

SELF-DETERMINATION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND WELLBEING IN THE  
ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITY OF NINILCHIK

By

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## **Abstract**

Alaska Natives are a diverse group of people with different language groups and over 200 tribes. We have a history of colonization and are still a colonized people, but through all this, we strive for wellness for our people. This paper begins with an explanation of historical trauma, development, and the lack of fate control Alaska Native people experience. The literature review explains how colonization can negatively impact the colonized and details international, federal, and Alaska state law and court cases having to do with Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. In this project the researcher works with the Ninilchik Village Tribe of Ninilchik, Alaska, to explore how community members utilize self-determination, either individually and/or as a group, to achieve individual, community, and tribal sustainability and wellbeing. This project uses the method of ethnographic futures research to conduct scenarios about the future. The researcher conducted 30 interviews about three possible futures: the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely, and followed the interviews with four focus groups to discuss the interview results. The results were coded through grounded theory in NVivo analysis software and compared with: (a) the Capabilities Approach, (b) Self-Determination Theory, (c) social science development theories of Dependency and World Systems, and (d) the Elements of Development Model. The Capabilities Approach and Self-Development Theory explain the links between self-determination and wellbeing. Dependency and World Systems Theories explain the importance of local self-determination for development. Finally, the Elements of Development Model provides an outline for different types of self-determining actions. The project analyzes Arctic wellbeing indicators and developed indicators of sustainability and wellbeing. The project results demonstrate what community members think that individuals, the community, and the tribe can do to improve sustainability and wellbeing in Ninilchik, and how to achieve those goals through self-determining actions. The dissemination document serves as the start to a 20-year strategic plan. This type of research demonstrates how tribes can address the results of historical trauma and take control of their fate through self-determination. The next steps in research would be asset mapping and capacity-building projects to work with the data and benefit the community.



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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Introduction

Alaska Natives are a diverse group of people with different language groups and over 200 tribes. We have a history of colonization, and with this history, currently, many Alaska Native villages are plagued with social ills and infrastructure problems. Through all this, we strive for wellness for our people, and some tribes are working through self-determination to address the ills they face. In this dissertation, I investigate the intersections between Alaska Native self-determination and community sustainability and wellbeing with the Ninilchik Village Tribe in the community of Ninilchik, Alaska. This study specifically addresses the perspectives Ninilchik community members have of the future. The method of the project is ethnographic futures research. It is used as a way to talk about the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely futures. These diverse possible futures provide evidence of how self-determination affects the sustainability and wellbeing of the Ninilchik tribal community.

In this chapter, I am going to discuss why it is important for communities to work toward sustainability and wellbeing. I begin by explaining the research partnership. Next, I give the background behind the project, the results of colonization and development, and the self-determining acts Alaska Natives have been involved in, including the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA) (1971). I then explain in brief, as it is detailed in Chapter III: Methods, the theoretical basis for the study: the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, social science development theories, and the Elements of Development Model (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999). I follow this with the literature-based definitions. Lastly, I provide the significance of the study, research questions, and my positioning as a researcher.

### Research Partnership

For this project I worked with the Ninilchik Village Tribe (NVT), located in Ninilchik, Alaska. I built a partnership with the Ninilchik Traditional Council, the governing body of the tribe, this is further explained in Chapter III. Being from Homer, Alaska, I was particularly interested in working with the NVT on this project as their historic land base extends from Kasilof to Homer, encompassing the area in which I was born and raised. I wanted to give back to the community on whose lands I had grown up. Ninilchik is also on Alaska's limited road

system, 37 miles North of Homer and 39 miles southwest of Soldotna. This made the community easy to access. Additionally, I met an NVT employee through a class we took together at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Through this employee I contacted the tribe about my interest in working with them, and the employee was assigned to be my point of contact to work with the tribe.

The NVT is an active tribe involved in self-determining efforts. They run multiple programs through the federal grants they have applied for, including a housing program through the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) and a program on reducing suicide and substance abuse in Native youth through a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). These programs allow them to employ community members and serve the community through different outreach efforts. The tribe is also active through the litigation and advocated for their subsistence rights and won the right to gillnet sockeye salmon on the Kenai River in 2016 through *Ninilchik Traditional Council v. Towarak et al* (2016).

The tribe's engagement with self-determination inspired me to pursue a project on self-determination. When I approached the tribe to work with them, knowing their involvement in the courts and their grants, I asked if they would like to work around issues of self-determination. They agreed. The project then developed around self-determination and how to achieve community sustainability and wellbeing through self-determining actions. This was something the tribe was already heavily invested in through their programs, and they were interested in exploring community perspectives on self-determining actions. They informed me about the level of involvement they wanted in the project, to choose the interviewees and receive information back about the project results. I worked back and forth with my community liaison on the project and developed a semi-structured interview guide which was approved by the tribal council. I then conducted the interviews and focus groups. My methods, analysis, and ethical considerations are explained in greater detail in Chapter III. I led interviewees through ethnographic futures research interviews about the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely futures to identify self-determining actions needed to reach an optimistic future with sustainability and wellbeing, as defined by the interviewees.

By focusing on self-determination and the optimistic future, the project provides a positive outlook for the tribe and community of Ninilchik. The positivity of this research

impacted me as a researcher and I found myself growing more optimistic about the future, seeking ways to be self-determining in my own life. The results of the project provide Ninilchik with a disseminating document that lists the ideas they came up with to reach the optimistic future (see Appendix F). My goal in working with the tribe was to meet their needs and give them something that they can use. As a tribe involved in self-determining actions this list of ideas developed through the interviews give the tribe community perspectives on development that they can chose to implement. It serves as a 20-year plan for the future. The project was asset based and the results focus on what individuals, the community, and the tribe can do to reach the optimistic future.

## **Background**

The purpose of this project was not to dwell on the difficulties that communities face, but to instead focus on an asset-based approach where interviewees recognized what can be done in their community to make it more sustainable, increasing community wellbeing. An asset-based approach does not dwell on the detrimental aspects of the community but focuses on what positive steps can be taken based on what the community has (Beckley, Martz, Nadeau, Wall, & Reimer, 2008). However, in order to highlight the need to focus on sustainability and wellbeing through self-determination, I will briefly describe the issues some Alaska Native communities are facing due to the results of colonization and development, and self-determining actions taken by tribes work to address this trauma from colonization and development. Alaska Natives partially exercise self-determination through a variety of federal acts such as the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (1971), the *Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975* (1975), and the *Indian Self-Determination Act Amendments of 1994* (1994), though these possess elements that inhibit self-determination as well. Tribes also exert their sovereignty to take control of their own fate for their wellbeing.

## ***Results of Colonization***

Historical trauma is a result of colonization<sup>1</sup> and is an underlying barrier to wellbeing. This trauma is intergenerational and is experienced by the younger generations even if they were

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<sup>1</sup> For the definition of colonization see page 16, Definitions section.



not the ones who experienced the time of diseases, attended boarding school, or lived during initial colonization with maltreatment and racism (Hirshberg & Sharp, 2005; Segal, Burgess, DeGross, Frank, Hild, & Saylor, 1999). First contact, colonization, missionaries, and the boarding school system were all traumas that led to many social problems in modern Native life (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; Wilk, Maltby, & Cooke, 2017).

Upon first contact with outsiders, around the late 17th and mid-18th centuries, many Alaska Native peoples were observed to be healthy (Case & Voluck, 2012). They also had long lifespans from 60 to 100 years. Contact with outsiders changed everything. Outsiders brought diseases such as influenza, measles, and smallpox. This time of disease, or the Great Sickness (also known as the Great Death) in the first few decades of the 1900s and continuing in some areas to the 1950s, began a change in, and in some cases a decimation of Native cultures and identities. These diseases killed many people: 90% to 100% of people in some Aleutian villages died while around 70% of the people in some villages on the Yukon River died (Wolfe, 1982). Shamans were not able to cure the diseases and this resulted in them being ignored, no longer believed in, or even killed as people thought the shamans were making them sick (Fortuine, 1989; Wolfe, 1982). Many post-contact Alaska Natives lost their health, their lives, and their spirituality. Nothing they did seemed to treat the diseases brought by outsiders.

