

Community Development in a Kwagiulth Indian Village

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The historical context

During the 1950's and 1960's, Native Indian communities on the Pacific coast of British Columbia, as elsewhere in Canada, were in a severe socio-economic crisis. At that time, unforeseen effects of earlier assimilation policies by Canadian authorities towards Native people became apparent. Since the 1880's, Indian ceremonial gatherings and institutions had been banned by the potlatch law (Statutes of Canada, Indian Act, 1884, c. 27, sec. 3). Until being repealed in 1951, it was at times strictly enforced by the authorities and even used to sentence Kwagiulth chiefs to prison terms (Sewid-Smith 1979). Compared with the attention the potlatch law has received in public debate and later research, it seems that the less conspicuous Canadian education policies towards Native people may have been even more successful in breaking up Indian communities. Residential schools were established in the Province for Native people, as the one in Alert Bay in 1929 for the Kwagiulth students from the surrounding villages, which was administered by the Anglican church. Strict regulations, disciplinary rules, banning of the Indian language and the children's separation from their families were intended to wipe out their cultural backgrounds and to foster their assimilation into Canadian society. The same objective lay behind the intensified custodial policies towards Indian children imposed by government social welfare authorities in the 1960's (Johnson 1983). Residential schools eventually were closed down and the Indian students were sent to boarding homes in non-Indian communities, often several days' travel away from their home villages.

While at residential school or at boarding homes, Indian children's chances to visit home and to attend the elaborate ceremonials connected with important family events were rare or non-existent. In many cases, this removal from traditional ways of enculturation during the formative years caused new orientations, a lack of understanding of traditional customs, and often the loss of capability to communicate fluently in the *Kwakwala* language with older family members. During the occasional home visits this could have caused irritations and hurt feelings among the elders, who – not seldom – had to perceive the young generation as being lost to the “White man's world”. Consequently, many of them became reluctant to pass down cultural traditions and ceremonial knowledge to them. This kind of family breakdown not only caused generational conflicts but

had the effect of alienating brothers and sisters as well, who were dispersed among distant boarding homes on southern Vancouver Island and the Fraser Valley. Broken communication networks with family members and the home village and an unfortunate exposure to the life in the city, which resulted in unflattering stereotypes of Indian people by non-Indian society, made it equally difficult for them to adjust either to a life in a non-Indian society or, upon their return, to a life in their home villages.

At the same time, drastic structural changes in the coastal industries dealt Indian communities a severe blow, cutting back seasonal job opportunities in the fishing and canning industry and eliminating small scale logging operations on reserves. These industries once fit well into traditional Indian lifestyles and the yearly cycle of domestic activities and ceremonial events. The setback of local Indian economies during the general post-war boom in British Columbia obviously was not of prime concern to Canadian governments. Instead, they tried to solve these problems by increasing social assistance and welfare payments to Indian communities. This resulted in the establishment of long-term dependencies on government agencies and respective unhealthy attitudes among Indian people. Increasingly scarce job opportunities in the home villages and socio-cultural disintegration, especially of those who had to leave the reserve for the city, caused many young Indian people periods of serious socio-psychological crisis with alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and deviant behavior becoming a more common feature (Goldthorpe Report, in: Government of Canada 1980).

The response of Indian people to combat the self-destructive and degrading effects of prevailing Indian lifestyles at that time began with their cultural re-orientation during the 1960's. This was triggered to some extent by a growing interest from the outside world in Indian art. Since then, the arts – and especially the revived Kwagiulth carving traditions – have helped many young Indian people to restore their bonds with their traditional culture. As Indian masks and designs are connected with certain legends and origin stories, the serious artist becomes increasingly aware of the respective family traditions and because of the ownership rights involved, also of the social fabric. In other cases, pan-Indian spiritual gatherings such as those at Morley, Alberta, in the late 1970's, could have offered a turning point for Indian people, causing them to look with regained pride at their cultural traditions and to carry them on. At the same time, a growing political awareness evolved especially in Urban Indian communities such as Vancouver during the Red Power movement of the 1970's. Since then, more Indian students have been gaining access to university education and new Indian leaders have been dealing more effectively with non-Indian institutions and governments (Tennant 1983). Where previously Indian reserves suffered from steady population decline as band members migrated to the cities, during

the 1970's a growing number of predominantly younger families decided to return home. With their return came a strong commitment to rebuild their communities on the basis of a restored pride in their cultural heritage assisted by a distinct political awareness.

