Challenges of Managing Data on Traditional Knowledge: A Case Study from the Canadian North

Teresa Scassa, Canada Research Chair in Information Law, Centre for Law, Technology and Society, University of Ottawa
D. R. Fraser Taylor, FRSC, Distinguished Research Professor and Director of the Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre, Carleton University
Tracey P. Lauriault, Post Doctoral Fellow, Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre, Carleton University.

The importance of Traditional Knowledge (TK) and the need to ensure that it is preserved and protected has received growing recognition. Property Organisation (WIPO) notes that TK is created by a process of interaction between members of a community and is developed maintained and held collectively. The scope of TK is quite broad. Oguamanam (2012) notes that "...it constitutes an aspect of the ecological management and environmental stewardship, sustainable development, economic empowerment, self determination, human rights, property rights, culture, arts, crafts, music, songs, dance and innumerable aspects of social processes that undergird a peoples overall world view" (pg. 146). TK is frequently passed down through oral traditions and therefore not static nor necessarily old. The creation of TK is an ongoing process within communities and the knowledge grows and evolves with the communities concerned.

The management of data on traditional knowledge is a challenging and complex process. This paper will describe an ongoing process of recording, preserving, protecting and disseminating the traditional knowledge of Inuit communities in the Territory of Nunavut in northern Canada. Building collaborative relationships with the communities involved is of paramount importance and creating a process by which the communities have a high degree of control over how the knowledge is disseminated is of great important.

This paper will describe how the Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre (GCRC) at Carleton University in Ottawa has used a new approach, known as cybercartography, to address the many challenges involved. The use of location is of growing importance in data management but the approach used by GCRC goes beyond the usual approach in geospatial data management and seeks to manage data geospatially with location being key. Cybercartography is not only useful in managing data. It also provides a useful way of portraying and disseminating knowledge. The paper will also consider the very important legal and ethical issues involved in managing data on Traditional Knowledge.

Keywords: data management, law and ethics, traditional knowledge, northern Canada