With contact came colonization, missionaries, and boarding schools, all of which changed how Natives lived. Missionaries and teachers came from outside of Alaska. Starting in the early 1900s with first missionary schools and then state and federal boarding schools, Native students were not allowed to speak their languages (Hirshberg & Sharp, 2005). Students were punished if they did speak their languages or if they practiced cultural activities like dance. Additionally, youth were abused at these schools through physical and sexual abuse. Students were given Euro-American names and told that their religious beliefs were from the devil and evil. School curricula and culture were developed entirely by the outsiders, and Native languages, cultures, and beliefs were lost by the youth. Western beliefs challenged Native understandings of social relationships and the environment, putting forth self-interest and attending to individual needs and desires (Fienup-Riordan, 1990). Native youth struggled to thrive in this environment, removed from their community, family, and friends (Kawagley, 2006). Missionaries and outside teachers greatly impacted the traditional education Alaska Natives were used to receiving through watching and experiencing life with their Elders and

family. Schooling became an institution that initially involved separation from home and a familiar culture. Native languages were not allowed in missionary or boarding schools, and more than a generation of speakers lost their language and their ways of life by being away from home.

These examples of cultural oppression/suppression and forced assimilation are linked to high rates of mental health and social problems such as identity problems, low self-esteem, mental health problems, and culture clash in Indigenous peoples' lives today (Kirmayer et al., 2003). Assimilation policies have been identified as “prime causes of poor health and social outcomes” such as alcoholism, depression, suicide, and community violence (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000; Kirmayer et al., 2003, p. S18). Research specifically on the boarding school experience of Indigenous people in Canada showed that there was “poorer physical, mental and emotional, and general health outcomes in both residential school attendees and their families” (Wilk et al., 2017, p. 19). Examples of poor health outcomes include diabetes as well as mental health and depression problems and substance abuse experienced intergenerationally. Additionally, suicide and domestic violence are linked to historical trauma as well as the current oppression experienced and internalized by Native people (Duran & Duran, 1995; McEachern, Van Winkle, & Steiner, 2008).

### ***Results of Development***

This rapid change and/or loss of identity and culture is tied to the second issue affecting Alaska Native wellness: the detrimental results of development. These include: (a) the fur trade, (b) commercial whaling, (c) prospectors and miners, (d) resource extraction in the Arctic, (e) pollution coming from all over the world to the Arctic, and (f) climate change problems from world development (Brubaker, Bell, Berner, & Warren, 2011; Cone, 2005a; Cone, 2005b; Foote, 1964; Fortuine, 1989; Jones, 1982; Reeves, 2014; Springer, Van Vliet, Piatt, & Danner, 2006).

The fur trade and commercial whaling devastated animal populations in Alaska that Alaska Natives relied on for subsistence. Russians came to Alaska in the mid-1700s and forced Aleut men to hunt fur seals, sea lions, and sea otters for them (Veltre & Veltre, 1987). With Russian contact also came diseases like tuberculosis, syphilis, and plagues such as small pox that killed the local Native people (Fortuine, 1989). Russians brought warfare to the Native people as well; among others, the Aleuts and Tlingit both worked to defend themselves from the Russians.

The fur trade resulted in much lower animal counts due to overharvesting for furs which resulted in less food for subsistence; the population of the Alaska Native peoples also declined due to slavery, war, and disease (Fortuine, 1989; Jones, 1982; Veltre & Veltre, 1987; Wolfe, 1982).

Commercial whaling began in Alaskan waters in 1819 and continued through the early 1900s (Foote, 1964). American whalers hunted whales for whale oil and baleen to make profit. They hunted right whales in the Gulf of Alaska and then bowheads in the Arctic waters (Springer et al., 2006). By the turn of the century, the bowhead population fell from 18,000 to 3,000. As whale populations went down, whalers turned to walrus and from 1865 to 1885 approximately 100,000 or more walrus were killed (Foote, 1964). These commercial operations devastated animal populations in the Arctic, which were a source of food to the Alaska Native inhabitants. Whaling also brought alcohol, guns, and diseases to the Natives in the North. This affected the social life of the Alaska Natives as alcohol use became more common resulting in violence, social disruption, and starvation as people were intoxicated and not hunting (Fortuine, 1989). The use of guns to hunt led to overhunting of caribou as well (Chance, 1990). Diseases, such as tuberculosis and syphilis, also spread from the whalers to the Native population.

Miners began coming to Alaska in the mid-1800s once gold was discovered in 1849 (Fortuine, 1989). They grew in number by the late-1800s and miners came to the Klondike and to the Seward Peninsula near Cape Nome. Cities grew quickly around the mining and lacked sanitation resulting in disease. In the early 1900s, influenza, measles, and smallpox spread rapidly in Alaska leading to the Great Sickness, where, as discussed in the previous section on the results of colonization, Native deaths in the villages were as high as 70 to 100% (Wolfe, 1982).

Oil prospection began in the late 1960s in Alaska. On the land and in the water, there is the encroaching development of pipelines, oil drilling rigs, and new shipping lanes in the Arctic (Reeves, 2014). Oil extraction pads, pipelines, and shipping lanes go through where animals migrate and can change their migration patterns, affecting the ability of people to subsist off of the animals in their environment. Byproducts of resource extraction and potential spills in oil, gas, and mineral extraction can also harm animal populations. If animal populations are harmed or their migration routes move, that affects the food security of Native peoples living in the area hunting from their home communities.

Pollution from all over the world brings polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) and other chemicals that contaminate the food chain and compromise Native health in the Arctic. Pollution carries up the food chain from the water and lichen the caribou eat, to the people who eat the caribou. The fat of Arctic animals also holds pollutants, and polar bears especially are considered contaminated (Cone, 2005a). In the Baffin Bay region in Nunavut, the Canadian government tested breast milk in women and found dangerously high concentrations of PCBs (Cone, 2005b). Now women are passing the contaminants on to their children. There is no way to know yet how this will affect generations to come. With some Native traditional foods becoming unhealthy to eat, their subsistence lifestyle is severely threatened. Alaska Natives see subsistence as a sense of wellbeing that contributes to their overall wellness (RuralCAP, 1994). A threat to subsistence is a threat to the food security and wellbeing of Alaska Natives (Brubaker et al., 2011).

Finally, climate change is found to be affected by human behaviors and development. The Arctic is currently paying the price for this unchecked worldwide development and experiences dramatic events due to climate change. Climate change is causing permafrost to melt, resulting in some Arctic cemeteries falling into the ocean (Jensen, 2012). Additionally, animals hunted for subsistence are changing their migration routes due to temperature, and some Arctic communities along the coast are having to relocate due to the fact that they are falling into the ocean (Bronen, 2008; Jensen, 2012; Walther et al., 2002). In this changing natural and social landscape, Arctic people strive to adapt and maintain a sense of wellness.

Alaska Natives experiencing the negative consequences of development through food security issues, disease, pollution, and climate change face challenges to their health and wellbeing. Their physical health is threatened by food insecurity. It threatens their mental health as well. Alaska Natives see subsistence as more than just food gathering; it is also a part of their wellbeing (RuralCAP, 1994). These changes are modern traumas and forms of oppression that leave Native people trying to maintain their culture and identity in a changing world. The traumas and oppression are linked to: (a) alcoholism, (b) depression, (c) domestic and community violence, and (d) suicide as explained above (Duran & Duran, 1995; Kirmayer et al., 2000).