Community development in the Dzawada'enuxw Indian village of Kingcome Inlet

The Dzawada'enuxw are one of the about twenty Kwagiulth village groups living on the northern part of Vancouver Island and on the coast of the opposite mainland. Their village Kingcome Inlet is located a few miles upstream at the inner end of the fjord, extending over thirty miles into the coast mountains. Access to the village is by float plane from Vancouver Island, or by boat, which takes about five hours from Alert Bay. Thus, transportation can be a problem and raises the costs of providing services and supplies, such as for fresh vegetables, up to 45 cents per pound.

In 1988, about one third of the 344 registered Dzawada'enuxw band members lived on the reserve in Kingcome Inlet, another third in the cities of Vancouver and Victoria, and the remainder in Alert Bay and other smaller communities mostly on Vancouver Island (see diagram 1). However, the actual population in the village fluctuates considerably, depending on seasonal activities outside or on the reserve as, for example, during the eulachon season or the school holidays.

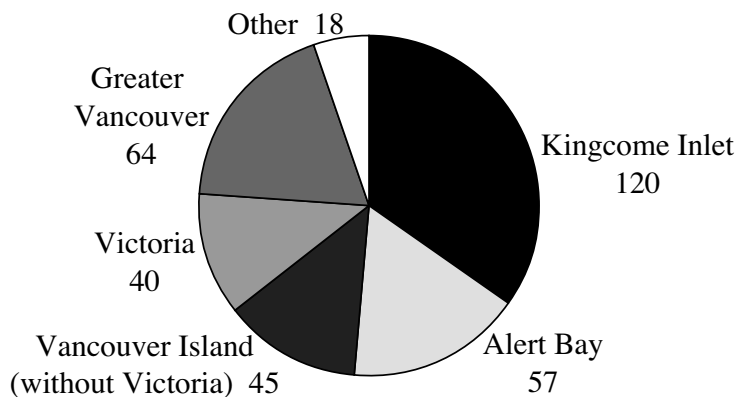


Diagram 1: Geographical population distribution of the Dzawada'enuxw Indian band (June 1988; total population: 344)

According to the Indian Act, there is a legal distinction between off-reserve and on-reserve Indians. While federal education, health, and social services apply only to those Indians “normally resident on reserves” i.e. those who meet both bloodline and territorial requirements, those Indians living off-reserve receive transfer payments from the Federal government by the Provincial

government. As financial responsibilities and special program moneys towards on- and off-reserve Indians from the Canadian governments can differ, an unhealthy competition may arise at times among these groups. On the other hand, as will be shown later, a mutually beneficial interaction between band members living in urban areas and those on the reserve is understood to be crucial for successful community development on both sides (Kasten 1988).

The population composition according to age of the D^zawad^a'enuxw band members living in Kingcome Inlet is well-balanced and clearly contrasting to the situation in many other Indian villages in that area, as the example of Gwayadams, a neighboring community on Gilford Island, illustrates (see diagrams 2 and 3). The favorable population figures of Kingcome Inlet can be explained to a great extent through the existence of a school, if only up to grade seven, which encourages young families to move to or remain in the village.

