

LESSONS FROM
RESEARCH



Editor's Introduction

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This section on lessons from research presents nine papers, each of which takes a somewhat different perspective on the sustainability of Aboriginal economies. Indeed, the concept of sustainability is used in two somewhat different ways here. Sometimes, the emphasis is on sustainability in the environmental sense of not being too demanding on natural and other resources. As the Brundtland Commission puts it, and in keeping with the tenets of Aboriginal cultures, the idea is that the improvement in the well-being of people today should not be at the expense of future generations. At other times in these papers, the conception of sustainability is broader. It may include the environmental approach, but other principles also come into play to define ways in which Aboriginal economies can get to a point where development is ongoing or self-sustaining.

The contribution from Jaypeetee Arnakak is interesting because it describes the efforts made by the Government of Nunavut to incorporate Inuit traditional knowledge into all aspects of government functioning in Nunavut.

Six principles reflecting Inuit culture are listed, including the commitment to environmental stewardship.

Drs. Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson give a very useful and comprehensive overview of Aboriginal cooperatives in Canada, and argue that this form of business ownership and organization is particularly well suited to the development of sustainable Aboriginal economies in both the meanings identified above.

Kelly Vodden, on the other hand, focuses on community economic development in a particular community (Alert Bay, British Columbia). The article applies a framework for evaluating what the community is doing — the principles, processes and challenges — to promote sustainable economic development in areas such as tourism and the co-management of natural resources.

Robert J. Oppenheimer, Tom O'Connell and Ron Araira draw lessons from the business experience of five Kahnawake, Ontario entrepreneurs for creating sustainable businesses. They remind small business owners about the reality of doing business in ways that lead to success.

The main thrust of Cynthia Chataway's article is that the process by which structural change is brought about in Aboriginal communities has an important bearing on whether change will be successful and lasting. She cites her own and other research that underlines the importance of elements such as the existence of generalized trust in the community (social capital), and of effective processes to deal with conflict and division (social cohesion) in contributing to economic development and self-government.

Eric Raymond looks at development in a global context, critiquing what he perceives to be the top-down, technological approaches of the mainstream international development agencies. Instead, he recommends a greater focus on people, an orientation that is more likely to be front and centre in anthropological perspectives on development.

Sarah Jane Fraser's article explores the value of joint ventures for First Nation communities with the opportunities for control of sustainable development options. She notes the relative value of other types of agreements within the context of sustainability standards: future values, current methods, equity and limits to growth.

Finally, John Loxley's article is of interest because it deals explicitly with sustainable economic development in urban areas. In particular, he outlines 11 principles of sustainable community economic development that have grown out of the experiences of organizations concerned with inner city development in Winnipeg.

In short, this section provides some interesting reading about the development process and the factors that contribute to sustainable Aboriginal economic development.