Development may provide money to Alaska Natives through resource extraction but it is not always progress, as it can disturb subsistence animal migration patterns and affect human health through food security issues. While on one hand development has brought the benefits of

modern medicine and technology to Alaska Natives, detrimental results of development include: (a) food insecurity issues from the inability to access animals with changing migration patterns, (b) pollutants, and (c) changes to life-ways from climate change causing people to move, leading to social issues such as alcoholism and suicide. These negative results of development affect the subsistence way of life and Alaska Native physical health as well.

### ***Consequences of Lack of Wellness Resulting from Colonization and Development***

The results of colonization and development play a role in the social, physical, mental, and overall wellness of Alaska Natives. Loss of culture, language, identity, spirituality, control of their own lives, and a variety of other problems stemming from colonization and development are tied to modern-day problems; Alaska Native people hold some of the highest rates of suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, and domestic violence, including rape (Duran & Duran, 1995; Duran, Duran, Woodis, & Woodis, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2000; Kirmayer et al., 2003; McEachern et al., 2008; Wilk et al., 2017).

In 2008, the US suicide rate was 11.6 per 100,000 persons (Craig & Hull-Jilly, 2012). The Alaska non-Native suicide rate was 20.6 per 100,000 persons. The Alaska Native suicide rate was 42.9 per 100,000 persons, 3.7 times that of the U.S. rate. The rate for Alaska Native males is higher than that of Alaska Native females at 60.7 per 100,000 and 19.7 per 100,000 respectively. Tragically, the suicide rate is even higher when looking specifically at rural Alaska Native villages. The suicide rate for rural Alaska Natives was highest in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region at 143.8 per 100,000 persons. The highest rates were for Alaska Native men aged 20-29 years old with 155.3 per 100,000 persons. These rates are staggering and can be seen as evidence of a lack of wellbeing and sustainable community life. In Ninilchik, the Ninilchik Traditional Council holds a \$1 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) through their Native Connections program. The grant is to reduce substance abuse and suicide in Native American youth. The tribe uses the funding in youth outreach.

Another issue Alaska Natives face is high rates of drug and alcohol abuse. In 2009, Alaska Natives died from alcohol-related deaths at an age-adjusted rate of 61.3 per 100,000 while white Alaskans died at a rate of 16.5 per 100,000 (Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2009). Alaska Natives also die from drug abuse at higher age-adjusted rates than white Alaskans, 26 per 100,000 with whites at 19 per 100,000 respectively. Although alcohol and marijuana are the most

common substances abused in the villages, heroin, methamphetamine, and prescription drug use is increasing (Alaska State Troopers, 2014). In February 2017, Alaska Governor Bill Walker made a declaration of disaster over the opioid epidemic in Alaska. The Kenai Peninsula, where the Ninilchik Village Tribe is located, has the highest rate of opioid prescriptions in Alaska (Center for Disease Control, 2017). Since 2016, the Ninilchik Traditional Council Addictions Program has served 79 opioid-use disorder (OUD) patients (personal communication with Ninilchik Village Tribe Executive Director Ivan Encelewski, August 21, 2018). Of the 31 currently active in the program, 29% are Alaska Native/Native American. Twelve percent to 20% of the population in Ninilchik is Alaska Native/Native American, so they are over-represented as opioid users (DCRA Information Portal, 2017). Additionally, Alaska Natives both perpetrate and experience high rates of domestic violence including sexual abuse and sexual assault of children. Alaska Native women are victims of rape at extremely high rates as well. Using 2010 data, the U.S. rate of rape is 27.7 per 100,000 people. The rate in Alaska is 87.6 per 100,000 (Alaska Victimization Survey, 2010; FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2014). The actual rates are likely much higher due to underreporting. A study on sexual assault and rape conducted in Anchorage, Alaska found Alaska Natives 7.6% more likely to be assaulted than whites (Justice Center, 2006). These issues demonstrate how important it is to address wellness in the Alaska Native population.

### ***Self-determining Acts and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)***

Alaska Native people work to come to terms with the loss of their culture, language, and life-ways through different means, with some resorting to alcohol abuse, suicide, and domestic violence. Self-determining acts are linked to improved wellbeing and community sustainability. When Arctic Natives have local governance, they have positive mental health outcomes while suicide rates decline (Einarsson, Larsen, Nilsson, & Young, 2004). This ability to control their own lives empowers them to make their own decisions (Kimmel, 2014). Just having this control over their own fate is a key factor in wellbeing (Larsen, Schweitzer, & Petrov, 2014).

Alaska Natives exercised fate control and self-determination in their daily lives until this autonomy was threatened with Russian contact in the mid-1700s. Natives in different parts of the state experienced different levels of contact with the Russians. Alaska Natives in the far Arctic had little, if any, contact with the Russians. Those in the southern parts of Alaska, the Pribilof Aleuts, the Unangan, and Sugpiat in South-Central Alaska, and the Tlingit in the Southeast

experienced slavery and colonization and fought back against the Russian fur traders when they could (Cascadia Times, 2005; Gibson, 1998). This fur gathering slavery officially ended when U.S. colonization began in 1867, as slavery was outlawed in the United States in 1863 with the *Emancipation Proclamation*. However, neglect and abuse of the Pribilof Aleuts continued under U.S. colonization in 1867 until the *Fur Seal Act* in 1966 (Jones, 1982). Due to the isolation in the Pribilof Islands, the U.S. at large was unaware of the colonial treatment the Aleuts were still receiving as they were manipulated and exploited, working without pay. The Euro-Americans managing the Aleuts in the fur gathering discriminated against Aleuts, considering them incapable of managing cash. This somehow justified not paying the workers and instead allowed the U.S. to compensate them with supplies for their labor. One Aleut man explained, “Every week they threw a bag of groceries at us, that was our pay” (Jones, 1982, pp. 69-70). The Aleuts did not even get to choose their own groceries. The Pribilof Aleuts filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government, *Aleut Community of St. Paul Island v. United States*, for their abusive treatment in 1973, and in 1978 they won an \$8.6 million settlement for back wages during their time under the U.S. government leading up to the *Fur Seal Act* in 1966. The suit was based on a violation of the Fair and Honorable Dealings clause of the *Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946* (Jones, 1982). Although they experienced colonization, Alaska Natives did not do so passively but instead committed self-determining acts through warfare and the court system, striving for their wellbeing.

The Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) and the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) were founded in 1912 and 1915 respectively to advocate for Alaska Native rights (Metcalf & Ruddy, 2014). Fish traps decimated Native fishing in the early 1900s and by the 1920s the U.S. government was taking land in Southeast Alaska for the Tongass National Forest and the Glacier Bay National Monument without compensating the Natives who lived on that land. The ANB sought a settlement from the U.S. government for the loss of Native land and rights and continued to work on this case into the 1930s when it was decided the ANB did not have the rights to file on behalf of the Tlingit and Haida as they were comprised of Natives and non-Natives (Case & Voluck, 2012). The ANB was able to convince the U.S. Congress to pass an act in 1935, *Act of June 19, 1935*, to allow the Tlingit and Haida to file the suit. The case, *Tlingit and Haida Indians v. United States*, was taken over by the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indians and formally filed in 1959; it was not settled until 1968. The Tlingit and Haida won by

establishing their title to the land and water and were compensated with \$7.5 million for the loss of land in the national forest and monument.