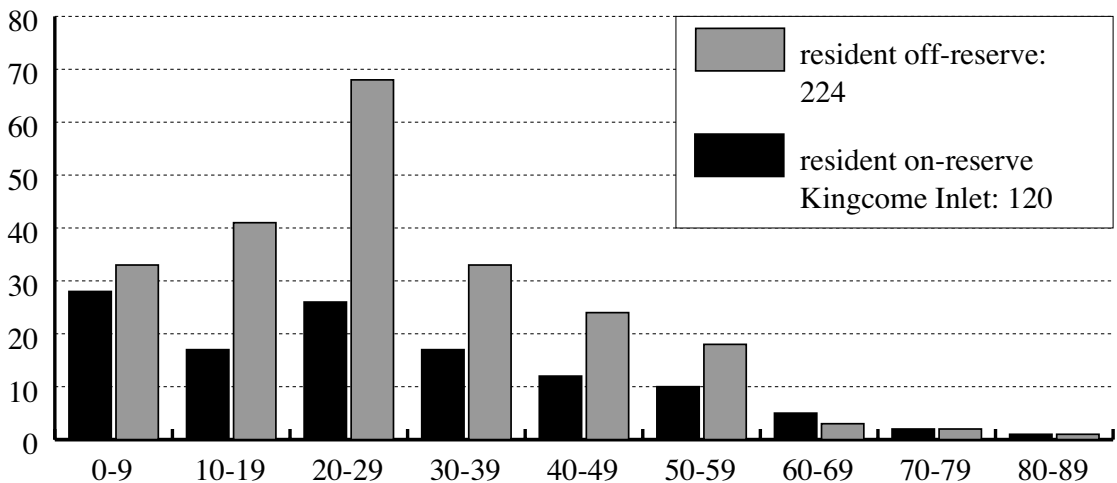


Diagram 2: D^zawad^a'enuxw population profile
(June 1988; total population: 344)

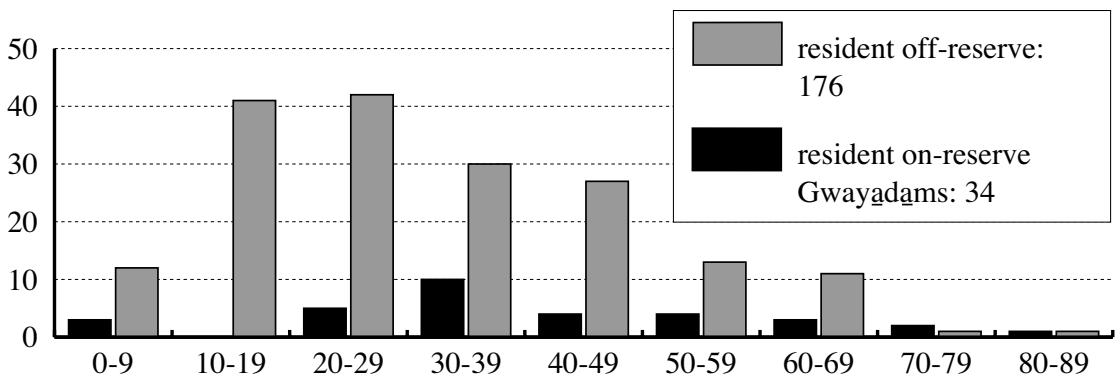


Diagram 3: K^wikwasu^tinuxw population profile
(June 1988; total population: 210)

According to the Indian Act, the administration of the village lies with a band council, whose six members and the chief councillor are elected for a two-year term. They constitute, together with the elected representatives from other neighboring village groups, the Haxwamis (Wakeman Sound), Kwikwasutinuxw (Gilford Island), Gwawa'enuxw (Drury Inlet) and, more recently, the 'Namgis (Alert Bay) and Ławitšis (Turnour Island), the Musgamagw Tribal Council (MTC), which has its office in Alert Bay. On behalf of the MTC, a staff of political and economic planners is working out in cooperation with the respective bands strategies for economic development. These programs are being proposed envisaging non-Indian business partners, Canadian governments, and other funding agencies. Tribal councils, such as the MTC, will in the future assume even more influence in coordinating social services and economic development projects for the individual bands, as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) is about to transfer most of its administrative tasks from its previous district agencies, in this case the one in Campbell River, to local Indian councils.

