SUSTAINABILITY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: THE INUIT CASE

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I shall try to examine the connection between the concept of sustainable development and indigenous peoples, such as the Inuit. As one of the best solutions to the growing environmental crisis, the idea of sustainable development has gained prominence in recent years, including in the international arena. Also, in recent years the ways and knowledge of indigenous peoples have been included in possible solutions to such a crisis as indigenous populations are certainly one of the few human communities that have lived sustainably on the territories, which they have occupied for centuries. I shall try to elaborate this connection in general and particularly with the example of the Inuit, an indigenous people residing in the Arctic. The Inuit have shown that sustainability of an area is clearly connected to the political autonomy of the communities concerned. Furthermore, the ideologies lying at the base of their self-construction as a community, as it may be seen through subsistence practices, are clearly related to the concept of sustainability and may even be categorised as such. Specific focus shall be given to the Yup'ik community with an attempt to picture the subsistence cycle of its members, to the Inupiaq whaling activities as an example of a particular sustainable subsistence activity within an extensive cultural and political context, and to the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the most important Inuit NGO that promotes indigenous political autonomy and sustainable management in the circumpolar areas.

SETTING

The setting where all of these processes occur is very complex. This complexity originates in its wide dimensions, including particular individuals pursuing daily subsistence sustainable activities on the one side and nation-state governments or international corporations on the other. The setting also includes an immense diversity of actors. By limiting ourselves to the Inuit context only, it includes specific individuals, native or non-native, households, kinship structures, villages, native corporations, educational institutions, such as the Inupiat University, Inuit NGOs, and also governments of states/territories and nation-states. Furthermore, primarily through the NGOs, structures like the one of United Nations, and its diverse subcommissions and permanent forums, form a broader part of this picture. Less directly, other organisational structures are also involved, such as indigenous NGOs, like the Indigenous World Association and a huge plethora of environmental NGOs and popular movements. In order to be able to perform a comprehensive analysis and deconstruction of the setting, we would first of all have to identify the field, what in itself is a daunting task, especially due to

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the difficulty in defining its boundaries, if not its actors. Secondly, there would be a need for determining and locating the power resistance points and which discourses are to be included in the inquiry. Is this a general discourse on human rights, discourse on sustainability, on indigenous sustainability, on international relations or simply Arctic politics, a discourse on Inuit or a discourse on colonial nation-states with indigenous minorities in a postcolonial setting? Perhaps we can talk about the identity politics as expressed within the present order of representation. These are all immensely demanding tasks, which by far exceed not only the intentions of the author, but also the possibilities this paper (or for that matter a number of papers) can cover. I simply have a desire to try and present, in brief, the developments showing that those individuals, self-identified as Inuit, still daily pursue sustainable subsistence activities. More so, the organised structures of these individuals and especially the Inuit NGOs, but in recent period also local government authorities such as that of the Nunavut, wish to see the sustainability principle recognised as the leading principle of circumpolar development plans in the spirit of the Bruntland Report. In addition, they wish to emphasise the role of the Inuit as the indigenous inhabitants, who already possess the knowledge of sustainable economic patterns, what ought to be, in their opinion, recognised by all as relevant in the decisions made.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, SUSTAINABILITY AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Human transformations of nature are in recent decades beginning to interfere with the functioning of the world ecosystem, as an increasing number of areas succumb to development, human colonisation, resource exploitation and environmental degradation. Increasing industrialisation and urbanisation in Third World countries put additional burdens on the already polluted planet, while the rising consumption of non-renewable mineral resources, mostly by the developed countries of the North, doesn't act in the opposite direction. A demographic explosion in poor countries fosters more poverty and further human encroachment into unpopulated areas for settlement, cultivation or firewood, only strengthened by mining and timbering activities. Wildlife habitat destruction only decreases the already diminished biodiversity of plants and animals. Improper use of water for irrigation, a resource already scarce in several areas, assisted in salinisation of the fertile land, itself under attack from herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. The loss of topsoil and desertification had also become a major reason for concern in more than one region. All the chemicals put into the soil reach inland and sea water, that are also polluted by industrial and other waste. To this extremely bleak picture two things may be added: the heating of the atmosphere and the depletion of the ozone layer (Gare 1994).

With the rise in proportions of environmental crisis, the attention given to the subject by an ever-increasing number of people also increased. One substantial effort in trying to find long-term solutions for such issues, while taking into the consideration the economic factors, certainly is the idea of sustainable development.

In 1987, The United Nations' Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Bruntland Commission, published the text "Our Common Future" of which the key concept was sustainable development. Sustainable development was defined "as a process of change in which exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the reorientation of technology development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (Taylor

1994: 83). Additional recognition was given to the concept at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development, The Earth Summit, held in Rio in June 1992. Almost every major institution in the world economy embraced the idea, including multinational mining and logging companies, as well as The World Bank (Gedicks 1993: 198).

The validation of the concept of sustainability coincides with a dissemination of postmodernist approaches in a wide range of sciences. Several authors have observed a connection between a "deep" ecological thinking that clearly rejects several central modernistic concepts, like limitless progress or anthropocentrism, and postmodernism. Oelschlaeger even advocates "postmodern environmentalism" as the key to an environmentally sustainable society (Taylor 1994: 262). Deep ecology rejects the dualism between ideology and science, humanity and nature and the underlying tradition of Enlightenment, the anthropocentrism (ibid. 264). It reflects the inter-relatedness of all life and is ideologically related to the many indigenous belief systems, as for example in the case of diverse Inuit groups, as I will try to show further on.

Many social movements that are connected to the philosophical-scientific perspective of the deep ecology have become very much involved in resolving the environmental situation. They can inclusively be called popular ecological resistance movements, including non-middle class people and peasants, and also western populist environmentalists and particularly the indigenous peoples (Taylor 1994: 2), such as those of the circumpolar belt.

These movements, including indigenous peoples', in general, share anti-industrial attitudes and a perception that environmental deterioration is threatening survival. They usually seek to gain local autonomy or even self-government. Such is an example of the Nunavut, which in March 1999 became a new Canadian territory. One of the central claims of this movement, as also presented today by the Inuit territorial leadership, was to be able to manage the land according to the traditional sustainable ways, supplemented by modern knowledge, while trying to protect the Rights of Commons (www.npc.nunavut). Renewing sustainable life patterns is the overall objective of popular ecological movements (Taylor 1994: 340 - 43). Such developments attract co-operation and solidarity of several environmental groups such as Earth First!, a US-based Rainforest Action Network (RAN) or the Australia-based Rainforest Information Centre (RIC). With Earth First!, for example, the most prominent struggles are those by people believed to live sustainably, especially indigenous peoples or those animated by nature spiritualities and those deemed similar to deep ecology, such as anti-logging movements in Amazonia, the Philippines or Malaysia (Ibid. 19-24).

