

Theme 11: Traditional Knowledge and Resource Development

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Research Priorities

Many studies of traditional knowledge have been carried out, and much recognition given to the inclusion of traditional knowledge in Arctic research, management, and policy. But there remains a gap between rhetoric and outcomes. Enough experience has been accumulated by now to allow an evaluation of the study and engagement of traditional knowledge in this regard:

How has traditional knowledge influenced resource development in the Arctic?

A great deal of effort has gone into promoting the idea that traditional knowledge has a lot to offer. What is the nature of its impact, and how has it been achieved? If it has not had an impact, what barriers appear to be blocking the path towards greater use of traditional knowledge?

What is the role of power relations in determining if and how traditional knowledge influences decision outcomes?

Many Arctic peoples have made substantial strides towards greater influence over their own futures. But, the resources available to government and industry remain far greater than those commanded by most indigenous governments and organizations. Is power imbalance an obstacle to greater acceptance of traditional knowledge in the resource development arena?

How do holders of traditional knowledge view their experiences in influencing resource development?

Few if any attempts have been made to assess how the participants in traditional knowledge activities feel about their experiences. Has reality matched their expectations? Are they satisfied with the outcomes they have seen? Do they have recommendations for improvements?

What infrastructure is needed, and what is available, to support the wider engagement of traditional knowledge?

The generation, dissemination, and archiving of scientific knowledge is supported by considerable infrastructure. Less is available for traditional knowledge on its own terms. What is needed to better support traditional knowledge holders in a larger role in resource development?

How do indigenous proponents of the use of traditional knowledge view progress to date?

Many indigenous leaders have called for greater use of traditional knowledge. It is not clear that the gains in recent years have achieved the aspirations of those leaders, nor that the use of traditional knowledge was the ultimate goal. Understanding where political leadership is likely to go next will be important in determining what kinds of studies are most needed.

How well suited is traditional knowledge for resource development decision-making?

The basic premise of using traditional knowledge in resource development is that it has something unique to add. It is less clear what, exactly, that "something" is. An analysis of entire decision-making process would make a significant advance in our understanding of how one system of knowledge can be brought to bear on a process based on another system of knowledge.