Clayoquot Sound: Understanding the Politics of Research in the Community

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*Paper prepared in partial fulfillment of course requirements for
ES 481A: Community-Based Research in Clayoquot Sound
(Summer session 2005)*

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2005**

Introduction

Say the phrase 'Clayoquot Sound' to anyone in British Columbia and you are unlikely to get a blank stare. For many, it conjures up the image of the infamous "war in the woods" during which almost 900 people were arrested while blockading a logging road in what was one of Canada's largest act of civil disobedience. To say that Clayoquot was Canada's flashpoint for forestry issues and the tension that they brought in the 1990s is an understatement; the protests over logging that took place in the Sound have had consequences that continue to reverberate throughout B.C. today. It is no surprise then, that the events of Clayoquot Sound in the 1990s have provoked much dialogue and written analyses; the topic has been well covered, telling us not only about the past, but also the future of this unique place.

This paper examines two short articles. The first article, "Clayoquot and the Cultures of Nature" by sociologist Sharon Zukin, talks about the effects of mass consumption on the ancient forests of Clayoquot and our extraction-dependent relationship with them; the second is an internal memo titled, "The Land Use Controversy: How did we get into this mess?" from the forestry company MacMillan Bloedel (the logging company active in Clayoquot at the time), which attempts to address their waning support in the hearts and minds of both British Columbians and citizens around the world. The objective of this paper is to review and critique these two seemingly unrelated articles and argue that such analysis of lay or 'grey' literature can offer important political insights for academic researchers situated in the Clayoquot region and perhaps also for those whose work is based in other communities.

The Clayoquot Sound region is a particularly useful case for examining some of the more general lessons that one might extract and apply to research involving remote communities with a historical dependence on natural resources - it has been and continues to be "ground zero" for forestry conflicts in British Columbia. The Zukin paper highlight's the larger context of capitalism's effects on the region by giving an account of the urban outsider's experience with Clayoquot in a consumptive-based relationship, as well as a succinct explanation of the "landscapes of power" (Zukin 2003: 172) that support the forestry industry - one of the main employers of people in the region. The MacMillan Bloedel memo hits closer to home and gives the reader a local context: it is a snapshot inside the then main forestry player in Clayoquot that was entangled in the changing tide of public opinion about the environment.

These accounts, while seemingly unrelated to academic research at first glance, provide a taste of the political context for those who wish to engage in research in the Clayoquot Sound region. Equally important are the lessons that can be learned about the broader political spectrum on which all research involving communities lies. Because this form of applied research inevitably takes place in, and/or involves, members of these communities, it is inherently a political endeavour - whether explicit or not - for example, in what questions are asked, in how they are answered, and in which questions are left unasked or unanswered. In particular, analysis of the two articles has much to contribute to the emerging and evolving discourse of "community-based research" (CBR).

According to Bannister (2005: 6) "Community-based research is used … in a broad sense to include a spectrum of research that actively engages community members or groups to various degrees, ranging from community participation to community initiation and control of research". My own experience of CBR from an undergraduate field course on the topic in Clayoquot Sound brought with it a clear recognition of the political complexity of the region. Prior to taking this course, I had a simplified conception, thinking of CBR as simply research that is done by or for a community, with respect and collaboration with that community, on an issue that the community deems important. Even a small amount of field experience has deepened my understanding of the complexities involved in both defining and conducting CBR.

Indeed, to learn about and explore issues in CBR, time in the field seems to be a key component. While it may seem counter-intuitive, this form of experiential learning is not commonly taught as part of the university undergraduate curriculum; thus, researchers often learn important lessons 'by accident' (be that good or bad fortune). Articles such as the two discussed in this paper can be valuable supplements to hands-on methods of learning as they shed light on the community context in which CBR takes place and raise awareness of political dimensions of research, thereby leaving the researcher better equipped to deal with the issues and politics that may arise in any given community.