The Bruntland Report also recognised the crucial role culture plays as an adaptive mechanism in applying the concept of sustainability. Since the native cultures in the remote regions of the world were recognised as the only ones that have proved to thrive in these environments, the Report advocated recognition of the native traditional land rights and a right to sustain their way of life (Gedicks 1993: 198).

A particular sector of the world population, the indigenous peoples, numbering around 250 million people, is connected to the ecological crisis in a specific manner. The 50 million (Taylor 1994: 27) indigenous peoples that inhabit the remaining tropical forests, or the land in their immediate vicinity, of SE Asia, Central and South America and Central Africa, are under the most pressure. The extensive and accelerating exploitation of the rainforests for timber, minerals, oil and hydroelectric energy, cattle ranching, and plantation agriculture, make these forests the most seriously threatened habitats. Native peoples are under assault on every continent because their lands contain a wide variety of valuable resources needed for industrial development. Oil exploitation in the Circumpolar North or teak logging

among the Karen people in Myanmar are just two examples of that. Such a development, where the indigenous peoples are driven out of their territories or start to work for the intrusive societies, all too often means the annihilation of their culture and lifestyle. They often end up living on the fringes of modern societies as underpaid agricultural labourers or in the slums of the towns, without any control over their own traditional territory and its resources (Ortiz 1984: 82).

THE INUIT

The Inuit are indigenous people (or rather a group of peoples) populating the Arctic areas above the tree line in North America and Greenland. A smaller community also resides on the eastern tip of the Chukotka peninsula, located in the NE Siberia, just across Alaska, separated by the Bering Straits. All together the Inuit peoples number around 150,000 members, residing in 4 different countries. Besides around 1700 in Chukchi Autonomous Area in Russia, there are approximately 50,000 in Alaska, around 35,000 in Canada and some 60,000 in Greenland (Creery 1993). Some clarifications, however, have to be made.

One concerns the terms used to describe these peoples: indigenous, aboriginal, native, original, first or tribal peoples, but also as the "fourth world peoples". The different groups, institutions and organisations that cope with these specific issues, like the World Bank, United Nations and ethnically based organisations or NGOs such as World Council of Indigenous Peoples, use different terms. Sometimes they are interchangeable and sometimes certain groups prefer a distinctive designation, while others have for them colonialist/racist connotations (like Aboriginal in Australia, slowly being replaced by the term Native) (see Sheleff 1999. Chapter 3).[1]

Another issue concerns the term used by the members of the community to describe themselves in relation to populations that colonised the areas that these communities consider as their ancestral lands. In Alaska, among the Inuit for instance, the term "Native" is commonly used to mean "Alaska Native" or "Yupiit/Inupiat", while its negation "non-Native" is commonly used for Euro-Americans, often called simply "white" (Hensel 1996: 191).

In addition to this, as it is the case with other aboriginal or native communities living in the areas prior to the European colonisation, the use of ethnonyms is problematic. The name used for a specific community can also exist in several forms, mostly when one form was used by the community itself (if such general and inclusive group consciousness existed before the arrival of modernism) and the other by the settlers or the colonial authorities.[2]

The term Eskimo (which is derived through French from an Indian name) is on one hand commonly used self-referentially by Alaskan Inupiat and Yupiit, but in Canadian and Greenlandic context it has clear racist/colonialist connotations and the word Inuit is preferred. In linguistic terms, the term Inuit is reserved for the peoples speaking a group of lan-

1 In India, for example, where these groups are called and recognised in law as Scheduled Tribes, the use of the term native, indigenous or other similar terms would be misleading. In India, with an estimated tribal population of 60 to 80 millions (Taylor 1994: 144), where all population of the country is indigenous to the area, certain groups, with social structure patterns based on hunting and gathering or subsistence farming activities received a special protection by the law. Such examples can be found across Africa and Asia.

2 The case in point is the Saami people of northern Fennoscandia, who were, until recently, known almost exclusively under the term Lapps, a name used by their Germanic speaking southern neighbours.

guages from the Bering Straits all over to Greenland and Yup'ik for those speaking the languages stretching from Norton Sound and the Siberian coast to Bristol Bay on the southern Alaskan coast. Here the term Eskimo would refer to all the peoples who speak Inuit and Yup'ik languages (Moseley & Asher 1991: Map 1), while the ethnonym Inuit was chosen as all-encompassing self-designation of the Eskimo peoples, as seen through the name of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. The languages belonging to the Eskimo-Aleut family are spread from the tip of Siberia to the eastern coast of Greenland and are divided into two branches, the Aleut language and the Yup'ik-Inuit language family. The Inuit-Yup'ik language family consists of the Yup'ik group (from Yupiit = People) and the Inuit (= People) group. The Yupiit speak three different languages: Siberian Yup'ik, Pacific Yup'ik and the most numerous Central Alaskan Yup'ik, each of them with several dialects. The Inuit group proper, though, is consisted of a fairly unbroken chain of dialects with mutual intelligibility, the furthest extremes being unintelligible to each other. According to somehow standardised scripts that have developed, three languages were formed.[3]

HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN ARCTIC AMERICA AND GREENLAND

The first human settlement to these areas can be traced to after the end of the last glacial period at around 12,000 BCE. The oldest recognisable culture is the so-called Paleo-Arctic Culture that existed until approximately 5000 BCE. The heartland were the areas of NE Siberian lowlands and the ice-free peninsula of Beringia, while in America they could, due to the extensive ice-sheet, advance no further than the southern parts of Alaska. Around 3000 BCE, a new hunting and gathering culture rapidly spread around the Arctic. The Arctic Small Tool Tradition, named after distinctive miniaturised artefacts, originated in Siberia and spread to the river Lena in the west and across Canada all the way to Greenland. With this wave of immigration into the arctic America, the forbearers of the Aleut-Inuit peoples settled the areas north of the tree line. This line represents a language boundary among the Aleut-Inuit family and the Amerindians, primarily of Athapaskan and Algonkian origin, up to the present day.

This immigration wave was followed by a period when separate cultures evolved, partially in their adaptation to the local environmental circumstances, like in Alaska where caribou hunting was replaced primarily by whaling. In Greenland, though, already around 1000 BCE, musk ox hunting and ice sealing became the focus of subsistence activities (Hertling 1970: 118).