The concept of elected Indian leaders is a fairly new phenomenon, which was introduced by the Indian Act legislation in 1951. As Indian people are, most recently, redefining their own principles of Indian self-government, the 'democratic' system is questioned, as it does not, in many cases, reflect Indian values and traditional ways (Kasten 1987). The basic economic and political unit among the Kwagiulth has always been the 'na'mim, the patrilineal corporate group or "family", as it is called by Indian people today. Its material property, such as rights to fishing and gathering grounds, and its symbolic property, such as myths, dances, and songs, were held and managed in trust by the chief of the group. While the office was given to an appropriate successor by means of inheritance, the approval and consensus of the group was necessary. One of the ways this was expressed was through the cooperation of the family members for his inaugural potlatch, as there were further checks and balances to the authority of the chief and his policy by the members of the group. Although chiefs from several 'na'mim, sharing the same winter village, could form ad-hoc political alliances under a ranked leadership for defense or to supervise important ceremonial transactions between particular 'na'mim during potlatches, the ultimate political and economic authority of the chief was limited to his 'na'mim only. The same is also true for relations between village groups, although certain ceremonial alliances provided the pattern for occasional economic and military cooperation.

An affiliation such as this with other village groups was formed by the Dzwada'enuxw with the Haxwamis, Kwikwasutinuxw, and Gwawa'enuxw, by the middle of the 19th century (Kasten 1990: 21ff.). The individual 'na'mim of these village groups built their winter houses in Gwayadams and gathered there for

their annual winter ceremonies. This alliance, called *Musgamagw* ('four tribes'), was openly confirmed by the erection of a common totem pole in 1936 in Kingcome Inlet, depicting the main crests of the individual village groups. That event is commemorated in contemporary village feasts, as by the week-long "Heritage '88" celebrations in May 1988. During these celebrations it became apparent how deeply rooted the traditional *'na'mim* concept is still among Kwagiulth people, when family chiefs clearly over-ruled the authority of the band council which had organized and sponsored the event. The elected leaders were not able to prevent individual families from potlatching at the same time and, with that, taking advantage of what was intended to be a village feast.

The authority of elected leaders is limited if they are not adequately supported by traditional family politics between the respective *'na'mim*. Emerging factionalism can either block current politics or lead to time-consuming processes of reaching consensus. Often traditional concepts of political decision-making come into conflict with modern ones. As in the past, the ambiguity of symbols and its ongoing reinterpretation with regard to status and family affiliations during potlatches appears to be still a common feature of policy making. This corresponds with the tendency towards continual renegotiation of agreements, once they are reached, as a widely accepted bargaining tool. However, this leads to uncertainties and delays which, consequently, frustrate particularly non-Indian business partners, who are not accustomed to these attitudes, and often jeopardizes joint venture projects with them.

The prerequisite for Indian self-government, promoted emphatically by today's Indian leaders, is for Bill Wilson, the political coordinator of the MTC as well as for Paul Willie, now the manager of the Dzawada'enuxw band, the need to overcome former attitudes of self-pity which focus on the cultural deprivation of Indian people, and dependency modes that the government owes them a living. Instead, they see reasons to be proud and for success in eventually resuming control over the management of the natural resources in their traditional territories, which was lost during the structural changes in the coastal industries after World War II. This route to becoming economically competitive and increasingly self-reliant is outlined in the "Musgamagw Integrated Resource Management Demonstration Project" (Musgamagw Tribal Council 1988). It responds to the unemployment rate, which is still high on Indian reserves such as Kingcome Inlet, where, in 1988, of the sixty-one people able to work, one third was employed in band administration and village maintenance, another third worked under temporary job creation programs by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission (CIC) with the remainder being self-employed or engaged in predominantly seasonal jobs.

Amongst the Dzawada'enuxw living on the reserve, only one has a fishing

boat of his own, whereas other Indian communities, especially those around Alert Bay and Campbell River, are known for their numerous fishing fleets. Kingcome Inlet, like many isolated Indian communities, lost fishing boats during the 1960's when they had difficulties in adjusting to the new license system. Because of their remote habitation there was limited access to financial advisers, as opposed to those Indians living in proximity to urban areas. In recent years a growing number of off-reserve Dzawada'enuxw have purchased fishing boats. During the fishing season, many Dzawada'enuxw from Kingcome Inlet work as crew on seine boats belonging to relatives from other Indian communities.

