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Analysis

"They're All Really Important, But…": Unpacking How People Prioritize Values for the Marine Environment in Haida Gwaii, British Columbia

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we report on research designed to learn about how people prioritize outcomes of the management of marine ecosystems. Using Q methodology, we asked residents to sort outcomes such as food security, trustworthy governance, harvest and recreational opportunities, education, and employment in terms of their importance to community well-being. We also asked them to discuss the strategies they used when faced with difficult tradeoffs, and their feelings throughout the sorting process. We identified four strategies that people used for resolving trade-offs and four social discourses that informed participants' sorts: the strategies for prioritization reflect aspects of people's ethical standpoint, as well as whether they are employing short or long-term thinking; the discourses reflect concerns regarding state-based governance, local autonomy, and people's desire to be engaged and connected with the marine environment. Our findings shed light on how people in natural resource dependent areas think about environmental governance and negotiate among multiple priorities. Our findings also offer explanations for why people agree or disagree with policies and management actions, especially in cases where people's preferences appear inconsistent with their stated values. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for natural resource management and research.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we report on research designed to learn about how people prioritize the many ways that their well-being is linked to marine ecosystems. Incorporating people's values and priorities into environmental decision-making is widely recognized as a prerequisite for achieving outcomes that are both sustainable and just (Bennett et al., 2016; Charnley et al., 2017). However, doing so can be a challenge, because different people invariably have different preferences about how resources ought to be managed, conserved, and developed (Adams et al., 2003; Hall and Lazarus, 2015; Loring et al., 2014). These differences, which occur both among and within groups, can foster a variety of challenges for effective management, from a lack of engagement and trust in management to outright conflict among stakeholders (Hall et al., 2016; Harrison and Loring, 2014; Pomeroy et al., 2007; Satterfield, 2007). Our goal in this paper is to add to the growing body of literature in this area, specifically by exploring how people choose among multiple outcomes that they deem 'good' or 'important'. That is, it is one thing to know that people value the protection of wetlands or whales, but how do those same people prioritize, within themselves, one outcome or benefit against others that they also consider to be good, say, the ability to fish for food? What influences these decisions, and, how do people feel when they must choose among multiple desired benefits?

These questions highlight an important aspect of environmental valuation—the internal space in which people negotiate their diverse values and priorities when faced with difficult trade-offs. Increasingly, research on environmental valuation is moving beyond solely economic concepts and research methods that emphasize only the instrumental or monetary value of natural resources (Arias-Arévalo et al., 2018; Christie et al., 2012). These methods, such as choice experiments, contingent valuation, and return-potential models (e.g., Jackson, 1965; Powe et al., 2005; Wallmo and Lew, 2012), are built on ontological assumptions that do not include the full set of social, cultural, and ethical matters that inform people's decisions (Næss, 2006). As such, they can unintentionally obscure or exclude the many personal considerations that make value judgments meaningful for people in the first place (Satterfield, 2001; Zendehdel et al., 2008). Some of people's preferences are doubtlessly motivated by economic concerns, but others are rooted in tradition or emotion, some reflect individual needs while others reflect collective needs and social relations, and arguably, many preferences are a complex combination of all of these (Arias-Arévalo et al., 2018; Chan et al., 2016).

Accordingly, many researchers are now working with a variety of

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Table 1
Interview and workshop prompts.

Standard preamble	We are here with you today to talk about the marine environment, how it relates to the health and well-being of you and your family, and what you think constitutes a "healthy" and "sustainable" environment. We'll talk about the ways you value the marine environment, changes you've observed that concern you, ways your lives have been impacted by changes, and your preferences for the future.
Open-ended interview questions	Tell me about yourself? Are you from Haida Gwaii? How long have you lived here? Do you think the Haida Gwaii Marine environment is healthy? Why or why not? Do you think the ways that Haida Gwaii residents use marine resources is sustainable? Why or why not? Thinking into the future, say the next 25 years, what kinds of changes do you imagine might take place? These could be things you hope for or worry about. Do you have any other pressing concerns about fisheries or Haida Gwaii's marine environment that we haven't yet talked about? After having this conversation, is there anyone else that you know of that we should be speaking with?
Workshop discussion prompts	Complete these sentences: • The marine environment is healthy when… • Our behaviors in the marine environment are sustainable when… • Our communities are healthy when…