Clayoquot and the Cultures of Nature
Sharon Zukin opens her commentary on Clayoquot by declaring, "I am just an urban visitor to the forests, a sometime traveler to 'natural wonders,' tied to Clayoquot by the acts of consumption environmentalists deplore" (Zukin 2003: 169). This is an important admission; in one sentence Zukin conveys the tension between extraction-based local economies and the cities that depend on the movement of these resources to maintain a way of life. The author focuses on the consumptive-end of the commodity chain that begins in places like Clayoquot - places that provide the raw materials that make our modern lives so comfortable. Her main argument is that our standard of living depends on destroying nature (and we do this is a myriad of ways). However, at the same time, we desire to see the forests in their "natural" state. It is in this tension or disconnect where our modern ecological crisis lies – our detachment from the supply end of the commodity chain further removes us from the consequences of our urban consumptive ways. The most experience a New Yorker has with the distant forests of Clayoquot is with the paper bag they get when they buy their groceries or use their phonebooks. Once we are finished with these items, we they are thrown away without a second thought.

Even when we venture outside of our urbane existences, we continue to commodify nature, "turning distant regions into 'metropolitan nature'" (Zukin 2003: 170). This is done through construction of roads, roadside attractions, hotels, and shops that descend upon each new ecotourism utopia. Zukin terms the development of forest lands a "second nature" and that, "if the forests lack this second nature, most of us cannot visit them" (Zukin 2003: 170). Clayoquot is no different – the region is shifting away from a resource based economy to a knowledge based one, a phenomenon which brings with it all the growing pains that accompany this economic shift - wage changes, business changes, and community changes (i.e., the influx of tourists and transient workers over the peak summer season).

As for local cultures, Zukin stresses the success that environmentalists have had in creating a global sense of community when it comes to environmental issues – it comes from "a universal sense of risk from environmental dangers" (Zukin 2003: 172). Environmentalists also have worked to take Clayoquot and place it in a larger context – part of a network of ancient forests that spans two continents, or the region is part of a larger watershed, and so on. She also situates the Clayoquot example in the larger framework of global politics and power dynamics,

cautioning that "such revisions come slowly, however, for local landscapes of power, dominated by large employers, labor unions, banks, and the state, repress alternative representations of community" (Zukin 1991 cited in Zukin 2003: 172). These "landscapes of power" are relationships that researchers need to be aware of when negotiating their way in a new community.

Landscapes of power are thus a useful way to think about issues in the region. Many levels of power converge in this local area – on the governmental side there is: federal, provincial, municipal, and on the non-governmental side you find environmentalists that work on all three government levels, and corporations that act in all these places as well. First Nations are difficult to place on the power scale – they do have power, but it exists in a grey area while the provincial government takes time negotiating treaties with them. Each power group has an agenda and they are revealed in different ways; researchers need to be aware of the complexity of these power relationships in order to effectively ask questions and conduct themselves with sensitivity and understanding. Some agendas are clear, others remain hidden for various reasons; what is clear is the importance for outside researchers to understand the broader sociopolitical context in which their research is situated, and how the production of knowledge can unwittingly become part of larger political agendas at the local level.

The tension tightens over the power of decision making beyond the local level. What will happen to the land base if First Nations' sovereignty is recognized over the land by the Provincial government? Zukin points out two schools of thought:

> Thinking in terms of a long history on the land may encourage preservation of the forests because of the First Nations' sense of what Environmental writers call "glacial time". Or, their need for education, jobs, and health care, and the province's financial troubles, may turn them away from preservation and toward conservation (Zukin 2003: 173).

There can be no predetermined outcome as communities are diverse and it is difficult to say what would happen in such a scenario; however, it is important to acknowledge that other possibilities exist. What follows is that communities are dynamic, not static, and local cultures are constantly being formed and reformed. This was epitomized by the new-found realization on the part of environmentalists of the diversity that exists between and within different First Nations' groups. An important tension still exists between these recently allied interest groups, in what Zukin terms "local cultures of decision making" (Zukin 2003: 172).

Further complicating the issue is the matter of who can speak on behalf of the whole group. There are several groups that have power and this power often overlaps. It is important for the community-based researcher, or environmentalist, to understand that no singular person or group can speak for the whole of any community, and that this applies to First Nations' communities like any other.