In the 10th century CE, a second wave of immigration called the Thule Culture spread from the area north of Bering Straits to the coast of Greenland. The areas south of the Straits weren't influenced by this cultural expansion and up until this day this represents a boundary between the Yupiit of Central and South Alaska and the Inuit proper. The Thule people spent summers in open-water hunting of sea mammals, facilitated by *umiyak* and *kayak* technology. In a few areas, where it was possible, the summer hunting was directed to caribou and fish, but the accumulation of winter stores remained a central part of the Thule

3 The Greenlandic Inuit is itself divided into three versions: the dominant and official West Greenlandic, the smaller East Greenlandic and the Thule or Polar Inuit. In Canada, east of the Mackenzie delta, Inuktut is spoken by several groups. From the Mackenzie delta and all over to Norton Sound across the Alaskan coast, the Inupiat speak Inupiaq.

economic pattern. Groups living in numerous hunting camps gathered in villages of permanent houses, where they spent their winters in sedentary consumption of supplies accumulated in the summer, supplemented by winter ice-sealing. From the 16th to the 18th century, a rather quick transition from the Thule Culture to the Historical Inuit Culture occurred in the areas beginning west of the McKenzie River delta: Central Arctic, Labrador and Greenland. The Inupiat of northern Alaska continued to depend primarily on whaling, living in permanent villages in a densely populated area. In Canada and Greenland, the Little Ice Age of the 18th and early 19th centuries was, with the increase of sea-ice that choked the channels of the high and central Arctic, one of the reasons for the decline of the whaling. Most of the permanent villages were abandoned as the Inuit communities weren't able to accumulate enough food stores to last them through the winters and greater economic importance was given to sealing and fishing (McGhee 1994: 566).

TRADITIONAL INUIT SOCIETIES

The traditional Inuit societies were, as hunting and gathering cultures, strongly dependent on the local provision of food resources. Their culture and social structure was most complex in Alaska and Western Greenland and least complex in the Central Arctic. Inuit and Yup'ik groups lived in numerous geographically defined subgroups that were extremely flexible in composition and structure. The basic social and economic unit was the nuclear family.

For much of the year, from spring to fall, families lived together in small houses or tents together with other families, in groups of 20 to 30 people moving from one camp to the other. Winters were spent in larger settlements where a large number of families gathered to spend the season together. The Copper Inuit of the Central Canadian Arctic gathered in snow-house settlements on the ocean ice to hunt seals (Condon 1987: 25), while the Yupiit and Inupiat spent winters in permanent coastal villages.

Traditionally, men and boys over the age of five spent their days and nights in the men's house. This traditional semi-subterranean house of which there was at least one in the settlement, was the communal men's residence hall and workshop, where men lived and were served meals by their wives, daughters and sisters. It was also the place where community dancing and ritual activity took place. Women and children lived in smaller individual houses. This separation of men and women's spaces coincided with a somehow dichotomous approach of reciprocal obligation that occurs in Inuit worldview; hunter/hunted, relative/non-relative, man/woman, summer/winter, host/guest, land/sea (Fienup-Riordan 1983: 341). The subsistence activities were (and still are) also divided according to gender. Women were gathering greens and berries, setting and checking nearby nets, cutting and drying fish and game and preparing food. Girls were often partnered in arranged marriages soon after puberty but divorce, initiated by either sex, also occurred often. Men on the other side were occupied by hunting land and sea animals, usually outside the village or camp by solitary individuals or by pairs (Hensel 1996: 38-39).

The ideal-type system of virtually complete gender separation and labour division was operational only in the permanent villages and camps, but even in smaller groups, in camps without a men's house, a sense of spatial separation was preserved. Since the general conception was that gender roles were complementary and flexible and the couple was seen as a productive unit, some flexibility in gender roles occurred, especially in cases of need. Boys learned girls' tasks and vice versa. There were no specialists in these communities. Even

shamans hunted and gathered like anyone else, although a powerful shaman could request things from people, with the expectation of not being refused. Many people had different shamanic powers.

The fundamental feature of the Inuit social organisation is the absence of unilinear exogamous kinship units, the prevalence of the principle of bilinear descent and flexibility in group composition. Even though the Inupiat and the Yupiit put more emphasis on the patrilinear descent, the matrilinear descent, for example, still plays a great importance at seal parties connected to exchange rituals (Fienup-Riordan 1983: 306-307). In the Canadian Arctic, the concept of "relative" included people of several different categories of kin, between which the Inuit saw no difference (ibid. 141). Only on the St. Lawrence Island, populated by the Siberian Yupiit, patrilinear kin groups do exist, but they aren't exogamous and residence after marriage is matrilocal. A limited number of descent groups exist. They are commonly known by definite names. They share distinctive subcultures and are recognised by all the participants in the common culture as distinctive socio-political groups (Hughes 1960: 248).

The social structure of a traditional Inuit community recognises the existence of descent, kinship, nuclear family, group, hunting party and other institutions, but their boundaries and definitions are flexible and constantly negotiated. The concept of leader never really developed in such communities and when these communities grew larger in winters, the leadership was ephemeral and co-operation was maintained through bilateral kin ties, alliance mechanisms, as well as by economic necessity. The Inuit groups, where a number of camps would share a dialect and certain stylistic forms, can be described as regional sub-cultures, but they had no strong kinship or political structure (Valentine and Vallee 1968: 109).

Therefore, no specific social structures developed which would embody group law and would have a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force. A clear example of the absence of strong social structures like unilinear clan or other clear intra-Inuit divisions can be seen even today in the case of the town of Inuvik in the Mackenzie delta, where the native population is divided administratively into Indians, Inuit and Other Natives. As opposed to the Indians, whose status is based on the inclusion in an Indian band roll or treaty list, the Inuit disk list, maintained by the R. C. M. Police, simply enumerates the Inuit. They, though, distinguish among themselves four different groups, based on the area of origin (Honigman 1970: 32).

An additional important feature of Inuit traditional society was that the land was communally owned. But not even that. People actually did not own the land. They considered themselves to have the right to use the land on which they were settled and the resources they found there. It may be interesting to note that even today in Greenland the concept of private land ownership is unknown (Foighel 1979: 97). Animals, as well as significant objects in the surrounding natural world, were conceived as having a *yuk/inuk* (person). Hunting was not conceptualised as a zero-sum game, but rather animal population and hunter success were both affected by how animals were treated (Hensel 1996: 40-41). Even when trapping assumed greater economic importance the area around the trapping camp was not owned by the trappers but was rather recognised as an area used by a specific trapper(s).

COLONISATION OF THE INUIT LANDS

The first Europeans to establish a contact with the Inuit were certainly the Greenlandic Norse. In 986 CE, around 400 people from Iceland landed on the Greenlandic coast. They

established two colonies. The Western settlement was abandoned in 1342, while the Eastern lasted until the end of the 15th century (Blackwell and Sugden 1982: 122).

The first Portuguese voyage to Greenland is recorded already in 1500, while in 1520 there is already evidence of Basque whalers in the areas of South Labrador. Again in 1555 and in 1558 a contact with the Inuit is reported by Portuguese, French and Danish sailors (McGhee 1994: 569-70). From these areas the Europeans started to penetrate into the interior and the English established the first trading post in the Hudson Bay in 1670 and the Inuit population became exposed not only to European trade but also to European diseases.

