

Indigenous territoriality and cartography

First research visit and meetings between the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok (Québec) and Hul'qumi'num (British Columbia)

Vancouver Island, June 10-14, 2019

Members of the **Indigenous Territoriality and Cartography** project (SSHRC, Insight Development 2018-2020) conducted their first visit to and workshop in the Hul'qumi'num communities (British Columbia) in June 2019. During this visit, the team members had the chance to meet several Indigenous actors who are partaking in territorial negotiations and the recognition and transmission of Indigenous knowledge.



Members of the *Indigenous Territoriality and Cartography* team (from left to right): Brian Thom (UVic), Sylvie Poirier (ULaval), Benoit Éthier (UQAT), Gérald Ottawa (Council of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Nation), Charles Coocoo (elder, member of the Atikamekw community of Wemotaci), Christian Coocoo (Council of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Nation). Photo taken by Justine Gagnon on the Ye'yumnuts ancestral site (Cowichan Tribes).



On the first day, the team members had the opportunity to meet Robert Morales (on the right in the photo), who is the chief negotiator for the Hul'qumi'num Nations and Al Anderson, Executive Director of the Hul'qumi'num

Treaty Group. During the meeting, Robert Morales talked about the history of the Hul'qumi'num attempts to have their ancestral land-rights recognized. Like the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, the Hul'qumi'num are involved in comprehensive territorial negotiations with the federal and provincial governments. These negotiations are governed by a comprehensive land-claims policy. This meeting allowed us, among other things, to discuss the challenges encountered in these negotiations and the various innovative strategies developed by the First Nations to affirm their existential principles and practices. Robert Morales explained in particular the measures undertaken by the federal government to rethink the comprehensive land-claims policy so that it would be more equitable and better respond to the expectations of the First Nations.

Charles Coocoo (Atikamekw Nehirowisiw from Wemotaci) gives an Atikamekw birchbark basket to Robert Morales as a gesture of thanks.



Our visit would not have been possible without the help of Brian Thom (University of Victoria) and Kathleen Johnnie (Coordinator for the Hul'qumi'num' Lands and Resources Society, in the centre of the photo).



As part of her responsibilities, Kathleen Johnnie works in close collaboration with Parks Canada. She took us to visit and explore various Hul'qumi'num ancestral sites located in the archipelago around Vancouver Island. She also organized a meeting with the Clam and Hunting Working Groups.



Photo: Visit to the Hul'qumi'num ancestral sites in the archipelago around Vancouver Island, including the “seafood garden” on the shores of Russell Island and the Hul'qumi'num hunting ground on Sidney Island. The guide for our tour was the very friendly David Dick, a member of the

Songhees Nation who works for Parks Canada. This tour was provided by Parks Canada (boat rental, guided tour, etc.) through a partnership with the Hul'qumi'num nations.

The **Indigenous Territoriality and Cartography** team's visit to the Hul'qumi'num territories was marked by several meetings with members of the Hul'qumi'num nations. They were proud to welcome and share their experiences and

approaches to promoting and transmitting territorial and cultural knowledge. We had the chance to be hosted by Chief John Elliot of the Stz'uminus Nation (one of the six Hul'qumi'num Nations). We participated with the same community in the celebration of the Hul'qumi'num language organized by the members of the ShXiXnu-tun Lelum Primary School.

Photo: As part of the celebration of the Hul'qumi'num language, Charles Coocoo (Nehirowisiw from Wemotaci) was invited to talk about the importance of languages in the transmission of Indigenous knowledge.



Photo taken during the meeting with the elders of the Stz'uminus First Nation. At the end of the community meal, members of the nation gave blankets (*swoqw'ulh*) to each of the team members to thank and honour us. The blankets had the Saskwatch figure on them, an important character in the oral tradition of all the Hul'qumi'num Nations.



Photo: During the team's visit, Christian and Charles Coocoo gave a presentation in a French immersion class at the Cowichan Secondary School (11th and 12th grade). Basing their presentation on oral tradition, archaeological data, and scientific studies, they drew up a portrait of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Nation in the settlement of north-eastern North America.

Photo: During our visit to the Quw'uts'un Culture Centre, we had the chance to meet Luke Marston (on the left in the photo), a craftsman from the Stz'uminus nation.



He was building a solid cedar canoe used primarily for fishing and travelling in the Pacific. We can also see Gérald Ottawa (Atikamekw from Manawan, in the centre of the photo). They are discussing the differences between the Hul'qumi'num cedar canoe and the Atikamekw birchbark canoe.



Photo: Brian Thom talks about his continuing research into the history of the ʔEL,İŁĆ - ɛəlítč (Cordova Bay) site, based on archival data, the Indigenous oral tradition, and his own archaeological data.

Brian Thom (associate professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria) and Justine Gagnon (post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria) talked about how their work to promote two important Hul'qumi'num archaeological sites (the ancestral sites Ye'yumnuts and

ʔEL,İŁĆ - ɛəlítč

[Cordova Bay]) was progressing. These sites comprise ancient Indigenous villages (around 2,000 years old in the case of Ye'yumnuts), burial grounds, and artifacts of all kinds providing a wealth of information about material culture, exchange networks, and Indigenous ways of living. In the two cases, the preservation of these important cultural sites is threatened by real-estate development, which has grown substantially in the last few decades in British Columbia, particularly on Vancouver Island.

Brian Thom likewise organized a cartography workshop at the Ethnographic Mapping Lab (University of Victoria), which he founded and now directs. He also discussed cartography resources and ideas that will help the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Nation in their efforts to document, promote, and transmit territorial knowledge. At the same time, the cartography workshop allowed the team members to reflect on the modelling of interactive maps that would better represent the Indigenous territorial relationships and land-tenure systems, particularly in the context of comprehensive land claims and overlapping claims.



Photo: Brian Thom (director of the Ethnographic Mapping Lab, UVic) telling us about the production of Indigenous interactive maps.

The **Indigenous Territoriality and Cartography** project is far from being over. The first research visit and meetings have opened the door to new avenues for developing interactive maps that are more representative of Indigenous territorial relationships and, more importantly, they have helped to build bridges between Canada's Eastern and Western First Nations. Even though these Nations have a distinct cultural and historic heritage, it nonetheless remains that they are both involved in the promotion and transmission of cultural knowledge and in comprehensive land claims. On this point, the meetings and work sessions allowed us to share experiences and strategies leading ultimately to Indigenous self-determination. The next research visit and meetings that will bring together the two First Nations will take place in autumn of 2020 in the *Nitaskinan*, the ancestral territory claimed by the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Nation.

For more information about the **Indigenous Territoriality and Cartography** project, please contact Benoit Éthier (School of Indigenous Studies, UQAT): benoit.ethier@uqat.ca.