Some members of the ANB started advocating for reservations in the 1940s to gain land, hunting, and fishing rights for Alaska Natives. The desire for reservations ended in the 1950s as Native leaders saw reservations as living under the Bureau of Indian Affairs bureaucracy, and instead they sought increased sovereignty under a corporate organization of land claims. Alaska Natives organized to form the Alaska Federation for Natives (AFN), formalized in 1966, to advocate for Alaska Native (a) culture, (b) economics, (c) land, and (d) politics.

The U.S. federal government sectioned off areas of Alaska under their ownership, such as the Naval petroleum reserves in 1944 and the Arctic Wildlife National Refuge in 1960, both in the far North, without compensating the Alaska Natives who lived and hunted on the land since time immemorial (Gallagher, 2001). Then the state of Alaska began to choose their land through the *Alaska Statehood Act* passed in 1958 and Alaska became a state in 1959. Native people saw their land was being taken by both the federal and state governments. In 1966, the Iñupiat of the North Slope of Alaska formed the North Slope Native Association and informed Alaska Governor Egan that they were making a claim to “all of the land from the 141<sup>st</sup> meridian to Bristol Bay, north of a line running east from the Chukchi Sea along 68 degrees, 30 minutes north, thence east along said latitude to the 141<sup>st</sup> west meridian” (Gallagher, 2001, p. 123). This was the entire North Slope. At the same time, Iñupiat in Kotzebue were meeting to form the Northwest Alaska Native Association and file their own land claims (Hensley, 2009). Other Native land claims followed through other regional Alaska Native organizations and the Alaska Federation of Natives.<sup>2</sup> Native, federal, and state land claims overlapped. With the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay in 1968, the State of Alaska accelerated their land claims as they were looking to lease land to the oil companies (Gallagher, 2001). Alaska Natives began to advocate for a land claims agreement and convinced the Secretary of the Interior Udall to institute a land freeze in 1969 until the Native land claims were settled (Case & Voluck, 2012). Alaska Native leaders, the state of Alaska, and the federal government worked to craft the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act*, passed in 1971, by the U.S. Congress.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on ANCSA please see *Etok: A Story of Eskimo Power* and *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow: A Memoir of Alaska and the Real People* (Gallagher, 2001; Hensley, 2009).



The *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA) removed all existing Alaska Native land claims. Twelve percent of Alaska went to the Native people, a loss of 88% of the land they used to hold. They ended up with 17,800,000 hectares, through corporations in a checkerboard fashion (*Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act*, 1971). The land was held as fee simple land that the corporations owned. The land was not reservation land or considered Indian Country, and ANCSA extinguished all reservations in Alaska except for Metlakatla (Strommer & Osborne, 2005). The land the Natives received went to 12 regional corporations and over 200 village corporations (*Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act*, 1971). Village corporations received surface lands around the villages, totaling up to 22 million acres (Chaffee, 2008). Regional corporations own the subsurface land under the village land, any of the 22 million acres that were not claimed, and 23.5 million additional acres both surface and subsurface. The corporations also divided up a \$962.5 million settlement. This settlement was considered by the U.S. Congress to meet the "economic and social needs" of the Natives in Alaska; the money was not based on the value of the land the government was taking from the Native people (Ongtooguk, n.d.). Tribes were not included in ANCSA, and there was no mention of tribal sovereignty (Berardi, 2005).

There are conflicting views on whether reservations or the eventual corporate structure created by ANCSA (and advocated for by AFN and the U.S. Congress) was most beneficial. At the time, AFN was against reservations. They saw corporations as a way to get out from under the Bureau of Indian Affairs mismanagement of reservations and to have more sovereignty and economic independence (Berardi, 2005; Cheney, 2014). The U.S. Congress was also against reservations. The federal government was dealing with reservations in the Midwest and Northwest parts of the continent fighting for water and fishing rights; the states were losing and the tribes winning. Congress wanted to avoid this type of rights issue by not creating reservations in Alaska and also by eliminating all reservations existing at the time in Alaska except for Metlakatla (Ongtooguk, n.d.). Additionally, many Natives and non-Natives saw the corporate model as a way to transition Natives into "modern economic society" (Berardi, 2005). In contrast, some Natives found the corporate structure to be another form of assimilation and colonization that made/make it difficult to maintain traditional Native values. They also found resource extraction contrasting with subsistence life-ways valuing the land over money (Cheney, 2014). Additionally, without recognizing the tribes, ANCSA did not support the idea of the tribes

as sovereign, instead emphasizing corporations as the way to move Alaska Natives forward (Berardi, 2005).

Alaska Natives living in rural areas throughout the state were disconnected from the legal movement of ANCSA and although it was ratified by the AFN leaders at the time, interviews detailed in the *Village Journey: The Report of the Alaska Native Review Commission* after the passage of ANCSA found that many Natives did not approve of it (Berger, 1985). People worried about losing the land and Berger ended up recommending the corporations turn the land over to the tribes. Some of the fear of losing the land was taken care of in the 1988 amendments (*Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Amendments of 1987*, 1988). The amendments avoided the pending 1991 changes in ANCSA that would have made the stock shares of the corporations able to be sold by individual shareholders to Natives or non-Natives (Thomas, 1988). A final amendment protected Native corporations' lands from taxation indefinitely if they were undeveloped and prevented lands being taken due to bankruptcy unless the lands had been mortgaged.

Another change in 1988 allowed corporations to issue shares to "afterborns," those born after the initial eligibility date for ANCSA shares, December 18, 1971 (Thomas, 1988). Not all corporations opened up shares to afterborns. Of those that did, like the Sealaska Corporation, shares are available to children being born based on blood quantum<sup>3</sup>, not the year ANCSA was passed. This allows young descendants to get stock in the corporation and be eligible for education scholarships. The corporations that opened up shares to afterborns have different levels of blood quantum they extend shares to, for example, Sealaska Corporation only gives shares to descendants who are one-quarter Alaska Native blood or more while Arctic Slope Regional Corporation issues shares to descendants with less than one-quarter blood quantum with no set blood quantum cut-off (McChesney, 2016; personal communication with Arctic Slope Regional Corporation stock department, November 20, 2018).

In addition to the many problems with ANCSA described above, it also took away the subsistence rights of Native people. They lobbied to regain these rights, and in 1990 the U.S. Congress passed the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act* (ANILCA). ANILCA did not give Natives specifically subsistence rights but gave rights to all rural residents of Alaska. Following ANILCA, a variety of subsistence organizations were formed around whales, seals,

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<sup>3</sup> Blood quantum is the percentage Native that a person is, such as 50% if one parent is 100% Native and the other parent is non-Native. Blood quantum is discussed further in Chapter II, the Literature Review.

walrus, polar bears, birds, and other living resources so that Natives could sit at the table in discussions over harvest and protection (Case & Voluck, 2012). ANILCA was challenged by the State of Alaska and in 1989 the Alaska Supreme Court ruled in *McDowell v. State of Alaska* that giving a rural preference was unconstitutional under the Alaska constitution (Case & Voluck, 2012; Constitution of the State of Alaska, 1956). The court said there could be a preference for subsistence users but not rural residents. Due to this, Alaska did not comply with ANILCA, a federal act, so the federal government took over the management of fish and wildlife in 1990 (Case & Voluck, 2012).

Alaska Natives have continued to exercise self-determination for their wellbeing. Much of their efforts have been through the court system. I detail these cases in Chapter II, the Literature Review. In brief, the tribes have worked through the courts for land and sovereignty rights. Alaska tribes have also pushed to have their land taken into trust by the federal government; this was recently approved with the removal of the Alaska Exception in 2015 but is now under review due to the changes in U.S. politics and the Trump administration taking over from the Obama administration (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 2018). The Craig Tribal Association (CTA) applied to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to have 1.08 acres of fee simple land they owned put into federal Indian trust status. This was approved January 13, 2017 (Kauffman, 2017). CTA was the only tribe in Alaska to get their application approved before the Trump administration decided to review the legality of the Secretary of Interior being able to take Alaska tribal land into trust (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 2018). Land in trust allows Alaska Natives to exercise self-determination in even more ways, including taxation, governmental authority, and likely having tribal schools as well. It puts development in the hands of Natives (Cornell & Kalt, 2007).