The first true colonising steps undertaken by the Europeans, whose influences are still felt today, were made by the Danes, more accurately Hans Edege, when he established in the vicinity of the present day Nuuk - Gothaab, the first colony in Greenland in 1721. By 1776, the Danish Crown took over the colonisation of Greenland and established the Royal Greenland Trading Company that preserved its monopoly well into the 20th century. In 1782, the first true legislation for the country was issued under the name "Instruction to The Trading Station in Greenland" (Hertling 1970: 128), which actually meant the closure of Greenland to non-Danish influences, a condition lasting until WWII (ibid. 129-130). The Inuit social structure began to change significantly only in the mid-19th century when the Danish colonial administration formed local assemblies of limited self-government and jurisdiction (see Hertling 1970).

In 1649, the Russians reached the subarctic Pacific coast and established a trade post in Anadyr, mainly for fur interests. In 1741, Bering reaches the southern Alaskan coast, but the exploitation of the area begun only in the 1770's, primarily based on the fur-sealing that continued until the beginning of the 20th century when the seals were on the brink of extermination. The effects concentrated on Aleut and Pribinov Islands where permanent trading settlements were established. Due to the subjugation, slaughter of the seals, the main food source, and the diseases the Russians brought (mostly tuberculosis), the Aleut population plummeted. In the Bering Sea area in 1839-39, a smallpox epidemic wiped out whole communities and seriously reduced population, while another one struck in 1861 in the Central Yupi'k territory. The other route, from which the European influence came to the Inuit, was from the south by the Canadian traders who had established themselves in the Mackenzie River valley already in 1805. In 1840, the Hudson Bay Company built Fort McPherson only 150 miles from the sea in the Mackenzie River area.

In general, the 19th century is the period in which the European impact on the Inuit communities became evident. From Siberia entered the Russian seal-fur and other traders and in 1840 the smallpox epidemic, brought by them, erased whole communities. In 1850, the whalers moved from the coasts of Labrador to the west into Hudson Bay, while in the west they reached the Beaufort Sea and the Inupiaq communities. In the same period, the fur traders started to reach the Inuit communities also from the south. These developments certainly had an immense influence on the native communities. The whaling and fur sealing depleted the food resources on which the Aleut (seal) or Inupiat (bowhead whale) depended, something that caused starvation, while the epidemics reduced the population. On the other side, the whalers and fur traders developed relations with the Inuit. In exchange for meat and furs the Inuit received guns, tobacco, tea, sugar, alcohol and hardware. The practice of whalers' over-wintering and establishment of trade posts encouraged Inuit concentration in permanent settlements.

Even though fur was traded for almost a hundred years, only at the beginning of the 20th century were permanent trading posts first established north of the tree line. In 1910, the

town of Aklavik in the Mackenzie delta was set up. In the Canadian Arctic the families no longer gathered in the winter but spent them in isolated family camps engaged in trapping. Other families moved to permanent settlements and centred trapping activities on the surrounding areas. By 1920, Inuit groups exchanged economically independent sustainable subsistence activities for a symbiotic relationship with the White society and cash-economy.

Another stage of the Inuit social transformation began with the establishment of the first missionary grammar and later federal schools in the 1920's and 1930's. This administrative inclusion of the Inuit communities continued after WWII with the expansion of a welfare state. The availability of government subsidised housing, wage employment, government assistance and child allowances, health service and bottle-feeding permitted families to provide for a larger number of offsprings than before (Condon 1987: 36). But the Inuit also took part in the wage economy and the larger state in which they lived. Even though subsistence activities remained of central importance, the education and wage economy brought about the new occupational category among the Inuit: wage labourers. But this final inclusion of the Inuit into the web of modern state apparatus and control, exposed those members of the community, that could fully exploit the educational possibilities a state could offer, to a wide variety of ideas and concepts that were ideologically opposed to the form of colonialism predominant in the circumpolar areas. It was this new class of educated Inuit that started movements to demand greater control of their territories, which could bring in the future the establishment of an indigenous nation-state. First visible organisational efforts in this direction could already be seen by the late 1960's.

ARCTIC ECOLOGY AND INUIT INITIATIVE

In recent years, growing numbers of people have become increasingly concerned with the damage to the Arctic environment caused by petroleum, hydroelectric, mining and other large-scale development programs. Additional concerns are being expressed due to the deposition of pollutants, thinning of the ozone layer with corresponding influence on the regional organisms. Human activity encourages the melting of permafrost, thereby creating a potential for extensive damage to the sensitive tundra ecosystems. While the most dramatic evidence of environmental devastation is found in the Russian north (Andreeva 1998: 238-40), threats are not confined to that area alone, as aren't the protests. In Alaska, a massive development at Prudhoe Bay that destroyed vast areas of wildlife habitat and the hydro-electric plans in Hudson Bay, Canada resulted in massive protests and debates over the proper utilisation of natural resources (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 218-19).

Already in 1970, UNESCO had recognised a connection between environmental conservation and indigenous peoples and created the "Man and the Biosphere" Program. This program promoted conservation of ecosystems that are ecologically self-sustaining with complete involvement of the native peoples (Gedicks 1993: 201). One reason why the biodiversity activists should be concerned about the indigenous peoples is the fact that they occupy 12-19 percent of Earth's land surface, even though only 6 percent with recognised rights. They are as such, tenders of the Earth on a larger scale than all the reserve authorities that together manage only 5 percent of the surface of the planet (Taylor 1994: 30). As a result of all the developments that enhanced the recognition of indigenous peoples, as an independent factor in environmental issues, the voice of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples is increasingly heard. The Council called upon the international community to recognise the

important contributions of the native technologies to sustainable development, tied to the idea of human and cultural diversity, including technological diversity (Gedicks 1993: 202). Subsistence ideologies and natural religions accompany such native technologies. One of the main differences between many indigenous civilisations and the West, is the belief that humans are one with all other creatures (Lundberg 1995: 86). For the indigenous peoples of the Americas, as it is pointed out, nature is not an enemy to be overcome, while man is considered part of an inseparable cosmos and therefore does not try to dominate nature, other men and other peoples (Ortiz 1984: 85). In general, native communities possess the experience of sustainability, learned from years of observation, careful behaviour and strong community, as formed through thousands of years of occupying the same space.

