

Heritage as a Means for Social and Economic Development in Nunavut

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Introduction

In Nunavut, Canada's newest territory, the predominant heritage is that of Inuit people. Heritage includes objects, archives, stories, songs, drum dances, language, culture, and traditional knowledge related to what makes Inuit a distinct culture. Inuit have been in contact with outsiders for over a hundred years but the most intense period of colonization occurred beginning in the mid-1940s. For this reason, many aspects of Inuit heritage are fairly strong compared to other Canadian aboriginal groups. Maintaining Inuit heritage is important for Inuit and also captivates the interest of people around the world. This outside interest in Inuit heritage provides opportunities for sharing in ways that benefit both Inuit and visitors. A major benefit of presenting Inuit culture for visitors is that Inuit traditions and knowledge continues to be preserved.

Context of Nunavut

The territory of Nunavut was created through an aboriginal land claims agreement between Inuit and the government of Canada. Nunavut has a huge land mass that is one-fifth the size of Canada with only 32,558¹ inhabitants out of Canada's total population of 33.93² million (9.5%). Each of Nunavut's twenty-five communities are accessible only by airplane, with no connecting roads. Airfares are extremely expensive which limits opportunities for flying anywhere within and outside of Nunavut³. Nunavut spans three time zones, each with distinct regions, which are often historically conflicting as different regions grapple over political power, resource development and the distribution of funding. Nunavut has a young population, with 51% of the population under the age of 24⁴, growing by 2.9% each year⁵. High school graduation rates in Nunavut are chronically low at 28.4% in 2008⁶ and only a fraction of those graduates continue on to post-secondary education. These statistics only create a very grim and homogeneous picture of Nunavut's citizens. In reality, Nunavut does face many challenges like anywhere else, and is grappling to address them as best as it can with the resources available. The implication of these statistics for the heritage sector is that it is an incredibly complex area to work within. Thankfully there are many in the territory working in various sectors to improve these grim statistics. Despite the obvious challenges, other areas provide some amazingly rich opportunities. Perhaps the greatest opportunity is that Inuit culture, experience and involvement is still part of daily life in Nunavut. This provides great potential to engage with Inuit culture to strengthen not only the heritage sector but all areas of daily life.

In Nunavut, the tourism sector is identified as one of the four main pillars of the Nunavut Economic Forum strategy. One of the major draws of tourists to Nunavut is their interest in cultural and experiential tourism. Inuit cultural traditions are seen as internationally unique, distinct and authentic. It is of course through Inuit people presenting and interpreting their culture that tourists expectations are met. Inuit need to determine their cultural priorities, manage cultural projects, mobilize their community, and interpret what tourists are experiencing, otherwise the whole experience is lost. This loss results in bad reviews and disappointment and negative economic impacts.

Inuit Heritage Trust offers an introductory heritage training program that develops the skills of those working in the heritage sector so that they can create a space and framework to research, document, interpret and display their culture with confidence. This program encourages participants to be unique and true to their community and Inuit culture. The increased ability to translate skills into a "product" (i.e., guided tours, programming at a cost) will help in enabling Nunavut's tourism experience to grow and mature into an experience that delivers what is promised.

Social economy is the part of the economy that is neither public (government) nor private (business), but rather a "third sector" characterized by the activities of organizations that provide goods and services in our communities on a not-for-profit basis⁷. In large part, Nunavut's heritage sector falls

within this third category, as the not-for-profit societies operate for the greater good of their members and the community. According to a Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada (SERNNNoCa) Census for Nunavut, 15% of Nunavut's social economy is in the Arts and Culture⁸, which fall under heritage. The Nunavut Economic Forum has this figure at 12.5%⁹. Nonetheless, the range of percentages reflects that these organizations are important because they provide essential services for communities that are not met by the government or private business.

Under the Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, the heritage sector is represented partly under "the Arts Economy" (noted as locations throughout Nunavut – heritage centers and other public spaces where work is displayed)¹⁰ and "Tourism" (experience-based holidays, visitor service centers and providing programming for cruise ships)¹¹. Currently the heritage sector creates exhibits/displays of artefacts, photos, traditional and historical materials, records and makes available oral histories and traditional place names, promotes and administers cultural programming, promotes and administers language programming and publishes educational and learning materials, and increases professionalism. These all encourage the development and pursuit of new heritage careers with higher levels of certification. This is good news for Nunavut's heritage sector, as we currently have very few accredited heritage professionals that are comfortable in leadership roles. In this study it is emphasized that if we do not invest in people individually, our ability to achieve our economic goals as a territory will be hampered. Investing in people means increasing their level of literacy, education, skills and knowledge¹². This investment allows our mixed economy to produce economic growth¹³.