This history from first contact with the Russians through colonization and on to the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (1971) leads to this research project and my partnership with the Ninilchik Village Tribe. The history emphasizes the role of self-determination in Alaska Native people fighting for their rights and their wellbeing. The Ninilchik Village Tribe is active in self-determining efforts through their grants and the court system. In this project I explore self-determination through four theoretical perspectives, explained below and detailed in Chapter III.

## **Theoretical Basis for the Study**

There are four primary theoretical perspectives I will be utilizing in this study that address self-determination: (a) the Capabilities Approach, (b) Self-Determination Theory, (c) social science development theories, and (d) the Elements of Development Model (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999). These are further explained in detail in the methods, Chapter III. The theories are compared to the results of this study in Chapter V where they are analyzed in relation to the interviews. Here I provide a brief overview of the theories I employed.

The first theoretical approach I employed is the Capabilities Approach. It was developed in the 1980s by an economist, Amartya Sen. The approach looks at economic development theory but is directly applicable to how Alaska Natives practice self-determining acts for the sustainability of their communities and wellbeing. The theory addresses the freedoms people have to act on their values, this directly correlates with Alaska Native self-determining acts (Panzironi, 2006; Sen, 1993). Additionally, the theory looks at the capabilities people have to achieve their functionings, an achievement from exercising a capability. A person's capabilities come from their "inheritance and situation" (Gasper, 1997, p. 283). This study focused on how self-determination, as a freedom is related to wellbeing and sustainability as values. Sen (1993) says that freedom alone "may be directly conducive to well-being" and this is what this study explores (p. 39).

The second theoretical approach is Self-Determination Theory out of the field of psychology. This theory explores how wellbeing is achieved through autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy is like self-determination, people taking actions based on what they value, not on external controls (Ryan & Deci, 2011). Relatedness is feeling connected socially with others in the community by feeling significant to others as a part of larger society and feeling cared for (Ryan & Sapp, 2007). Competence is a person feeling they can attain outcomes they desire and be effective within their environment. This theory is another way to understand wellbeing.

Third, I explored Dependency and World Systems Theories, based in the social sciences. Dependency and World Systems Theories explain that for Indigenous people to develop they need to not be exploited by outside economies but instead engage in independent economic

development through self-determination and work with the modern capitalist economies (Cardoso & Enzo, 1979; Frank, 1966).

The final theoretical approach is the Elements of Development Model. This theory is also an economic development theory but is directly relatable to self-determining acts working toward wellbeing and sustainability. This theory is elaborated on in Chapter III, the methods, and in Chapter V, where I explain how it relates to self-determining actions. This model looks at many different components of tribal strengths and principles such as: (a) control of assets, (b) spirituality, (c) kinship and personal efficacy along with environmental balance, (d) hope/future orientation, (e) choices/vision, (f) cultural integrity, (g) social respect, (h) political and civic participation, (i) health and safety, (j) responsibility and consequences, (k) vibrant initiative, (l) productivity skills, (m) income, and (n) trade and exchange (Black, 1994). The model proposes monitoring community success through indicators both quantitative and qualitative. This model provides an example of different Native values and needs for positive community development.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions were found in the literature and relate specifically to Indigenous people. These definitions were used as the basis for coding the data. Through coding the interview and focus group data Ninilchik specific definitions of sustainability and wellbeing emerged which are explained in Chapter IV.

*Colonization* is “the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area” (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018).

*Community members* are residents in and around Ninilchik, Alaska.

*Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations* are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as

the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system (Martinez Cobo Study, 1986, paragraph 379).

*Self-determination* is the ability for an individual/tribe/community to make their own decisions and control their own fate (Einarsson et al., 2004; Jorgensen, 2007). On a tribal level it is “substantial decision-making control over the nation’s lands, resources, affairs, and future” (Jorgensen, 2007, p. 57)

*Sustainability* is comprised of “ecological, social, and economic dimensions” (Berkes & Folke, 1998, p. 4). A sustainable community would meet “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 8). Indigenous people expand this definition of sustainability to include transmission of traditional knowledge, culture, relationships to land, and livelihoods (Corntassel, 2008).

*Tribal members* in this research project are members of the Ninilchik Village Tribe. Not all tribal members live in Ninilchik, but the tribal members that participated in this project are all community members in Ninilchik.

*Tribal sovereignty* is self-rule by tribes. It has been diminished by federal laws and court cases but is an inherent right of tribes that is “recognized and protected by the U.S. Constitution, legal precedent, and treaties, as well as applicable principles of human rights” (Kalt & Singer, 2004, p. Abstract).

*Wellbeing* includes mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, cultural, and social health which fulfill needs of identity, purpose, and belonging (Tagalik, 2010). It is a concern for the individual, collective community, and culture as well (Tagalik, 2015). Individual, tribal, and community wellbeing are inseparable in the Native worldview (Tagalik, 2010; Tagalik, 2015).

## **Significance of the Study**

Murphy (2014) succinctly articulates the importance of conducting research on self-determination by saying that “one of the greatest weaknesses of the literature on Indigenous self-determination is the overall lack of empirical studies tracking the success or failure of self-determination as a means of addressing the key social and economic challenges faced by Indigenous communities today” (p. 329). Research that has been conducted on self-determination focuses on legal rights, often ignoring how it relates to wellbeing (Corntassel, 2008). This study goes beyond the legal research to address social and economic challenges to wellbeing. Murphy (2014) explains the challenges in connecting self-determination with wellbeing, along with the lack of social and economic data governments have not granted much self-determination to Indigenous groups that researchers could study. Although self-determination is not a quick or even assured fix, “evidence of the intrinsic, instrumental and constructive value of collective self-determination for Indigenous peoples cannot be ignored; indeed, it cries out for much more thorough investigation by researchers and policymakers alike” (Murphy, 2014, p. 329).

The purpose of this research is to investigate how Ninilchik community members utilize self-determination, individually, as a community, and tribally, to achieve community sustainability and wellbeing. I begin by exploring how interviewees define wellbeing and sustainability. As this project uses ethnographic futures research, I sought to understand how the interviewees see tribal self-determining acts leading to a more sustainable community with an increased wellbeing (increased wellbeing in the subjective perspectives of the interviewees). I wanted to be able to provide the tribe with data from their own community members about how they see the tribe moving forward to a more sustainable and well future.

## **Primary Research Questions**

This project addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Ninilchik community members define sustainability and wellbeing?
2. How do Ninilchik community members utilize self-determination to achieve sustainability and wellbeing?

I sought to understand how the interviewees describe their own community in the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely future scenarios. These scenarios were the basis of my

method for this project, ethnographic futures research (Textor, 1980). When hearing these scenarios, I looked to see if the interviewees describe any self-determining acts as the reason for differences between the three scenarios. I investigated these self-determining acts and their results to see if the interviewees' subjective opinions saw the acts resulting in increased sustainability and wellbeing in their community. I provided the community with the interview results and suggestions about self-determining acts the interviewees identified through a dissemination document (see Appendix F) in a meeting with the tribe and another with the community at large in January 2019. This information is useful for the community to decide what they can do to address community sustainability and wellbeing.