The legal and political position of indigenous peoples had begun to change after World War II, when the principle of self-determination was introduced into the Charter of the United Nations. This principle played a crucial role in the processes of decolonisation and by 1960, most European colonies, all over the World, gained their independence. But the principle's application was only limited, since several groups, such as the indigenous peoples, were denied that right. The first international institution to codify the rights of indigenous peoples was the International Labour Organisation with its 1957 Convention in which appeared articles dealing with land rights. In 1989, the new Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention was issued. For many years though, indigenous peoples have brought to the attention of the UN the need for international legal protection of their most fundamental rights. The fact that indigenous cultures pre-date the emergence of international law and European colonial expansion lies at the root of the debate over indigenous rights. Between 1985 and 1993, a group of UN human rights experts (called The UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations or UNWGIP) worked on a document now referred to as The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was done through a series of annual meetings in which governments and indigenous peoples' representatives were invited to present their views. In 1993, The Draft Declaration was adopted by a resolution of UNWGIP's parent body, The UN Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (www: Halycon.com/pub/-FWDP/Resolutions/ICC/: 3). Even the great financier and planner of many environmentally threatening projects, The World Bank, has realised the sensibility of the issue and in 1991 issued a new Operational Directive on Indigenous Peoples. It requires adaptation of the project by the indigenous populations, even though this principle is often only paid lip service. (Plant 1994: 9-11). The World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro in May 1992 and the UN year of Indigenous Peoples was proclaimed in 1993 (Creery 1993: 5).

There are many non-indigenous environmental organisations and movements that in addition to other environmental activities, also oppose numerous environmentally damaging projects planned on indigenous lands. Survival International, Cultural Survival, Greenpeace and Earth First! are only a few examples. In addition to these, a number of international indigenous organisations, each of them representing a complex of indigenous interests, rose in the last two-three decades. The Indigenous Environmental Network, The Arctic to Amazonia Alliance and Native Forest Network are only some of them. A well-known example for the co-operation among the environmental and native rights groups was the case of James Bay II Project in Quebec, Canada.

In 1975 James Bay Phase I was constructed and eventually the whole project flooded around 11,000 km^2 of land which brought about fierce resistance among the Inuit and the Cree. As a result, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was signed (see below).

It did not prevent, though, the construction of the Phase I itself. But in the 1980's when Phase II was planned, the Inuit and the Cree already acquired valuable political experience, organisational skills and a network of non-native American experts and advisers to help them wage the battle against it. The battle continued until 1994 when, after blockades and demonstrations in November, Quebec Prime Minister indefinitely shelved the project (Taylor 1994: 90-94). By then, in Canada, the political relations with the indigenous groups had taken a new course.

Nevertheless, the Cree and the Inuit had demonstrated that indigenous populations were able to use most innovative and efficient environmental (and political) activism to challenge the one of most powerful institutions of the large nation-state and win.

INUIT LAND CLAIMS

Already in the late 1960's, the oil discovery in Beaufort Sea at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska and also in Canada demanded a more firm action by the existing native organisations, but also prompted the creation of new ones. In 1969, The Committee for Original People's Entitlement (COPE) was established and in 1971, The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC). In 1977, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) was formed. Such organisations demanded and eventually achieved agreements through which the indigenous populations were granted ownership and political rights over their ancestral lands. With the first of such agreements, The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, the Native peoples of Alaska received 162.000 km^2 of lands with full title and sub-surface rights (Blackwell and Sugden 1982: 348). The US Fish and Wildlife Service retained the management of animal resources even though, under the new guidelines, the subsistence activities were taken into account. In the last two decades, the Inuit have increasingly gained control over a great part of their ancestral lands and are becoming a major partner in decision-making over the management of resources in the Arctic.

With the James Bay Agreement in 1975, the Inuit gained control over 8300 km^2 of land with an additional 155,000 km^2 including exclusive hunting-fishing-trapping rights (together with the Cree, see above). The Inuvialuit Agreement allotted, in 1977, 95,000 km^2 to the Inuvialuit, the Canadian Inuit living west of the McKenzie River delta (Creery 1993: 13). The other two political developments, however, may have even greater importance. In 1979, the Home Rule Act gave the Greenland Inuit complete independence in their internal affairs and since fishing remains the most important resource, on which their economy is based, their traditional concepts may begin to play a greater role in the sustainable management of these resources. The Nunavut Agreement in March 1999 created a new Canadian Territory in which according to the 1996 census 83% of population are Inuit. The Territory comprises of 1,900,000 km^2 of land on all of which the Inuit have the right to harvest wildlife (www.gov.nu.ca/eng/).[4] The Greenland and Nunavut cases particularly cause greater interest, since they actually represent two Inuit proto-nation-states, what is seen through more than just emblems or official language policies.

4 In addition to this, exclusive mineral rights were given on 35,250 km^2 to the Inuit

These agreements, in general, spawned Native-owned development corporations to make contracts with oil, gas and mineral companies providing services needed in exploration, operation, housing and food services to the workers. Native companies entered construction, banking, radio and TV communications, and air and sea transport, among other activities. The granting of extensive rights to indigenous groups turned out to be not an obstacle to the development, despite their "spiritualist' vision of the environment and nature. Rather, it led them to co-operate with industry in promoting development and to alter projects making them more sustainable and less damaging to the environment and local economy (Osherenko 1995: 229).

YUP'IK SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY PATTERNS

Despite the great changes the Yupiit have gone through since the European arrival, the subsistence activities remain of central importance. Subsistence was the traditional ideological focus of Yup'ik life and continues to be of major importance socially, economically and gastronomically, as well as symbolically. Since subsistence crosscuts so many dichotomies of public/private, work/play, production/consumption, it provides an arena to which all the aspects of life are connected (Hensel 1996: 104), as seen on the example of Central Yupiit from Bethel, a two-third Yup'ik settlement of some four thousand people, and its surroundings. Subsistence activities are a major focus of time and energy for most of the people in a Yup'ik village. This includes not only time spent on hunting but also time needed for preparation of equipment or processing the food. Hensel (1996) argues "that subsistence is the central focus in the intellectual material, and spiritual culture of both historic and contemporary Yup'ik society" (ibid. 3). But there are two aspects of subsistence, each highly context-dependent. The first are the actual activities of preparation, hunting, fishing, gathering, processing and repairing and storing of equipment. The second aspect is a subsistence discourse, which ranges from informal conversations to formal discussions on various governmental and commercial aspects of subsistence, wildlife and their regulation. This discourse is privileged over actual practices because it is constantly available for strategic use and through which personal, ethnic and gender identities are constructed and negotiated. The values associated with subsistence became "key symbols of Yup'ik ethnic, social and spiritual identity particularly as traditional subsistence practices are challenged and threatened in a postcolonial setting" (Ibid. 4). Since the symbolic value of subsistence activity is increasing, "it is likely that at least some types of subsistence activities may become more, rather than less, important over time" (Ibid. 6). The subsistence activities are not simply a mere technique of survival, a means to an end, "but an end to itself" (Fienup-Riordan 1983: XX). This holds equally true of the Inupiaq people of the northern coast of Alaska (ibid.), as wage-jobs are not associated, as shown by Bodenhorn, with individual identity (Hensel 1996: 134). Similar observations were made by Jolles in relation to Siberian Yup'ik on St. Lawrence Island where "non-traditional work, at least so far, is not an important source of identity. Identity remains associated with successful performance of subsistence duties" (ibid. 135). Fienup-Riordan (1983) clearly presents an immense variety of meanings subsistence activities may have. He also shows that an important unit for subsistence research is not the individual household but a larger grouping of kinship networks that acquire, process and share products, such as through an example of seal parties, organised by women, among the Nelson Island Yupiit.