Besides the regulated and closely monitored commercial fishing, Native people have an unrestricted right to fish for domestic use, known as 'food fishing'. Food fishing for salmon in the Kingcome River is at its peak in September, towards the end of the commercial fishing season, when individual families gather to process the fish for canning or drying in their smoke houses (Kasten 1990: 58). The spring season brings the eulachon run, a rare fish species found only in a few rivers along the coast. This fish is rendered in the traditional way into valuable oil or grease (Kasten 1990: 58ff.). Eulachon grease is still regarded as an important dietary element and formerly was a valuable trade good amongst Indian people. The manufacture of this grease represented a special privilege shared by families from only a few village groups. The excitement during these annual activities in Kingcome Inlet clearly reflects the joy and eagerness to reinforce their particular identity as Dzawada'enuxw which means 'those, who always have eulachon'. Beyond the economic value, these traditional activities have the important function of re-integrating family members, who visit their home village during these times, by strengthening their family ties in communal work, which has always been an important concept of communicating particular social networks among Indian people.

In addition to these traditional industries, the MTC has designed programs developing other currently successful coastal industries such as aquaculture, forestry and tourism. In Kingcome Inlet a salmon enhancement program has recently been initiated with assistance from the CIC. This program has created six jobs for the Dzawada'enuxw with valuable training leading to expertise in the modern fisheries industry. This may enable them later to enter into long-term contracts with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In the area of tourism a sports fishing lodge is being considered in the inlet. A forestry project is in the experimental stages and is expected to become a stable industry for the Dzawada'enuxw in the future. In 1988, the Dzawada'enuxw procured a woodlot license for the purpose of harvesting cottonwood, with the product purchase being secured by the Scott Paper Company. This company controls fifteen other woodlot licenses in the area and the Dzawada'enuxw are optimistic about entering an

agreement for this entire license. Such an agreement would create six to twelve permanent jobs for the D_zwad_a'enu_xw making thirty to fifty of them self-reliant and independent from government financial assistance. In this initial stage, a CIC forestry training program is in place in Kingcome Inlet for nine D_zwad_a'enu_xw.

The MTC is concerned about the integrated management of renewable resources paying close attention that side effects from the use of one resource do not create a hazard in another. Thus, ecological disasters could be prevented, such as the one recently caused by the logging operations of Whonnock Timber in the Kingcome valley, when a slide blocked the creek supplying water for the salmon enhancement station or when its operations interfered with the eulachon run in 1986. Regarding the tourism resource, reduced fish stocks and clear cut logging would be detrimental. In contrast to large forestry companies with their transient nature, a local population would possibly be more concerned about the continuous use of its traditional land and ensure sensitive reforestation for future generations. Most importantly, by getting actively involved in these modern and rapidly expanding industries, Indian people will take part in decisions about the future land use of their traditional territories. This is seen as another route to acquire not only political but rather economic independence as opposed to going through costly, time-consuming and often frustrating legal processes regarding land claim issues.

The MTC recognizes education and the development of technical expertise as a prerequisite for the successful, competitive management of their traditional resources. To ensure the development of self-reliant Indian communities it is important that the newly trained Indian people seek employment in their traditional areas, where they are needed. Although as much job training as possible is done on-site, the students have to leave the reserves for college or university or – in the case of Kingcome Inlet – for their last five years of high school. Today, reserve and off-reserve Indian communities work closely together to facilitate a smooth adjustment to different social, cultural, and educational standards in the city in order to keep the dropout rates low (Kasten 1988). Another problem which can undermine efforts at reserve community development is the ongoing braindrain, which depletes the reserves of their most talented people. The students from Kingcome Inlet, who have to leave the village after grade seven, are overseen by the homeschool coordinator of the band. Besides ensuring that the students stay in appropriate boarding homes, preferably with extended family members or, at least, within the Kwagiulth Urban Indian community, the homeschool coordinator extends also financial and emotional support. This encouragement is conveyed through newsletters from the band and, most importantly, the participation of the young people in sports and cultural events – particularly potlatches – at home. The students are reminded of their obligation and responsibility towards

the local band which is sponsoring them. A more sophisticated approach has recently been adopted by the Dzawada'enuxw to ensure that students have the option of returning and finding a job on the reserve. This initiative sponsors band members for college and university training only in areas where a definite need in the local Indian economy has been identified or is anticipated.