### **Researcher Positioning**

My heritage is Iñupiaq and Western European (Euro-American). I am an enrolled tribal member of the Nome Eskimo Community and a shareholder in two ANCSA-created corporations, the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and the Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation, a village corporation. I was raised as and I am an Indigenous person first and foremost, and in this situation, I am also an Indigenous researcher. I do not live life as a passive observer. As an Indigenous person it is important I act to address issues in my community. As Smith says, “we need to get ourselves up in terms of a critical voice and critical action – this movement to enactment is itself an important site of struggle” (Smith, Hoskins, & Jones, 2012, p. 14). As an Indigenous person and researcher, I can only seek to understand the experiences of those I work with, and through understanding work toward healing and wellbeing. I cannot separate myself from my praxis, “the inseparability of action and analysis” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 12). I am tied to my own experiences, seeing things through my worldview, and acting where I find appropriate.

I have opportunities the Native women from earlier generations in my family have not had. Looking at the matriline of my father's side, these women are all Alaska Native. My grandmother, her mother, and her grandmother all lived in Nome, which was a rural area but was busy with the gold rush. Being Native, the experiences of these women included forced boarding school, assimilation education, English-only education, lack of opportunity for a high school education, and Jim Crow racism. Achieving a PhD in Indigenous Studies is important to me as I am building on the education of the Native side of my family. I am also studying self-determination which is understudied and important for the wellbeing of Indigenous people.



Alaska Natives experienced disparities in education when compared to Euro-Americans, especially when compared to continental U.S. Euro-Americans. Natives live/d in rural areas which makes/made education delivery difficult and expensive. Due to this, the U.S. government contracted with different religious groups to deliver education in the 1800s and 1900s (Barnhardt, 2001). Natives experienced abuse in missionary schools as missionaries tried to “save” them from their Native ways and assimilate them into wider United States society through dressing them as Euro-Americans, requiring them to speak English, devaluing their culture, and teaching them gender-specific duties such as gardening, machine work, and sewing. Where my family is from, in the Northwest Arctic, many Iñupiat people converted to Christian religions between 1890 and 1910 when missionaries came to the Bering Strait (Burch, 1994). Iñupiat then spread Christianity to other Iñupiat throughout the Arctic.

In 1905, with the passage of the Nelson Act, the state of Alaska established schools in some rural areas but only allowed Euro-Americans to attend (Barnhardt, 2001). Some “civilized” Native youth were able to attend. My paternal grandmother was one of these civilized children who spoke English and had a Euro-American, non-Native, father. The history of Native education is written on the paternal matrilineal side of my family, my father’s mother and the women in her family. These experiences are not necessarily “good” but demonstrate the *resilience* of Natives and their ability to survive through great turmoil. They give me resolve to succeed in the predominately Euro-American world of academia.

My paternal great-great-grandmother, Ella Kaguna, was an Iñupiaq woman born in 1874. She was born in the Kotzebue area in the late 1800s, her family having traveled down from the Utqiagvik area. She moved to Nome in her late youth and met a man from Germany, John Becker, and married him. She never experienced any formal Western education and barely spoke any English. Her education was based on the land and survival as an Iñupiaq woman (Kawagley, 1999). She lived a traditional Iñupiaq life. She ended up dying of pneumonia from getting wet in a skin boat on the way to pick berries. One of her children, her daughter Margaret Becker, ended up being my grandmother’s mother.

Margaret Becker was born in 1905 and began her life learning both about being Iñupiaq from her mother and the Western world from her German father and the Nome Public School. However, she was told to attend a Catholic boarding school at Holy Cross in her teens. The Holy Cross School was for Native children and the Catholic teachers sought to stamp out their

“Nativeness.” The children were only allowed to speak English (and if they didn't they were punished), were dressed in Western clothes, and were taught to assimilate to Euro-American culture. Margaret did not have a good time in her schooling. Schooling at Holy Cross is described as something one survived (Pember, 2015). According to Pember (2015) the children wore uniforms and were taught by nuns. They were beaten and punished by the nuns if they did not follow orders. They were underfed and sexually abused. Signs around the orphanage reminded the children they were forbidden to speak their Native languages. After this experience, Margaret never spoke about the school to her children. She also never spoke Iñupiaq to her children, literally not one word. I imagine that the experiences she had trying to speak Iñupiaq at school and being punished resulted in her wanting her children to never go through that. Thus, the Iñupiaq language in my family ended with my great-grandmother Margaret. After school, Margaret married a German man, Frederick Yenney. Margaret and Frederick raised six children; the seventh did not survive and died shortly after birth in 1944. Margaret died young from stomach cancer, right after giving birth to her last child.

My grandmother, Mary Jean Kaguna Yenney, was born in Nome. She attended the Euro-American school in Nome as she was considered civilized since she spoke English. Her grandfather, John, pushed her and her siblings to sit in the white area of the movie theatre and attend the white school, as he told them they were equal to the other children. My grandmother is mixed German and Iñupiaq and is not near as dark as her grandmother was. When Mary's mother died, the family ended up moving to Anchorage. Here my grandmother attended the Anchorage Public School for high school. She did not finish high school then as she got married and started having children. My grandmother married a German man, Lloyd Louis Strutz, from Anchorage, Alaska. She had four children, the third of which is my father, William Louis Strutz. She did go back to the community college in Anchorage in order to get her high school diploma in 1964. She continued at the community college taking accounting courses and signed up for Native language courses but quit as the teacher was from a different area of Alaska than where she grew up. With her accounting skills, she worked in the accounting field for eight years. She also homesteaded with her husband in the Homer area in 1955, and that is how I ended up being born in Homer, as my family still lived on the homestead.

My father was born in 1955 in Anchorage and attended school in Anchorage. He is German and Iñupiaq. He was born with light skin, blue eyes, and reddish hair. He did not

experience racism in school, as he looked like the other Euro-American children. My father was an accomplished cross-country skier and won the Alaska state championship more than once. This landed him a scholarship to ski for the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. He was there for two years and then moved back to Alaska to ski for the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), and finally back to UAA where he graduated with an education degree to teach. He completed his training but never ended up teaching. The highest education he received was a bachelor of education degree from UAA. He ended up working as a cross-country ski coach and construction worker. He now owns his own water bottling business.

The level of education rose over the years in my father's family. My great-great-grandmother had no formal Western education. My great-grandmother had an education with some high school. My grandmother had a high school degree and some college, and my father graduated from college. Each generation built on the last to get me where I am today. Their experiences in education were troubled all the way through. My great-grandmother suffered in a horrific boarding school, and my grandmother endured living in Nome during the Jim Crow era. (The Jim Crow era typically refers to the U.S. South, but in Alaska, Alaska Natives were experiencing similar situations to African Americans in the South such as separate water fountains and seats in movie theatres, or signs banning them from restaurants and stores.) My father was the first to grow up in a city, not in rural Alaska. He was raised primarily in Anchorage and struggled in school but was able to complete college, which he did not use in his work life. All of this leads to me, born in 1985. I took advantage of every educational opportunity presented to me and pushed myself to achieve what was not available for the other Native women in my family. Now I have completed a PhD program and am working to give back to Alaska Native people. I am driven by the possibilities of self-determining acts to better the lives of Native people. I want to bring the concept of self-determination and its ties to sustainability to light so that Native people can see that it can actually work in improving wellbeing.

My mother's side of the family is Western European and has a much more privileged background. However, I grew up in Alaska with my father's side of the family. I was raised as an Iñupiaq woman and grew up living a subsistence lifestyle on a reindeer ranch. My connection to the Alaska Native side of my family is very strong and I identify closest with that side of my

family. I wanted to share the story of the Native side of my family so readers can understand how much my relatives have endured and how, in each generation, we educate ourselves and strive to achieve wellbeing.