qualitative and quantitative research methods to elicit better information about how people weigh symbolic, ethical, emotional, and cognitive values, methods that include surveys, in-depth interviews, priority ranking and sorting, and group deliberations (Arias-Arévalo et al., 2018; Bennett et al., 2016). These can be invaluable for helping researchers and policymakers to understand how people think about and negotiate their environmental values, for example, between monetary and non-monetary factors or between individually- and collectively-held values for natural resources (Arias-Arévalo et al., 2018). Here, we report research that used one such method, Q methodology (hereafter referred to as 'Q method'), which is an increasingly popular research approach for understanding individuals' subjective values (Armatas et al., 2014; Barry and Proops, 1999; Hermelingmeier and Nicholas, 2017; Steelman and Maguire, 1999). Specifically, we asked residents of Haida Gwaii, British Columbia to prioritize a variety of social and environmental outcomes related to the marine environment, such as food security, recreational opportunities, education, and employment, in terms of their perceived importance to community well-being.

Through this exercise, we identified four discourses that inform residents' prioritizations, and that reflect their concerns surrounding governance, autonomy, and a desire to be engaged and connected with their local environments. We also identified four strategies for prioritization that people employed when negotiating trade-offs among outcomes, strategies that we believe reflect aspects of people's ethical standpoint (i.e., whether they emphasize what they believe is right or what they believe is necessary). Together, these discourses and prioritization strategies reveal how local people think about the relationships among local environments and their own well-being. They also illustrate the embeddedness of people's decision making within multiple sets of social and environmental relations and power dynamics (e.g., Agrawal, 2005). We discuss the implications of these findings for management and further research and conclude by noting the methodological implications of our work.

2. Research Area and Methods

This research took place in the communities of Queen Charlotte, Sandspit, Masset, Tlell, Old Masset, and Skidegate in Haida Gwaii, an archipelago of islands located off the northwest coast of British Colombia. Haida Gwaii is home to approximately 5000 people, roughly half of whom are indigenous Haida, and the remainder being a mix of multi-generational settler families, recent newcomers, and part-time laborers for such industries as construction, timber, tourism, and government services. The islands are also home to an extremely diverse range of wildlife and plant species, and the lower third (roughly) of the archipelago is a protected area and Haida heritage site known as Gwaii Haanas, which is cooperatively managed by the Council of the Haida Nation (CHN) and the Government of Canada (GC). The region has a long history of conflict over natural resources, stretching to before the first colonial contact (Fedje and Mathewes, 2011; Vaillant, 2009), and also more recent history of successes by local people to oppose problematic environmental activities and take a lead role in developing alternatives (Jones et al., 2016; Lee, 2012).

Sustainable use of resources such as fisheries and timber, protection of the marine environment, and issues of governance are central concerns among most Haida Gwaii residents today (Kent, 2014). There are multiple groups currently involved in these issues; CHN, GC (through such agencies as Parks Canada [PC] and Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada [DFO]), and the provincial government of British Columbia (BC) all actively contribute to the management of local ecosystems and resources. In addition, there are numerous stakeholder and rightsholder groups, including local municipalities, sport fishing lodges, the commercial fishing industry, and the timber industry. Ongoing interactions and conflicts among these groups are entangled in cultural differences, unsettled aboriginal title, differing economic development goals, and the fact that so many locals depend on the natural environment for food and livelihood security (Lee, 2012). Despite local conflicts or disagreements, in our experience on the islands, many locals exhibit much goodwill to one another and an ability to unite against issues that are perceived as common threats, such as the development of pipelines and increased shipping traffic (Hinzman, 2018).

We designed this research in consultation with CHN and PC, and our research protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan. The primary goal of the research was to identify how residents of Haida Gwaii understand and prioritize the linkages between their well-being and the marine environment. We employed one-on-one interviews, small workshops, and Q method. All activities took place in 2014 and 2015. Interviews were semi-structured, lasting from 30 to 90 min. Discussion prompts focused on current challenges facing their communities and people's values for the marine environment (Table 1). We recruited key informants first by reaching out to a diverse set of community-members, starting with local business owners, administrators of non-profits, and other community organizations. From there, we identified additional interviewees through snowball sampling. At the request of CHN, our research with Haida participants, save one, took the form of workshops and focused on millennial-age community members (born between the mid-1980s and the turn of the 21st century, so roughly 18–30 years of age). These workshops were not restricted to Haida participants. Workshop participation was solicited via posted advertisements throughout local communities, as well as through direct recruitment by CHN and the Haida Gwaii Higher Education Society. As with the interviews, discussion prompts in the workshops raised issues of marine health, community well-being, and values for the future.

All participants performed a Q sort, which describes a process by which participants sort a stack of index cards, each bearing a single statement about an environmental value (Barry and Proops, 1999; Eden et al., 2005; Steelman and Maguire, 1999). Not just simple ranking, Q

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