Since the position paper on "Indian control of Indian education" was issued in 1972 by the National Indian Brotherhood, two of its main educational principles – parental responsibility and local control of education, rights denied to Indian people since Confederation – have been given increased recognition in Indian education. Presently, most of the schools on Kwagiulth reserves such as Kingcome Inlet are operated by the local bands. For those students who have to leave the reserve for high school education, two types of schools are available in urban areas. One type is the Native Way or Indian Cultural Survival School such as the "Spirit Rising Cultural Survival School" in Vancouver, where a variety of new pedagogies, as well as a combination of conventional academic subjects and a more pronounced Indian cultural curriculum are applied. According to the various backgrounds of the students it has to offer a mix of pan-Indian and localized tribal traditions (McCaskill 1987: 153ff.). In Victoria, an integrated Indian education approach within the public school system has shown positive results. Special programs, such as Native Career Days or Native Awareness Days and a re-written curriculum regarding Native issues, done in close cooperation with the Kwagiulth Indian teacher Nella Nelson, give Indian students the opportunity to define and enhance their cultural identities vis-à-vis non-Indian society (Kasten 1988: 129f.). As these issues are directed towards non-Indian students as well, an integrated school system like Victoria's may help to overcome stereotypes on both sides through encouraging a meaningful, multicultural dialogue.

On the reserve in Kingcome Inlet, in 1988 twenty-eight students from grade one to seven were taught in two classes. The two teachers are hired by the band for a one-year period after a public hearing involving all band members. In addition, three part-time teachers from within the village are employed, particularly to teach the *Kwakwala* classes. Although a special program (NITEP) at the University of British Columbia encourages Native people to get a teacher's degree, only a limited number of fluently *Kwakwala* speaking teachers with the required academic qualifications are available. As in other band-operated schools, it is up to the homeschool coordinator to incorporate Indian cultural issues within the conventional curriculum, in consultation with parents and other band members. During these meetings controversial opinions may arise regarding the question to what degree the regular curriculum should be replaced by traditional issues. It is recognized that students have to be adequately prepared for off-reserve high schools so that they do not fall behind academically. How-

ever, other band members believe the regular curriculum does not give enough attention to skills that are required for a life on the reserve, consequently alienating the students from home. Everyone agrees that special efforts are to be made for the continuation of the *Kwakwala* language, which is taught every day for half an hour in both classes. It is a problem that *Kwakwala* is infrequently spoken at home by the younger families, as they were the generation that had suffered most from earlier Canada school policies enforcing the abandonment of their traditional language. Culturally enclined young parents, however, are showing a growing interest in *Kwakwala* classes, which have been offered for some time even to adult members of the Kwagiulth Urban Indian community in Victoria.

The once usual way of passing down cultural traditions such as singing, dancing, and carving within the families was seriously disrupted during the time of the Canadian assimilation policies. This traditional knowledge has now to be revived through special courses and programs, which were initiated in Kingcome Inlet in 1983 by the cultural coordinator of the band, Frank Nelson. Since then, young students have been taught by him and Frances Dick the traditional potlatch songs, while so-called play potlatches give the young people an opportunity to practice their dances and to foster a renewed interest in their particular cultural heritage. It is important that these events and courses are also offered to the Kwagiulth Urban Indian community, to prepare family and band members living apart for the ceremonial activities which take place during their traditional feasts, particularly at potlatches.