We have seen that this heritage training program is touching youth in positive ways. Those that began in our archaeology field school are now participating in this heritage training program and making concrete plans to attend university for a heritage qualification once they have completed it. This means that this current investment is seeing a longer-term return in the career development of mostly Inuit in the heritage sector. In the cases of young people going to university, it is clear that they will be able to open up their own businesses and do consulting or field work in the areas of archaeology and conservation. Their skills are useful and transferable in a number of sectors aside from heritage – from mining to tourism. Their work will directly improve the services and businesses available for economic growth in the territory. This also aligns with the NEFS goal that youth have "opportunities to develop their abilities and interests and to acquire the skills needed to maintain a sustainable livelihood in the future"¹⁴ based on understanding and respecting Inuit *Qaujimagatuqangit* or Inuit knowledge. Clearly IHT is playing the role of an industry-focused training organization ensuring that relevant programming and training is being offered consistently in ways that will benefit the sector immediately as well as in the medium to longer term.

To date, no work has been done in the territory to document the economic benefits and impacts that heritage has had and is forecasted to have in the territory. Inuit Heritage Trust is currently in communication with SERNOCCA to figure out how it may help us to note the economic benefit and to better bridge and integrate heritage into the bigger discussion of economic development within Nunavut.

The benefit of preserving Inuit heritage is not only of economic benefit through tourism, it is key to maintaining identity and well-being amongst Inuit and all people of Nunavut. Beginning in the 1970s Inuit began advocating for the creation of an Inuit territory. The skills and sophistication to enter into these types of negotiations was a major leap from a lifestyle of seasonal hunting and residential schooling to being savvy in a corporate way. Today, each Inuk person grapples with what traditions to preserve and what to let go. Some traditions, such as custom adoption, spoiling of a favoured child, and sharing all resources with extended family all the time, are not working today as they did in the past. However, others such as the Inuktitut language, strengthening family ties through the naming of children after those that have passed away, and hunting and being out on the land all bring strength and comfort. Today, those traditions incorporated into the many programs aimed at educating Inuit youth about the land claims and participating in exchanges promote a balance of using traditions to forge a modern yet grounded Inuit identity.

Case studies

I'd like to present some brief examples of how Inuit and Nunavut heritage development has resulted in economic development. The main areas are within cruise ship tourism, local programming in skill building for community members, and catering to the business travel market.

Cruise ship tourism is a growing trend in Nunavut. Since all the communities are fly-in communities, mostly coastal, and accommodation in some communities is limited or not very desirable, cruise ships offer a solution to these logistical challenges. As well, subject matter experts are present in one place to present on topics such as wildlife, archaeology, photography, literature, Inuit history and contemporary Inuit issues. The community of Pond Inlet (at the top of Baffin Island) has had a lot of tourism investment over the decades and for that reason, in addition to magnificent natural scenery, has been able to benefit economically from cruise ship visits. It has created programs that allow visitors to be divided up to have a walking tour to an archaeological site, to view a cultural performance (Inuit games, lighting of the seal oil lamp, throat singing) in the visitors center, to explore some treasures of the local Pond Inlet archives, to visit a small gift shop of carving, jewelry and other handmade items, to have a baseball game with locals under the midnight sun, to view locally created theater, and to eat both traditional and modern food through a feast or a barbeque. This diversity of programming has made Pond Inlet a "must see" for many tourists. These programs create economic benefit by employing people to coordinate the activities, by supporting local creativity through the arts, and by engaging a broad range of community members, as programming is varied for different cruise ships and return visitors.

The Kitikmeot Heritage Society (KHS) operates in western Nunavut, in Cambridge Bay. It is very active in the programs it runs. Many of the programs result in knowledge creation and skills practice, such as mitt and clothing making, crafting items out of traditional materials, as in bone tools, and creating sealskin kayaks. The participants in these programs gain self-confidence and the ability to talk to others about challenges they may be working on overcoming. As well, they gain skills that will allow them to create and sell items in their community. It also creates programming for cruise ship and tourist visits similar to Pond Inlet, but with regional flavour. Particularly popular is the western arctic style of dancing, singing and drumming. It also taps into researchers (both within and outside of the heritage sector) visiting the community to provide programming, and space for them to work. Its small gift shop is popular with people in the community as well as with visitors.