Current subsistence activities that provide foods in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of Southwest Alaska and represent a "material" base for the second aspect of the subsistence, i.e. the subsistence discourse, target mostly the same resources they did at the time of the contact. Most adults, including those with jobs or professional careers, are involved year-round in subsistence, with the peak of activity from March to November. For most residents, though, income-producing work is usually available only seasonally, consisting of commercial fishing and the occasional construction jobs in the summer, and trapping in the winter. With this, some of the techniques and harvest locations have changed, mostly as a result of new hunting and transport technologies, but also due to the shifts in village locations. Presently, for most families, seasonal moves are reduced to moving to fish camps and berry camps, while men also spend time in trapping camps or seal hunting at the coast. Sea-mammal hunting (mainly for bearded and harbour seal and walrus, but also beluga whales), that was at the time of contact the most highly developed system of capture, has nowadays become completely mechanised, in terms of both transport and weaponry used. Also large land mammals, such as caribou, moose and bear, are now hunted with rifles. Harvesting fish that were calorically the most important for most Yupiit, traditionally required, not only due to the diversity of species, but also due to the variety of harvest locations, a greater number of hunting techniques, some still widely practised today. Species like flounder, trout, halibut, blackfish, whitefish, sheefish, needlefish, pike, tomcod, smelt, herring, and several sub-species of salmon are harvested through jigging (through the ice using a short stick), funnel-mouthed fish traps, dip nets, set nets, drift nets, and also gillnetting. Geese and ducks are caught with gill nets and shotguns, while beavers, rabbits and ptarmigans are predominately snared. Metal traps are used mostly to take fur-bearers, especially foxes. Despite the fact that most of the clothing is now purchased already manufactured, furs of locally caught animals, such as seal, beaver, mink, muskrat, otter, ground squirrel, fox, wolf, wolverine, and caribou, are still used. Furthermore, the traditional activities of gathering berries like cranberries and blackberries, greens and bird eggs, have, despite the appearance of frozen vegetables imported from the South, remained of central importance (Hensel 1996: 53-55).

As mentioned, traditional Yup'ik religious beliefs emphasised the connections between humans and the rest of the natural world that they are so obviously and consciously connected to. Human and animal souls are continually in motion. The same seals and the same people have been on earth forever, continually cycling through life and death. The coastal Yup'ik "are not simply surviving on the resources of their environment, but are living in a highly structured relationship to them" (Fienup-Riordan 1983: XIX), as constantly expressed through their daily activities. Animals gave themselves to the hunter out of choice, while hunting was conceptualised rather as the culmination of a relationship characterised by respect towards the hunted. The success of hunting or fishing meant that a hunter was in a harmonious relation with the world, since not only human "persons" cycled from one body to another, but also "persons" of seals, whales or other animals (Hensel 1996: 40 - 41). A bad catch of fish, for instance, clearly represents a disturbance in this order, which has to be preserved. This traditional conceptual system still guides the behaviour of most Yupiit that behave with an awareness that human thoughts, words and actions powerfully affect interactions with animals and the natural world. It is through such eyes that we should see the significance of the threat of an oil spill or game mismanagement to the Yupiit. There is a strong ethics against waste and people work generally hard to use all parts of the animals hunted. Subsistence foods should be protected from spoilage, stored, and never wasted, while hunt-

ing and fishing gear should be kept clean and in good condition. They practice conservation and take only what they need (ibid. 71).

INUPIAQ WHALING ACTIVITIES

The Inupiaq bowhead whale hunting communities of NW Alaska were traditionally organised into a number of regional societies, each of which specialised in a particular subsistence cycle. The bowhead whales were hunted in spring and fall in accordance with their migratory activities. The hunting was associated with organised whaling crews led by *umialik* who owned the *umiak* and other hunting equipment, while a large share of meat that the hunter and his wife redistributed to others is what reinforced social connections. In the summer, individual families or larger groups often travelled either for trade or to obtain additional resources such as walrus, seals and migratory birds or caribou. From fall to summer they lived in large coastal settlements consuming primarily whale based food stores (Friesen 1999: 24).

Today, the Inupiat remain strongly linked to subsistence whaling, fishing and hunting and in fact still use the *umiak*. A loss of bowhead whale to such a sea mammal oriented society would be highly significant, not only in reducing an important source of nutritional importance, but in weakening their cultural identity as well. The right to hunt for food is a fundamental indigenous right of Inuit and other hunting peoples. Inuit have traditionally exercised that right by trying to maintain equilibrium between prey and hunter, so that the resource itself is perpetuated. The failure to protect such rights would inevitably lead to the disregard for some sustainable development approaches that have proven themselves over hundreds of years of social and environmental equilibrium. "Inuit themselves are committed to the principle of sustainable development and the conservation of the living resources of the arctic" (Doubleday 1989: 374).

In recent decades, they have gained substantial political rights that give them a considerable voice in making decisions regarding arctic natural resource development. In Alaska, for example, following the federal passage of the ANCSA, the North Alaskan Inupiat formed in 1972 the North Slope Borough.[5] The Borough's Inupiaq leaders soon proceeded to tax the oil revenues from Prudhoe Bay, which enabled, due to millions of dollars of income, the people to obtain the benefits of a modern life style.

However, state and federal wildlife regulations have consistently interfered with their subsistence activities, since with the passage of ANCSA, the aboriginal hunting and fishing rights were extinguished (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 233). This enabled the Department of Fish and Game of Alaska to enforce its rules and regulations without regard to the cultural heritage of the people, but limitations came from other directions as well. In 1977, The International Whaling Commission (IWC) proposed a moratorium on the hunting of the bowhead whale. The response of the Inupiat to loss of access to their subsistence resource was to assert their subsistence rights. The Borough's administration organised a major campaign to change the IWC decision. In 1978, Inupiat and St. Lawrence Island Yupiit, from 9 whaling villages, formed the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) that, with its own research, suggested 10-12,000 whales rather than less than 1000 previously estimated,

5 Thus becoming geographically the largest city of America despite the population of only around 5000 people.

challenged the IWC moratorium policy (Young 1994: 124). Finally an agreement was reached in exchange for a decision that Inupiat would limit their annual subsistence whaling to 12 (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 234). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights addresses subsistence rights in Article 1.2 by stating that in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence. With respect to Inuit rights, hunting whales is clearly a means of subsistence and as such, Inuit cannot be deprived of it under the Covenant (Doubleday 1989: 383). In relation to this, in 1980, The US Congress passed a law that distinguished between the nature cultural and non-native social subsistence needs (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 235).

