Community-engaged field research in Southeast Alaska: Lessons learned from an early career researcher

By Ryan Naylor
INTRODUCTION

Resilience of Alaskan Coastal Communities
(Fakhri, 2017; Pachauri et al., 2014; Pörtner et al., 2019)

Arctic & Oceanic Governance
(Dawson et al., 2014; Johnston et al., 2017; Steffen et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2013)

Southeast Alaska as premier landscape to study future Arctic tourism
(Hillmer-Pegram, 2016, Meredith et al., 2019)
Modern Interpretations (Iles & Montenegro de Wit, 2015; Stepputat, 2016)

Indigenous sovereignty (Barker, 2015)

Food sovereignty (Nyéléni Village, 2007)

Cultural sovereignty (Bunten, 2008, 2010)

Redefined locally (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010)

Historical notions of sovereignty (Bull, 1977; Hobson & Sharman, 2005)

SOVEREIGNTY = A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

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SOVEREIGNTY = A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Livelihood
Self-Determination
Self-Reliance
Decision Making
Independence
Redefined locally

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The enhanced levels of local resident control and influence over management institutions and decision-making regarding:

- persistence of valued traditional practices,
- how new production opportunities are integrated into local socio-ecological systems,
- and how local community wellbeing is perpetuated over time.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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RQ1: Around what issues is sovereignty centered for residents in Alaskan coastal communities?

RQ2: What is the influence of tourism on livelihood sovereignty in Alaskan coastal communities?

RQ3: How will current, and anticipated, climate dynamics influence livelihood sovereignty in Alaskan coastal communities?

RQ4: How can greater levels of sovereignty be achieved in Alaskan coastal communities?
MULTI-SITE ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE-CONTROL STUDY

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MULTI-SITE ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE-CONTROL STUDY

Small scale
cruise tourism
Months of Fieldwork = 7

Medium scale
cruise tourism
Months of Fieldwork = 3

Large scale
cruise tourism
Months of Fieldwork = 3

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When keeping community characteristics relatively similar (i.e., population, economy, geography), how does differential forms of tourism influence community development?
**DATA COLLECTION**

**Archival Literature**
- Scholarly literature
- Local government documents
- Local Newspaper
- Local Radio Station
- Local Library Archives
- Forest Service literature

**Participant Observation**
(Musante & Dewalt, 2011; Spradley, 1979)
- Passive Observation
  - Public Events
  - Borough/City Meetings
- Active Observation
  - Daily Interaction
  - n = 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork

**Interviews, n = 134** (Musante & Dewalt)
- Informal Interviews, n = 19 (Spradley, 1979)
- Semi-structured Interviews (Guest et al., 2012)
  - Petersburg, n = 37
  - Wrangell, n = 40
  - Ketchikan, n = 38

**Sampling** (Bernard, 2011)
- Snowball, Opportunistic, Quota

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**City and Borough of Wrangell Comprehensive Plan**
June 2010

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TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

- Petersburg Indian Association
- Wrangell Cooperative Association
- Ketchikan Indian Community
- Saxman IRA Tribal Council

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IMPLICATIONS
ADVISORY BOARDS

- Three community advisory boards
- Regional Advisory Board
- Identity and incorporate community specific issues
- Knowledge co-production from data collection to dissemination
OTHER FORMS OF OUTREACH

• 19 community presentations
• 21 community organizations
• Participatory workshops
• 3 Community reports
• Local methods of dissemination

Doctoral student studies Wrangell tourism industry

BY CAROLINE JAMES
Seattle reporter

For communities around the globe, tourism can be both a blessing and a curse. The industry can provide a much-needed economic bump, but in Wrangell, millions of international arrivals inflate prices for residents and replace locally owned businesses with tourist traps. Close to home, the city of Ketchikan has hosted cruise ships with capacities of nearly half its population, which can crowd out residents and dilute the town’s authentic character.

As the tourism industry expands, Alaska communities are seeking a path forward that will allow them to hold onto these decisions making power, keep economic benefits in town and retain their cultural distinctiveness. Doctoral student Tyson Taylor of Pennsylvania State University is conducting a research project on how tourism impacts a community’s ability to determine its own future.

On April 25, he presented some preliminary thoughts from his work in the Wrangell Borough Assembly. After analyzing data throughout the summer and fall, he hopes to return to Wrangell in December to present more concrete findings.

Through this work is in the early stages, he hopes to produce something that Wrangell and communities throughout Southeast could use to guide their decision-making processes. “I want this research to be able to benefit local communities, rather than something that just sits on the shelf, but that’s where we’re headed,” said.

Wrangell, Petersburg and Ketchikan are his case studies. Each community has its own attitudes toward tourism and each is having different conversations about the future of the industry. For Wrangell and Petersburg, that might involve questions about how to sustainably scale up. For Ketchikan, which anticipates more than 1.4 million cruise ship visitors this summer, the conversation is geared toward determining acceptable limits.

Taylor has been impressed with the Wrangell borough’s community engagement efforts, particularly surrounding the 6-Mile site and the tourism best management practices program. “At the end of the day, I truly believe that tourism, unlike many other industries, is a community-wide industry that has community-wide impacts as well as community-wide responsibility to manage it properly,” he said. Because all residents will be affected by the choices the industry takes in their town, they should be included in the conversation.

Living in Wrangell last winter, he conducted 40 interviews with community stakeholders, observed daily life and helped out around town where he could.

One of his favorite parts about living and working in Wrangell was experiencing residents’ love for the town firsthand. “It’s always fun to see the passion that individuals will have when talking about their town,” he said. “Everybody here wants to ensure that the future of Wrangell is sustainable. That passion is surprising and exciting.”

However, living through his first Southeast winter was “a shock.” The darkness and heavy rains made it difficult to get around without a car, but he stuck it out. “Wrangell is an extremely welcoming community and so it was very fun to be able to do my research here,” he recalled. “If you come into the community with the initiative to want to give back, the community is going to welcome you with open arms.”

Taylor has completed his master’s degree in a related topic, but he’s talking about his master’s thesis and removing questions Thursday, June 16, 2022 the Wrangell Public Library from 7:30 p.m.
LESSONS LEARNED: Earning Rapport

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LESSONS LEARNED: Tribal Engagement

1. Earned Trust
2. Iterative in-person engagement
3. Recognize Research Fatigue
4. Establishing protocols
   • Indigenous impacts presentations per community
   • Offering to help establish tribal IRB protocols
   • Source of reference for future researchers
LESSONS LEARNED: Advisory Boards

1. Repeated and direct interaction
2. Balancing availability vs. expertise
3. Research advocacy
4. Establishing a support system
IMPLICATIONS FOR EARLY RESEARCHERS

1. Maintaining connections
2. Respecting Indigenous Sovereignty
3. Communicating realistic expectations to oneself, communities, and peers
4. Identify other avenues for giving back outside of the project scope
5. Community-engaged research is a spectrum
Ryan -

Thank you for your time, research and involvement with the City of Wrangell. Both the WWB + ED Boards enjoyed learning from your studies -

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All the best in the next steps - Nate Thomas
THANK YOU

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