Framing and Identity in the Gwich’in Campaign Against Oil Development

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Overview

- Climate Justice framework
- Gwich’in
- Method
- Claims
- Identity (Collective, Individual, & Public)
- Community Images
- Future Directions
- *Not included:* Framing, Community of Interest, Social Networks
Climate Justice Framework

“...from which indigenous peoples, the environmental justice movement, fence line communities affected by oil refineries, students and anti-globalization activists can begin to assert leadership on the global warming issue” —CorpWatch
Gwich’in

- Native population
- Porcupine Caribou Herd for food, shelter, clothing, medicine, or tools
- Resisting oil development for decades
- Entrance of CJ framework into enduring campaign
- Several shifts in political and popular sentiment
- Examine influence on CJ framework, and vice versa
Method

• New Social Movement (NSM) approach
• Identity formation and framing related to the construction of
  – community images
  – communities of interest
  – social networks
• Written material only
• Subsistence livelihood threatened by decreased caribou numbers
  – coastal plains calving grounds
• Environmental degradation from accidents
• Temperature increase
  – reduces ability to fish and travel
Exemplary Case?

- Brought together
  - climate change
  - wilderness conservation
  - environmental justice
  - indigenous
- Population characteristic: subsistence
- Nature of threat: oil extraction
- Experience full cycle of negative effects
Identity
Collective Identity

• Group norms including boundaries, the meaning of membership, and appropriate group actions
• Gwich’in group identification as “The Caribou People”
• Bolstered community members’ images of themselves and their community
Individual Identity

• Interpret how others receive the individual as they act out different roles
• Frequently equated with the collective identity
• Benefit members when positive collective identity utilized
Public Identity

• Individuals respond to public’s perception and response
• Influences individual and collective identities
• Sources of reflection: media and non-members of movement
• Promoted by Gwich’in Steering Committee & representatives
Community Images

- Objective features and subjective individual opinions
- Influence interactions and willingness to participate in formal and informal community organizations
- Cultural and physical value of eating caribou
- “Ecological Indian” myth
Future Directions

- Holistic approach to campaigns
- Essentializing?
- Right to create or select a public identity?
- Effects of subsistence image?
- Unique opportunity to evaluate effectiveness of framework?
- Compare to case where CJ framework used by urban community?
- Does connection among different parties strengthen campaigns by introducing a diversity of actors, issues, perspectives, skills, tactics, and resources?
Communities of Interest

- Individuals that share common interest or trait
- CJ framework
  - created expansive community of interest through effective utilization of identity fields
  - appeal to wide audience
    - environmentalists (conservation and EJ)
    - anti-globalization and social rights activists
    - indigenous peoples
    - general public
    - loss of migratory birds, pristine wilderness, and the ability to enjoy publicly-owned Alaska reserves
Framing

• Collective action frames (diagnostic)
  – draw interest to issues
  – impacts on wildlife and humans

• Prognostic
  – propose alternatives
  – increased fuel efficiency and overall reduced consumption of fossil fuels

• Motivational
  – provide rationales
  – drilling as vital to decreasing the trade deficit, creating jobs, and boosting the national economy
Social Networks

• Within Gwich’in communities
  – dynamics among Gwich’in leaders and community members

• Among Gwich’in and environmentalists
  – environmentalists’ altering community image

• Among different interest groups
  – growth of existing social networks
  – rely heavily on the support of existing groups and networks
  – contributed to the diversity of ideas, tactics, and resources available