Our CBR field course exposed students to some of the First Nations' perspectives on land use. We learned that within the Hesquiaht First Nation, for example, there are supporters of resource extraction on traditional territory, in order to lend much needed economic aid to an impoverished community. The current band council supports this use of the land, where previously it was not supported under the former leadership. We learned also within the Hesquiaht First Nation there are those who do not support any more resource extraction, as they feel that enough has already been taken and the land needs time to heal. They believe resource extraction should operation on an ecological time scale – for example, on a 2000-year cycle.

The irony lied in the fact that both these proponents and opponents of commercial logging believe that use of the land must follow the Nuu-chah-nulth principle of "*hishuk ish ts'awalk*" or "everything is one". However, as seen by the divergent and conflicting views held within the same community, the application of *hishuk ish ts'awalk*, while seemingly simple and clear in its meaning, can have many interpretations and be applied strategically according to who holds power within the community.

Differing identities within First Nations communities are also exemplified by Zukin in her depiction of different forms of knowledge. Knowledge is often used as a form of power and academic research can contribute directly to and reinforce inequitable relationships. In this regard, Aboriginal traditional knowledge has been regarded as less important than western academic knowledge, and often dismissed as invalid. For example, in the Hesquiaht First Nation, one elder explained that, in the past, western "experts" were brought in to identify culturally modified trees (CMTs), while community experts were not consulted.

Finally, toward the end of her commentary, Zukin talks about "primal cultures". When it comes down to it, most people are primarily concerned about environmental problems that affect them in their present location more than distant issues. "Home" is the most primal culture, "yet the stability of home is continually threatened by the commodification of raw materials and labor that can plunge a community into cycles of development, uprooting, and abandonment" (Zukin 2003: 174). Environmentalists react against this and "today's environmental rhetoric acknowledges all the cultures and technologies that create a sense of place" (Zukin 2003: 174).

It is through our reconceptualization of "place" that Zukin links New York to Clayoquot. Companies such as MacMillan Bloedel provide the medium through which New Yorkers wage war on "place". As such, MacMillan Bloedel is a company that acts in a global capitalist market place, which has profound effects on the places it operates in. Zukin argues that, "the forces of 'markets' are always arrayed against 'place'" (Zukin 2003: 174). However, that is not the case when it comes to companies operating in a capitalist economy. They do have power over a region as they, "reshape the social and spatial arrangements of place to keep up with changing markets" (Zukin 2003: 175). These companies also form a part of this place, as major employers in the region.

The MacMillan Bloedel Memo
In July of 1989 MacMillan Bloedel circulated an opinion paper within the company about how to deal with the controversy erupting over logging in Clayoquot. A consultant named Rosy Siney, who had worked with the company throughout their troubles with environmentalists over the Carmanah Valley, wrote the paper. According to the cover letter accompanying the paper, the memo was to be shared with "namely the division foresters who are on the front lines" (Nancy Scott in MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 1).

The paper begins with a background section outlining western industrial society's involvement in "a period of almost continuous industrial progress" (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 2). It recognizes the values admired in this quest for progress: "aggression, domination, decisiveness, measurable efficiency, individual achievement, acquisition of material goods. As a society we have acclaimed growth and progress as our goals" (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 2). However, the paper further recognizes that many changes from this model of progress based on resource extraction to an increasingly intellectual and service oriented economy. This has led to a fundamental shift in our values, and this is the main argument of the position paper. Siney states, "the preservationists are not attacking our numbers, but our values" (MacMillan Bloedel

1989: 3). Siney goes on to introduce an analogy that she uses throughout the rest of her paper to explain the issue:

> If we can view the forest industry as being culturally at one far end of the Patriarchal/masculine spectrum it may help explain why we are peculiarly ill-equipped to deal with an attack from the opposite far end of the matriarchal/feminine spectrum (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 5).

Siney cautions on dismissing this "feminine" way of thinking as a passing trend because it is successfully challenging the industry's image in the eyes of the public. She notes that there is world wide recognition of these new values and that this "conflict of 'masculine' vs. 'feminine' values faces the B.C. forest industry daily" (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 5).