In 1992, the working group of the IWC began a dialogue, which included all the parties in the international regulation of whaling and identified three categories of small-scale whaling to be accepted as permissible on grounds of sustainability and equity; under the terms of reconstructed whaling regime. The first category would be aboriginal subsistence whaling that is organised around family and kinship groups and incorporates devices for regulating the behaviour of individual participants, which differs from market and commercial whaling. Such aboriginal groups that were able to demonstrate that they have occupied a particular territory and used the same regional resources over long periods of time can be found amongst Inupiat and Greenlandic Inuit (Young 1994: 122). In a similar vein, an agreement between Alaskan and Canadian Inuit developed over sustainable harvest of polar bears, involving prohibition on hunting female bears with cubs or bears in dens (Riches 1995: 429). The other two acceptable categories of small-scale whaling are: other subsistence whaling (if stocks permit harvesting) by non-aboriginal, though indigenous to the territory, peoples like Faeroe Islanders, and artisanal whaling, as family based activities stemming from traditional knowledge that are also sustainable. A few coastal communities in Iceland, Japan and Norway practice such whaling (Young 1994: 122).

Inuit rely heavily on marine animals for their subsistence and it is this reliance that distinguishes the Inuit way of life from that of other arctic peoples. Inuit culture and values are rooted in sharing the harvest of the hunt, especially of marine animals. Marine animals, even today, still provide food, clothing, light and heat. They are also important to the maintenance of health and well being, as they provide vitamins and calories essential in the cold climate of the circumpolar areas. The ability to obtain food from hunting as a livelihood is important to their psychological and cultural integrity. The right to take whales for food is a matter of cultural survival. Being a good hunter is an occupation with a proud heritage among the Inuit. Hunting is the Inuit way of life. The Inuit hunted in the past and hunt now for food in order to survive, culturally and physically - not for sport or pleasure. Conservation is part of the relationships between Inupiaq and other Inuit cultures and the environment of which they are a part. This is what makes such cultures sustainable, that which was after a long road recognised by the relevant national and international decision-making forums.

THE INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE

In June of 1977, at Barrow Point in Northern Slope Borough, Alaska, delegates from Greenland, Canada and Alaska formed the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). It was defined as an international non-governmental organisation of Inuit representatives committed to asserting the rights of Inuit peoples and to protect their culture and environment from incursions

of the industrial society from the south. The Inuit formed the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) to work for the survival of the Inuit culture and the recognition of Inuit rights. Through the ICC, the Inuit initiated the Inuit Regional Conservation Strategy to protect the arctic environment by promoting sustainable development and conservation (Doubleday 1989: 389). In their statements we can find culturally oriented rationale for the sustainable utilisation of the Arctic's natural resources (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 222).

In 1989, Russian Yupiit, as the last grouping delegation, joined in as observers and in 1992 as full members. The ICC holds NGO status within the UN Economic and Social Council and represents 150,000 or so Inuit in the international arena of environmental and social initiatives. Further attention has been directed towards the protection of subsistence economy and the renewable resources that are so vital to sustaining the Inuit cultures, long after petroleum and other minerals have been depleted from their regions. The primary goals of the ICC are to strengthen the unity among all the Inuit of the circumpolar region, to promote Inuit rights and interests on the international level plus to seek full and active partnership in the development of the region (www.randburg.com/gr/inuitcir: 1). The focus of the ICC strategies is determined on General Assemblies that are held every four years.

Organisationally, the ICC is composed of national divisions who are in full co-operation with relevant Inuit national organisations. ICC Canada, for instance, states among its aims and objectives to represent the interests of Canadian Inuit through their national organisation Inuit Tapirisat of Canada on international matters (www.inuitcircumpolar.com/: 1).

The focus of ICC strategies has been centred on many environmental issues in relation to sustainable development. As stated by the President of ICC before the UN Commission for Sustainable Development on 15/04/1997: "Many Inuit use computers, invest stocks and bonds, and welcome sustainable development of the Arctic's natural resources. But as people we have not lost our reverence for natural world as our commitment to treat it with respect. Inuit have practised sustainable development for generations" (www.inusiaat.com: 1). ICC believes aboriginal self-determination and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin. To promote sustainable development they have concluded agreements dealing with land ownership, resource management, revenue sharing, economic development and self-government, while only Inuit of Chukotka and Labrador remain without such an agreement. But despite the fact that national governments and Inuit can work together to promote these issues in the Arctic, also through the Arctic Council, these activities are limited by international political realities.

Since the Inuit today use modern technology to hunt/fish/trap, which demands high expenses, they have to sell their products on the world market. But the EU and the USA, influenced by the Animal Rights movement whose primary goal was not the ban on subsistence activities but on commercial exploitation, limit this. They have erected barriers to trade in such products, such as walrus ivory or seal fur, even though such resources are harvested in accordance with the principles of conservation and sustainable development. Besides trade barriers, the persistent organic pollutants (POPs) that reach the Arctic from other areas of the globe concentrate particularly in the marine food chain.

One of the projects of ICC is the conservation of biodiversity. But in addition to many wildlife refuges which have been already established on the Inuit lands, many efforts have to be done internationally, especially in relation to migratory birds. In 1988, the ICC Inuit Regional Conservation Strategy, devoted to sustainable development and conservation, was granted by the UN Environmental Program a Global 500 Award for significant environmental achievement (www.ranburg.com/gr/inuitcir: 2).

In 1994, the ICC began the project of Traditional Ecological Knowledge on Beluga Whales: An Indigenous Pilot project in the Chukchi and Bering Seas in order to find sustainable ways for harvesting (www.grida.no/parl/isdi/data.ina35t: 2).

One of the most recent projects that began by the ICC in November 1996 is on the Integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Scientific Knowledge. The documentation and application of indigenous knowledge brought together hunters, elders, researchers and resource managers. They stressed that in order to further promote the idea of sustainable development, TEK should be incorporated into school curricula and the TEK research projects should be done in co-operation with local communities. TEK should be documented and made available to all those who wish to use or apply it. The project also promotes the inclusion of TEK into the processes of wildlife and resource management and environmental impact assessment besides the utilisation of scientific knowledge. Also, the support of sustainable resource industries is considered to be one way of protecting the continued use of TEK by governments and indigenous organisations working together (www.inusiaat.com/tek: 1-9).

The Rovanieni Declaration signed on 14/06/1991 for the construction of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) can be, with its later consequences, considered historical. The Declaration was signed by foreign ministries of all arctic countries. AEPS was to be carried out through several programs: Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program, Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment, Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response, but also through The Working Group on Sustainable Development (Andreeva 1998: 241). At one of the meetings it was agreed to protect "... the arctic environment and its sustainable and equitable development, while protecting the culture of indigenous peoples" (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 219). On the second Ministerial Meeting in 1993, three Indigenous Peoples' Organisations were accredited to the meeting, namely the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, The Saami Council and the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North.