These potlatches provide the ceremonial setting for the specific ways of symbolic communication of Kwagiulth and other Northwest Coast Indian people with humans, ancestors, and the supernatural. It clearly reflects the diverse and changing demands upon the individual and society at a given time. A diachronic view of the potlatch may provide us with the understanding of its complexity, often disregarded in earlier studies on this subject, which were focused predominantly on singular aspects, such as its economic (Piddocke 1965), socio-structural (Barnett 1938, Drucker and Heizer 1967, Rosman and Rubel 1971), or religious (Goldman 1975) functions and meanings. It appears, however, that religious concepts, most often based on encounters with the supernatural, have gradually been reinterpreted in the socio-political realm of evolving increasingly complex Northwest Coast Indian society and, most recently, with regard to today's Canadian multiculturalism, without replacing former meanings which can continue to exist simultaneously.

In correspondence to the various levels of meaning, the potlatch allows the symbolic communication of multiple networks and respective identities. Through financial support and communal work, such as the preparation for the potlatch and the serving of the food, as well as through particular dances (Kasten 1990:

135ff.) showing the *dtugwe*' of the family, the solidarity of the '*nq*'*mim* of the host is publicly demonstrated. Other dances, as the *amlala*, or its particular version of the Dzawada'*enuxw*, the *leswa*'*ana* are performed by members of the entire village group. Furthermore, cross-'*nq*'*mim* and village networks can be expressed through the membership to certain secret societies and by the participation in the respective *rseka* dances. This is seen today, among others, at the end of the *hamatsa* series when older *hamatsa* dancers from different village groups come forward to perform together their particular *hamatsa* dance to honour the new initiate. During the *ta'sala* cycle, the peace dances demonstrate to the audience the relationship of the host not only to the family whose representatives have been asked to dance together and showing their solidarity, but also the special relationships to non-Indian friends, as for example, adopted family members, or to non-Indian liaison or resource people. The use of their traditional language and distinctive Kwagiulth or Northwest Coast Indian art styles and designs in form of masks, button blankets, and other regalia worn during potlatches, help to define further networks, such as their identity as Kwagiulth or Northwest Coast Indian people. When Native groups from other parts of North America are among the guests, pan-Indian identity is shown, for example, in a special dance, the *sudi*, which was given to the Kwagiulth during the St. Louis World Fair in 1904 by the Sioux. This dance was performed during a play potlatch in connection with the closing ceremonies of the National Association of Friendship Centres conference in Victoria in 1986.

From this pool of latent or potential relations, symbolically defined and communicated during potlatches, that actual network is mobilized which appears most convenient as an adaptive strategy for a particular situation, depending on whether the respective action set or coalition is persuing family, village, Kwagiulth, or pan-Indian interests. With regard to community development, potlatching as a traditional mode of thought offers the pattern for multi-level strategies to deal with current issues on the basis of multiple identities. For these to become most clearly re-defined, after the breakdown of socio-cultural networks in previous times, the revived complex feasting system of the Kwagiulth seems to be decisive.

Conclusions

For successful community development in Kwagiulth Indian villages such as Kingcome Inlet it is important to bring into line traditional and modern concepts in order to cope with crisis situations caused by cultural confusion, in the Durkheimian sense, political factionalism, and economic immobilization. For this to occur, new types of Indian leaders are called for who are legitimized both in a

traditional and in a modern way, and being capable and obliged to dealing on both levels.

It was shown that well-defined interaction between the reserve and the respective Urban Indian community is indispensable for successful community development on both sides. Translocal networks like these are ceremonially confirmed and strengthened by participation in intercommunity feasts and the potlatch system. Thus, even more than in the past, a particular Indian village or district must not be seen as a 'closed system'.

With regards to truly Indian self-government, to be based on economic self-reliance, the *Musgamagw* approach seems promising in resuming control of the management of the natural resources of the traditional area of the Dzawada'-enuxw of Kingcome Inlet. For the future, 'Indian' concepts of modern economic development, based on specific cultural values combined with proven environmental emphasis, may create useful alliances with respective groups among non-Indian people, mobilizing public opinion and, consequently, governments and political decisions in their favour. Thus, land claim issues could be solved, if not yet in principle, but for the time being on a pragmatic level by the Native use and control of the resources of their traditional territories.

To sum up, community development on a Kwagiulth Indian reserve, such as Kingcome Inlet, seems to require combined efforts of well-integrated cultural, socio-structural, political, and economic strategies to further succeed.

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