientists" (Warry 1990:4). A *praxis* approach implies a methodology embedded in communication and dialogue with our 'subject' and/or our 'client.' This implies the need for a training programme that can nurture a kind of research that is more than something *influenced* by the cultural Others among whom we work. While this is a participation of sorts, it is NOT participatory, nor can it justify what is otherwise an alienating process.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the ethical and political future of applied anthropology is significantly dependent upon a restructuring of our training programs to correct the imbalance between theory and practice. By this I mean curricular opportunities to become involved in anthropological practice, rather than just talking about practice as yet another anthropological category. I would also suggest that our future as applied researchers requires a more honest understanding and explication of participation as a crucial element in the ethical and political philosophies of a *praxis* approach.

REFERENCES

Barger, W.K. & Ernesto Reza
1989 Policy and Community-Action Research: The Farm Labour Movement in California. In Making Our Research Useful: Case Studies in the Utilization of Anthropological Knowledge. J.Van Willigen, B.Rylko-Bauer & A.McElroy, (editors). Boulder: Westview Press, pp. 258-282.

Brody, Hugh
1975 The Peoples' Land: Whites and the Eastern Arctic. London: Penguin Books.

Chambers, Erve
1985 Applied Anthropology: A Practical Guide. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Clifford, James & George Marcus
1986 Writing Culture; The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkely: University of California Press.

Cohen, John M. & Norman T. Uphoff
1980 Participation's Place in Rural Development: Seeking Clarity through Specificity. World Development 8:213-235.

Freeman, Milton M.R.
1977 Anthropologists and Policy-Relevant Research: The Case for Accountability. In Applied Anthropology in Canada, Proceedings No. 4, J. Freedman, (editor). Canadian Ethnology Society.

Hall, Budd L.
1978 Knowledge as a Commodity and Participatory Research. Prospects 9(4):393-408.

Krefetz, Sharon P. & Allan E. Goodman
1973 Participation for What or for Whom? Some Considerations for Research. Journal of Comparative Administration 5(3):367-380.

Partridge, William L.
1987 Toward a Theory of Practice. In Applied Anthropology in America, Second Edition. Elizabeth M. Eddy & William L. Partridge, (editors). New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 211-233.

Rylko-Bauer, Barbara, John Van Willigen, & Ann McElroy
1989 Strategies for Increasing the Use of Anthropological Research in the Policy Process: A Cross- Disciplinary Analysis. In Making Our Research Useful: Case Studies in the Utilization of Anthropological Knowledge. J. Van Willigen, B.Rylko-Bauer & A.McElroy, (editors). Boulder: Westview Press, pp. 1-25.

Scholte, Bob
1972 Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology. In Reinventing Anthropology, Dell Hymes, (editor). New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 430-457.

Stiles, J.Mark
1982 The Baker Lake Affair: Case Study of a Cancelled Training Workshop. In Learning for Self-Determination: Community Based Options for Native Training and Research. T.Jackson, D. McCaskill & B.L. Hall, (editors). Canadian Journal of Native Studies 2(1):25-50.

Uphoff, Norman T.
1985 Fitting Projects to People. In Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development. Michael M. Cernea, (editor). New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 359-395.

Warry, Wayne
1990 Doing Unto Others: Applied Anthropology and Native Self-Determination. Unpublished paper prepared for the Society for Applied Anthropology Meetings, York, England, March 1990. (Cited with permission of the author).

1991 The Eleventh Thesis: Applied Anthropology as Praxis. Unpublished paper prepared for the 1991 Meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology and for the Journal Human Organization. (Cited with permission of the author).

NOTES

1. The ideas expressed in this paper have benefitted from discussions with McMaster colleagues Mike Evans, Eudene Luther, and Wayne Warry. However, I take full responsibility for the contents herein.

2. I may indeed discover that Government of Northwest Territories officials or private investors -- Toronto tour operators, for example -- have co-opted leaders in Pangnirtung, bending them to outside priorities and perceptions concerning tourism development (cf. Uphoff 1985:386-7). In reverse, I might find that local leaders belonging to a particular community faction have become consumers of community-based development and have co-opted the tourism project benefits in some way (cf. Chambers 1985:193). Moreover, I might be dismayed by local attempts to use the participatory approach to my research as an avenue to co-opt its results. Conversely, I may simply be unable to generate the kind of research participation that can be considered truly representative.

3. The title of my research proposal is: "Evaluation of Community-based Tourism Development in Pangnirtung, Northwest Territories: 1980-1990" (Reimer, April 1991).

4. I wrote this detailed "Research Objectives" section for two reasons: first, because my Ph.D. committee expected me to demonstrate what I think I know; and second, because these are the things I need to find out in order to write the kind of dissertation I believe the Department of Anthropology at McMaster expects. This further begs the question of why the university 'powers that be' seem unwilling to accept an applied piece of work as evidence of Ph.D. qualification and distinction. I fully expect to have to write two pieces of work: a lay-report for community and GNWT use; and a much more lengthy and likely completely different academic report for dissertation purposes.

5. In my proposal I state: "Participatory methods allow communities such as Pangnirtung to develop criteria for the benefit, pertinence, and utility of research. This methodology also creates an awareness among government policy makers that key Inuit women and men in local organizations are experts in community life".

6. For an example of how development research can be co-opted by a community faction, see Chapter 9 of *Deep Water: Development and Change in Pacific Village Fisheries* by Margaret C. Rodman (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).