The next section of the paper is titled, "So how do we deal with this mess?" This is where the above analysis is used to the ends of maintaining the industry – what some would call a strategy for green washing. For Siney the problem becomes not one of changing the actual activities of the forest industry but one of aligning the needs of the industry with the "new" values that the pubic has embraced (i.e. sustainability, conservation, consensus, choice – all 'feminine' values). Siney states, "[a]fter all we are in an essentially 'green' industry. We can view ourselves as farmers, nurturers of the earth's forests, instead of its conquerors" (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 6). Also noted, "[c]onsciously thinking in these terms may also help us find different ways of describing what we do and ways of differentiating ourselves from others (positioning is a classic marketing technique)" (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 6). The whole section focuses on rethinking forestry operations in terms of supporting 'green' industries.

The next two sections cover the importance of language and appearance – both in written form and spokesperson form. Siney points out the difference between the masculine value and the feminine value of key words used:

> masculine = aggression, feminine = consensus;
> masculine = clearcutting, feminine counterpart = selective logging
> (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 8).

When it comes to spokespeople women are preferred and "people within our industry who most closely represent 'feminine' values" (MacMillan Bloedel, 1989: 9).

The last section, "Performance changes" is perhaps the most poignant from an analytical point of view. It states that:

> We have many skills in-house which would be of great value to a small Chamber of Commerce. What better way to develop confidence within a community that to help them achieve their own goals by sharing our skills? We cannot stop tourism development. If we are involved in the process at least we will have fewer surprises and perhaps even some influence on how tourism development interacts with forestry industry activities (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 10).

She follows up with what seems like a rallying cry: "Better that we should have a working relationship with business people in those areas, even if they are in tourism, than hand the field over entirely to the preservationist point of view" (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 10). Perhaps it is best said, in a comment that has been written at the end of the paper by an unknown author: "this is a counter strategy propaganda proposal" (MacMillan Bloedel 1989: 11).

Implications for Researchers and CBR
Why would these two seemingly unrelated articles with no similarity other than the fact that they address Clayoquot Sound be of concern to academic researchers? Firstly, the articles help us

to understand the dynamics of research involving communities, while enriching the complex nature of on the ground experience with a more understandable, though abstract, theory. Secondly, this dynamic combination of theory and practice can provide an important guide for creating a more complete curriculum that is able to guide students and researchers through global issues that face communities like those in Clayoquot Sound. The CBR field course, for example, accomplished this in part through drawing students' attention to articles like the ones examined here.

Both articles essentially depict two very different, but related elements of Clayoquot's "local landscapes of power". One view is from the top and the other view is from the bottom. The insight gained by the two articles and having an 'in-situ' knowledge of the place you are operating can be used to either benefit or harm the community. For example, the MacMillan Bloedel memo creates a simple, yet effective plan designed to neutralize the criticism directed at the company by environmentalists in the wake of "changing societal values". On the other hand, the Zukin article attempts to raise awareness of how our consumptive culture can have far reaching impacts on far-away communities. However interpreted, for the students of the CBR class, the experience in Clayoquot Sound reflected a microcosm of the deeper issues addressed by the two articles.

The objectives of the course included exposure to contexts in which research takes place including the questions, "What contextual understandings are necessary for researchers to address community issues?" and "What role does academic research play in resolving, or assisting communities to resolve, environmental and social problems?" (ES 481A Course Syllabus 2005). A brief comment on the term 'community' is needed. Community is a complex term that is often used loosely and liberally, either out of convenience or ignorance. Understanding who comprises and speaks for the community are not things that community-based researchers can afford to be ignorant about. If your research was related to forestry issues in the Clayoquot Sound region, who you involve matters as much as the questions you will (or will not) be asking. Understanding the political circumstances around forestry in Clayoquot is necessary to understand the context of why certain groups will participate and others might not want to. Research has consequences – in how it will be used, and by whom it will be used, and to what political end it might be used. Researchers, whether on purpose or not, create a sense of expectations on the part of some community members. Researchers need to be managers of these expectations by being explicit about the details of their research topic, what the research entails, and what the community may gain or lose by the production of this knowledge.

The insights provided by this analysis of two little known articles could better equip students in their understanding of the political issues that underlie the communities of the Clayoquot Sound region. As budding researchers, armed with deeper awareness and more situated understandings, we will be better prepared to conduct research that involves real people in real places.

References

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