Understanding the interview data requires me to try to see it through the worldview of the interviewees. I am accomplishing this in two ways. First, I am Iñupiaq and understand the world through an Iñupiaq lens. My worldview is the backbone of my epistemology, and I draw on knowing that all things have awareness and are connected to one another. I see spirits and the Creator in all things, including people. This leads me to know that all people are one with the Creator, whether they believe that or not. Having this perspective makes me compassionate towards all people. Everything is to be respected as it has awareness and life. I believe in caring for all things; it is how I understand my place in the world. I am no better than any other being.

Speaking the truth is a way I demonstrate my respect for others. Additionally, I choose to place trust in others. I constantly seek knowledge to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the world around me. The more I learn, the more I am able to understand and speak from a place of experience. My knowledge is from my personal experience, stories I have been told, and what I have read. Although reading is not firsthand experience, I have been trained as a researcher most of my life. I am shaped by the Western education system and do embrace combing through written knowledge and experiences. I seek multiple sources to back ideas but again place my trust in authors and interviews. Yet, being trained as a researcher, I have been trained as a critical thinker. This skill allows me to sift through knowledge, seeing where I can augment my worldview and knowledge base. Ultimately, I keep an open mind to experiences and knowledge.

I seek additional knowledge to improve my own and my community's wellbeing. I speak from my personal experiences of what I believe to be true. These are not solely my opinions but are based on the knowledge I have accumulated over my lifetime in the ways described above. My epistemology is grounded in my worldview and enhanced by knowledge I continue to acquire. My epistemology is foundational to my research methodologies. When I enter a community, I respect and trust their knowledge. If at all possible, I try to work from their epistemology. I know my epistemology will come through in my analysis, but I work to let people speak for themselves through their own lens. Research, like many experiences I have, constantly adds to my worldview and epistemology. My epistemology is constantly evolving.

The second way I see the data through the worldview of the interviewees is by being raised Methodist. Although I no longer subscribe to that belief system, I am intimately aware of it. With the missionary influx into the Native communities in Alaska, most people converted to Christian denominations. In Ninilchik the Native population was intermingled with the Russians and many tribal people are Russian Orthodox. However, there are other Christian denominations in the community such as Methodist and Baptist as well. I am able to understand that religious worldview due to my background, the many years I spent practicing a Christian religion, and my open-mindedness for alternative ways of understanding the world. These two worldviews, both Native and Christian that I possess, provide me with the knowledge in which to try to understand the worldview of my interviewees. While one half of my family has Native heritage, the other half is of Western European descent. Some of my interviewees are non-Native people, and I grew up with both Euro-American and Native sides of my family and understand the perspectives of Alaska Natives as well as people who consider themselves lifelong Alaskans with long family histories in the state. When I look at the interviews, I am able to consider the worldview and culture behind the statements in order to interpret them in a culturally considerate way. Sharing a worldview with the interviewees helps me relate to them. If at all possible, I try to work from their epistemology.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is composed of seven chapters.

Chapter I is the Introduction. In the introduction I provide background information and the theoretical basis for the study. I outline the significance of the study and give my research questions. Lastly, I explain my positioning as a researcher.

Chapter II is the Literature Review. The literature review begins with a thorough background on colonization, sovereignty of Indigenous peoples worldwide, Native Americans, and Alaska Natives. I also situate the study in the relevant literature.

Chapter III is the Methods. I first describe my sample and setting for the research. Second, I detail the research design and the procedures of conducting the project. Third, I describe

ethnographic futures research. Fourth, I described how I analyzed the data. Fifth, I discuss the ethical considerations in the project and how I went about respecting the culture of my participants. Sixth, I detail the theoretical perspectives I employed. Finally, I address validity and reliability in the study.

Chapters IV, V, and VI are the chapters that include the results and discussion of the results. These chapters address my research questions. Chapters IV and V also discuss the implications of the results on what actions can actually be taken in the community of Ninilchik by individuals, the community, and the Ninilchik Village Tribe. I also compare the results to the four theories I introduced in this chapter, the Introduction, in Chapter VI.

Chapter VII is the Conclusion.

## **Summary**

Self-determination through self-determining acts increases community sustainability and wellbeing (Larsen et al., 2014). Tribes are able to address the results of historical trauma, development, and take control of their fate through self-determination. This project provides a framework for tribes to identify self-determining acts that can lead to sustainability and wellbeing by looking to the future and identifying what they want the future to look like. In this chapter, I discussed how the results of colonization and development have led to a lack of wellbeing in Alaska Native communities. Yet, I explained that Natives are working through self-determining acts, like ANCSA, to improve their lives. I also briefly described my theory, detailed in Chapter III, and the method and research questions used in this study.

Chapter II, the Literature Review, follows this chapter. The Literature Review addresses the historical context of colonization, stemming from Memmi (1967), Friere (1993), and Fanon (1968). I follow this with a detailed explanation of Alaska Native sovereignty through the law and court cases in the U.S., international realm, and Alaska specifically. Finally, I detail the problem the project is addressing, how self-determination can contribute to wellbeing and sustainability.



## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Introduction

As identified in the Introduction, one of the keys to community sustainability and wellbeing for Alaska Native people is self-determination. Despite its importance, there is a lack of literature exploring how self-determination leads to sustainability and wellbeing. This dissertation addresses this gap in the literature through primary research about how an Alaska Native community, Ninilchik, sees self-determining acts affecting their future. In this chapter, I begin with a review of the colonized status of Alaska Natives and detail some mindsets colonized people may internalize. Second, I review how Alaska Natives are inherently sovereign and compare this with how they are recognized by the U.S. government, international community, and state of Alaska. Finally, I address the gap in the literature and look at the links between self-determination, sustainability, and wellbeing.

### Background

#### *The Colonized*

No research project involving colonized people can ignore this fact: Alaska Natives are living as colonized people. Their colonizers never left and they remain in a colonized state. To be considered decolonized, Indigenous people would necessarily be in control of their own lives and their own government where currently Alaska Natives live in a country largely governed by descendants of colonizers. Due to past injustices, including mission and boarding schools, they will need to revitalize their culture and language as well to overcome colonization. Overall, colonialism is a psychological state as well as a physical state, where colonized people internalize negative beliefs about themselves (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Colonialism was and is an ongoing process of control and cultural domination that will not be fixed overnight. Bureaucratic control of existing colonizing governments over Indigenous people limits Indigenous wellbeing and decolonization through laws on land, cultural practices, and politics.

Alaska Natives living as the colonized involves more than just having Native lands and resources exploited (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Indigenous people live under the “racial, cultural, and political domination” of their colonizing force; in the case of Alaska Natives this is the U.S. government (Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 40). Alaska Natives believe in their inherent sovereignty but live under practical sovereignty that can be extinguished at any time by the U.S. Congress



through plenary power. Alaska Native people remain oppressed through federal and state laws restricting their sovereignty and self-determination, which includes the criminalization of some subsistence practices. Memmi (1967), Friere (1993), and Fanon (1968) explain what it means to be colonized and oppressed and how to go about ending these circumstances through recognizing colonization and starting over, putting Native interests first.

Alaska Natives have been told for generations that they are not as good as their mostly Euro-American colonizers. Colonialism is dehumanizing and makes the colonized dependent on the colonizer through the colonized internalizing ideas of being inferior and worthless, as well as through the development of political and economic dependencies (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Over time, this domination by the colonizer becomes the norm. Memmi (1967) talks about how the colonized feel when they are described by their oppressor as lazy and timid:

The accusation disturbs him [the colonized] and worries him even more because he admires and fears his powerful accuser [the colonizer]. “Is he not partially right?” he mutters. “Are we not all a little guilty after all? Lazy, because we have so many idlers? Timid, because we let ourselves be oppressed.” Willfully created and spread by the colonizer, this mythical [inaccurate] and degrading portrait ends up by being accepted and lived with to a certain extent by the colonized. (p. 87)

As further mentioned by Friere, “They become convinced of their own unfitness” (1993, p. 45). The internalization of these ideas is a form of self-hate. The colonized may feel worthless, hopeless, a sense of apathy toward their condition, and even have low self-esteem (Midre, 2008). These are the results of colonization and a lack of self-determination and fate control. Internalizing these words holds back Native people from realizing their potential.

