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P34.26

On the land - Greenland and Nunavut: a small footprint model

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Atmospheric-induced change at Arctic latitudes is more immediate and dramatic than at temperate latitudes. As the planet warms, one significant atmospheric alteration in the North is increased incidence and velocity of wind. This greatly reduces aboriginal ability to engage in traditional hunting by eliminating the frozen sea as a hunting platform. To cope more with hunting on water rather than ice, the Inuit have resorted to increased use of technology, subsequently producing additional hydrocarbons, and incurring greater levels of financial debt. Although the media make us aware of rapid ice melt of the Arctic, the Western world is largely oblivious of the cultural implications of disappearing ice which has the attention of scientists and the public. In the Arctic, Western adventure and heritage travellers are guests and students; the Inuit are hosts and teachers. The Inuit culture is one from which visitors from the big foot print Western model can benefit through exposure to environmentally friendly strategies of living lightly on the land. This paper is based on field notes, observations, and photographs from 12 trips as geographer and photographer in Nunavut and Greenland. Conference presentation will be accompanied by Power Point tour of lands to east and west of Baffin Bay. Images feature aerials, flora and fauna, ice conditions and travel and hunting on the ice, energy acquisition and use, landscapes, and settlement life. As a function of a shorter ice season, Inuit are forced into wage labor and participation in the market economy. On both sides of Baffin Bay, tourism is growing as a means of employment. Permanent settlement and re-settlement policies, "micro" urbanization, even in the Arctic, carries its own panoply of cultural problems that can compromise successful adaptation, such as health and education, water and sewage, housing and energy. The detritus of settlement enlarges the mark of small footprint culture. Given the Gulf Stream, a modest number of Greenlanders have the opportunity of agricultural employment. Still, the indigenous populations of Baffin Bay have much that they can teach us of the West about living on the land as we attend to our responsibility as stewards of planet Earth. Climate change through intensified wind and reduced ice has adversely affected the Inuit subsistence traditions of living on the land. Ramifications include increased dependence on processed foods from the West, erosion of family interdependence on the land through attachment to the wage labor force, and loss of subsistence skills to successive generations. My research question continues to be, what can Western travelers learn from the adaptive strategies of the Inuit. As a point for long-term discussion: Has Inuit culture become too much like Western culture to serve as a model. Has it absorbed too much of a wage economy and the accoutrements of technology and energy use from the developed world. As an ethical question, can we preserve traditional life as a reserve system.

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