In Iqaluit, the capital city of Nunavut, the Nunatta Sunakkutaangit Museum is the best example of how a well-run gift shop can be a key economic driver. Though there are three main stores in town selling cultural items handmade by Inuit, the museum is the longest running one, with a wide selection of items by artists mostly from Nunavut. The museum purchases items on the spot from artists for cash and has a very small mark-up, which make the prices competitive. There is a profound amount of respect for the artists and their work. It also encourages unique styles of work that may not be found in other places, because of the immediate purchase once an item is completed. This successfully run business supports artists in town, staffing at the museum, as well as day-to-day operations of the museum.

Iqaluit also hosts a number of larger conferences, which brings in a significant number of business travellers from across Canada. Event organizers realize that Inuit heritage is a particularly compelling reason why people choose to come here over other cities. Due to this, a body of performers, cooks and artists has been cultivated to easily add on a cultural component to conferences, such as having elders light the seal oil lamp (*qullit*), serving country food during breaks or meals, having sealskin fashion shows, drum dances, throat singing and school choir performances. This provides a steady and reliable body of visitors that want to experience parts of Inuit culture.

Conclusion

Inuit heritage and its presentation to visitors is one very real way to create economic benefits in a community. As communities and organizations experience success, they will mature in what they create and offer, and thus diversify the economic base through the heritage sector. Of course, in order to present one's culture to others, one has to learn and live it. Presenting culture to others encourages deep

awareness and reflection of traditional Inuit knowledge and skills. Even more important than economic development is the opportunity to preserve and strengthen Inuit culture that may have weakened otherwise.

Notes

- ¹ Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, *Nunavut Quick Facts*, <http://www.gov.nu.ca/eia/stats/>, estimate as of January 2010, accessed June 26, 2010.
- ² Statistics Canada, *Latest Indicators*, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>, estimate as of January 2010, accessed May 2, 2011.
- ³ A return airfare from Ottawa to Iqaluit is approximately \$2,330.00, checked online at www.canadiannorth.ca on May 2, 2011.
- ⁴ Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, *Nunavut population estimates by sex and age group, 2009*, <http://www.gov.nu.ca/eia/stats/population.html>, accessed May 2, 2011.
- ⁵ Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, Nunavut Regional Projections, 2009 to 2036, <http://www.gov.nu.ca/eia/stats/population.html>, accessed May 2, 2011.
- ⁶ *Nunatsiaq News Online*, “The actual graduation rates have shown dramatic improvements? One set of numbers, two sets of tales,” Jim Bell, http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/The_actual_graduation_rates_have_shown_dramatic_improvements/, accessed May 1, 2011.
- ⁷ SERNNOCA, Nunavut Summit on the Social Economy Proceedings November 2009, <http://ycdl4.yukoncollege.yk.ca/frontier/files/sernnoca/NunavutSummitontheSocialEcon.pdf>, p. 3.
- ⁸ SERNNOCA, Nunavut Summit on the Social Economy Proceedings November 2009, <http://ycdl4.yukoncollege.yk.ca/frontier/files/sernnoca/NunavutSummitontheSocialEcon.pdf>, p. 8.
- ⁹ SERNNOCA, Nunavut Summit on the Social Economy Proceedings November 2009, <http://ycdl4.yukoncollege.yk.ca/frontier/files/sernnoca/NunavutSummitontheSocialEcon.pdf>, p. 13.
- ¹⁰ Nunavut Economic Forum, Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, June 2003, <http://www.nunavuteconomicforum.ca/public/files/strategy/NUNAVUTE.PDF>, p. 12.
- ¹¹ (Nunavut Economic Forum, Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, June 2003, <http://www.nunavuteconomicforum.ca/public/files/strategy/NUNAVUTE.PDF>, p. 16.
- ¹² Nunavut Economic Forum, Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, June 2003, <http://www.nunavuteconomicforum.ca/public/files/strategy/NUNAVUTE.PDF>, p. 38.
- ¹³ Nunavut Economic Forum, Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, June 2003, <http://www.nunavuteconomicforum.ca/public/files/strategy/NUNAVUTE.PDF>, p. 39.
- ¹⁴ Nunavut Economic Forum, Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, June 2003, <http://www.nunavuteconomicforum.ca/public/files/strategy/NUNAVUTE.PDF>, p. 39.