In 1996, the Ministers signed the "Inuvik Declaration on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development in Arctic", and the "Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council" that would continue its work. Its meeting was held first at the end of 1998 (www.grida.no/prog/polar/aeps/saao). By naming the ICC, together with the Saami and Russian indigenous organisations, as a Permanent Participant, the Arctic Council framework created an unprecedented category in international co-operation and forums, since in the Arctic Council a "mere" observer status is granted to governments, international governmental organisations and NGOs (www.arcticpeoples.org). The Arctic Council is the first intergovernmental forum that has accredited any indigenous organisation such a status. It is a status that ensures a full inclusion of these organisations into all matters and deliberations of the Arctic Council, and it is thus a status that goes beyond the status of an Observer.

Indeed, the ICC is only one of the many indigenous and environmental NGOs that pursue their interests in many national and international arenas. But with this, it is also very unique in its character. First of all, it claims to be (and is recognised as such by the Inuit and by the non-Inuit factors involved) a legitimate representative of the Inuit people on the international arena, despite the fact that it represents citizens of four different sovereign nation-states and of seven federal units within them, where it is primarily operative through the national Inuit organisations. As such, it has gained recognition not only by the United Nations, but also by the Arctic Council. Its uniqueness comes also from the fact that it has so fully joined the concepts of indigenous self-determination and sustainable development. It

claims that since the sustainable development is the only form of development that should be implemented, in general and particularly in the arctic areas, the groupings of people, i.e. the Inuit, that see the sustainability principle as an integral part of their civilisational fabric, should be given much more freedom in managing the development of these regions. This in turn demands greater levels of indigenous self-government and sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

The subsistence economy practising indigenous communities world wide are today, in most cases, considered to be under particular pressure due to the growing environmental crisis and greater demand for natural resources. With the inclusion of a sustainability principle into the international development discourse, soon appeared the idea showing a particularly strong connection between the subsistence practices of indigenous peoples and perpetuation of resources. In order to insure such sustainable management, the indigenous communities have to assume greater levels of sovereignty over the areas that they have been populating for generations. The ability to promote independent policies on the issues of resource utilisation ensures the inclusion of the traditional indigenous ecological knowledge that represents an inseparable part of indigenous cultural patterns. Due to the large stakes the indigenous populations hold in the preservation of their environment, it seems inevitable to include these communities and their representations into the decision-making processes concerning the relevant areas, particularly since the indigenous populations have proved to sustainably manage the resources they harvest.

The Inuit, certainly, are a case in point. Despite the great influences modernity had on the Inuit, they were able to retain their traditional focus on subsistence activities that still plays a central role in their identity construction as individuals and as a group. With the late 1960's threat to their ecological vicinity, the Inuit begun organising themselves to protect their subsistence resources but also to further land claims, as a basis for any viable settlement. Several land-claims that had been concluded in the last decades of 1900's, including the Greenlandic Home Rule and the establishment of Nunavut Territory, provided several legal frameworks through which the Inuit became able to exercise more political sovereignty. The Inuit were enabled to affirm their cultural heritage with its focus on the subsistence patterns. As presented through an example of mixed Yup'ik - non-Native community of Bethel, the Inuit subsistence economy is highly complex. Many species are harvested and processed by a major part of population throughout a year and the subsistence talk represents a large portion of not only indigenous conversational staple. Due to such importance the subsistence resources have for the Inuit construction of reality, their renewable resource exploitation is conservation-oriented and sustainable. Particular subsistence activities, such as several forms of whaling, have in the recent past come under special pressure to cease. With the fact that on numerous occasions particular subsistence activities, around the globe, come under pressure, the Inupiaq community of northern Alaska, possessing a certain level of political sovereignty, represents a positive trend. Indigenous representatives were involved in the policy, planning, and implementation of the regional renewable resource management project. The co-operation of the Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission and the International Whaling Commission clearly demonstrated that common interests could provide a firm foundation for successful wildlife management and supervision. Furthermore, it can be said that the Inuit, through their all-inclusive international NGO, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, clearly

identify themselves with the idea of sustainable management of the arctic resources and operate as such on the international arena. Inuit, among the indigenous peoples, represent a unique case. They have retained access to most of their traditional areas of residence and resources. They are, despite them being citizens of nation-states, internationally represented through one body, the ICC and have succeeded in making a nation-state, i.e. Canada, to redraw its internal borders and form a new territorial unit, i.e. Nunavut, clearly recognised as indigenous in character. In addition to that, it incorporated the principle of sustainability into its development policies. The ICC, as shown, also, through its particular and unprecedented status of Permanent Participant at the Arctic Council, co-operates with other bodies in realisation and implementation of sustainability-oriented development, conservation, and management projects.

The Inuit represent a case of an indigenous people that follows sustainable subsistence practices. In order to properly respond also to the environmental situation and demand for resources of the Arctic, the Inuit successfully demanded greater autonomy and self-government from the metropolitan states. In these areas of differing levels of Inuit self-government, we can clearly see the prevalence of sustainability principle, embedded in their subsistence patterns, and their economic and other operations.

POVZETEK

Članek predstavlja poskus identifikacije povezave med trajnostnim konceptom in staroselskimi ljudstvi, v tem primeru Inuiti. Kot eden najboljših pristopov do rešitve naraščajoče ekološke krize, je trajnostni princip v zadnjih letih tudi v mednarodni areni pridobil na veljavi. Istočasno so v zadnjih letih znanja in vednosti staroselskih ljudstev začela z vključevanjem v reševanje tovrstne krize, saj so staroselske skupnosti vsekakor ene redkih človeških skupnosti, ki so na svojih področjih poselitve živele trajnostno. Avtor članka poskuša predstaviti to povezavo na splošno in še posebej na primeru Inuitov, arktičnega staroselskega ljudstva. Inuiti so pokazali, da je trajnostni razvoj nekega območja tesno povezan s politično avtonomijo tam živečih skupnosti. Ideologije, ki so prisotne v temeljih njihove skupnostne samo-konstrukcije, kot to razkriva njihova lovno-nabiralniška ekonomija, so jasno povezane s trajnostnim konceptom in se lahko kot take kategorizirajo. Posebna pozornost je posvečena Yup'ik skupnosti z namenom predstavitve njihovega lovno-nabiralniškega ekonomskega ciklusa in kitolovskim dejavnostim Inupiaq skupnosti kot primer specifične trajnostne tradicionalne ekonomske aktivnosti z obsežnim kulturnim in političnim kontekstom. Pozornost je namenjena tudi najpomembnejši inuitski nevladni organizaciji Inuit Circumpolar Conference, kot tistemu faktorju, ki promovira staroselsko politično samoupravo in trajnostno upravljanje virov v polarnih predelih.

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