Each of the authors describes self-determining acts a different way, but all of them point to this (self-determination) as being the answer to end the situation of the colonized and oppressed. Fanon (1968) talks about:

...the urgent need to thoroughly challenge the colonial situation. Its definition can, if we want to describe it accurately, be summed up in the well-known words: “The last shall be first.” Decolonization is verification of this. At a descriptive level, therefore, any decolonization is a success. (p. 2)

Putting the last, the colonized and oppressed, first, is the first step in decolonization. Natives are not second-class citizens or any lesser in substance or value than their mostly Euro-

American colonizers. Taking action for themselves is a self-determining move toward decolonization.

Memmi (1967) emphasizes that there is no life under colonization. “The colonial condition cannot be adjusted to; like an iron collar, it can only be broken” (p. 157). The colonized are the ones who break the collar; they cannot wait around for the colonizer to become benevolent. The colonizer benefits so fully from colonization that the benevolent day will never come. Friere (1993) puts forth this idea as well. The oppressed “will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it” (p. 27). The oppressed people's praxis is their “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 33). Friere talks about the importance of people reflecting on their oppression to recognize where it is coming from so that they can take self-determining action to change the situation. Indigenous people need to see their oppression as something they can move through, something with an exit that is limiting them only temporarily.

### ***Alaska Natives as the Colonized***

#### Self-government

Alaska Native people who work to overcome their oppressed and colonized state through self-government still find themselves unable to get out from under the yoke of colonization. They form their own governments, yet those new governments tend to mimic that of the colonizer or follow requirements set out by the colonizer. The governments do not match the values and beliefs of the people (Fanon, 1968). According to Fanon (1968), “Everything has to be started over from scratch, everything has to be rethought” (p. 56). Some Alaska Natives have gone back to forms of government used prior to colonization and formed traditional councils. This form of government has still been modified by the colonizer; to be recognized as Native governments by the U.S., Alaska Natives must register as tribes or communities, something most Alaska Native people were not, originally, as they lived in family groups and moved with the subsistence seasons. Most tribal governments in Alaska were formed under the *Indian Reorganization Act* (IRA), passed in 1934 and extended to Alaska in 1936. The U.S. federal government imposed the IRA onto the Native people of the U.S., allowing the U.S. government to maintain control over the colonized tribes; original IRA constitutions require the signature of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for approval of the constitutions and any changes proposed. Few IRA constitutions in

Alaska have gone through revisions and removed the need for the Secretary's signature from their constitutions. If self-governing Alaska Native people accept the IRA government passed down from the colonizer, the U.S., and organize as the IRA suggests, then they place their form of government and themselves in a colonized state, requiring the approving signature of the colonizing government and adopting the label of tribe or community.

If Alaska Natives do *not* accept this IRA tribal government or create another form of a tribal centered government, they forgo all aid offered by the U.S. federal government under treaty obligations with Native American people in the U.S. Alaska Natives need to be listed as tribes or communities on the Department of Interior's Public Law 103-454 *Federally Recognized Tribes List Act of 1994* to qualify for aid under treaties. So, Alaska Natives perpetuate their own colonization and take on the foreign term of "tribe" to define their people. As tribes, they are eligible for aid, not charity, from the federal government (Fanon, 1968). This aid is due to those in a colonized state, as the colonizers, in one way or another, took Native land, waters, animals, ways of life, languages, and cultures. It is vital that the Natives of Alaska do not "tremble with gratitude" over this aid, as it is due to them from their colonized treatment (Fanon, 1968, p. 59). This aid already requires them to organize as tribes, which is another way the colonizers are forcing change in Native ways of life.

### Blood Quantum

Blood quantum is an additional method through which the U.S. government keeps Alaska Natives in a colonized state. The idea of blood quantum is something completely foreign to Native people. Traditionally, many Native people mixed marriages between people groups and the outsider was readily adopted by the new group they joined (Schmidt, 2011). They identified themselves through culture, not race. With colonization and skull measurements, Native Americans were identified as a separate race from the Euro-Americans. The idea of blood quantum came about in treaties in the 1800s where Natives who were mixed were described as "half-bloods," "half-breeds," or "quarter-bloods" (Spruhan, 2006). Blood quantum became formal during the Allotment Period from 1887 to 1934 where American Indians were allotted land based on blood quantum. Full-bloods were not allowed to sell the land they were allotted, as they were considered not competent to conduct business as they were full-blooded Natives.

During the creation and implementation of the IRA in 1934, blood quantum came up again, through tribal enrollment. The Act offered blood quantum as one way to organize tribal membership (Schmidt, 2011). Many tribes adopted this blood quantum policy and the Bureau of Indian Affairs helped tribes set up their membership eligibility. When the IRA came to Alaska in 1936, so did the idea of tribal membership and blood quantum. Some newly formed tribes adopted this idea while others maintain lineage as membership regardless of blood quantum. However, no Native person in Alaska or the U.S. can escape blood quantum as it is printed on their Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood (CDIB) card from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Blood quantum and tribal membership are both used in determining eligibility for individual aid available to Natives from scholarships to healthcare. Following the blood quantum policy enforces an oppression and power relationship that the U.S. colonial period established over the tribes, and now many tribes have internalized it and define identity through race rather than descent or culture.

One-quarter blood quantum was used to sign people up to ANCSA in 1971. People who were born by December 18, 1971 and were a quarter Alaska Native could sign up with one of the newly created regional corporations to be a shareholder (Thomas, 1988). In 1988, amendments to the original ANCSA allowed afterborns to enroll in corporations as shareholders as well, people born after that date but still a descendent of an original shareholder. Each regional and village corporation determined their own blood quantum requirements. As mentioned previously, Sealaska Corporation has a one-quarter Alaska Native blood or more requirement for shareholders (McChesney, 2016).

Blood quantum poses further problems as it is a part of the *Marine Mammal Protection Act* (MMPA) of 1972. The MMPA states that Alaska Natives have to be one-quarter Alaska Native blood in order to harvest marine mammals and create artwork with the raw marine mammal products, as the definition of Alaska Native in the MMPA is based off of the original ANCSA definition of a quarter Alaska Native blood. The problem ensues when someone who is a quarter Native blood marries a non-Native and has children. These children are now only one-eighth Native blood quantum, and they can watch their parent hunt whales, seals, or sea otters. They can watch their parent carve ivory or sew sea otter hats, but they cannot personally be involved in these cultural pursuits (Langdon, 2016). This restricts Native parents from teaching their Native, but not Native enough, children cultural heritage. It also raises issues of food

security for Alaska Natives less than one-quarter Native blood quantum living in rural marine mammal-based communities. If they cannot hunt for the local food, how will they subsist and feed their families? The research report by Langdon (2016) raises the question if tribal membership should meet the criteria to be involved in the MMPA. Many tribes in Alaska have a descendant requirement, not blood quantum, to be a member, so someone could have even 1/128<sup>th</sup> blood quantum and be a tribal member. This is five generations removed from a one-quarter Native blood quantum. It raises the question if being Native is based solely on blood quantum or cultural continuation.

No specific blood quantum is used to receive healthcare services provided by the Indian Health Services (IHS) in Alaska. IHS care in Alaska is provided by the Alaska Native Medical Center and the Regional Health Corporations. Alaska Natives can receive Indian Health Services healthcare if they are on the ANCSA rolls, enrolled in a federally recognized Indian tribe, a lineal descendent of the original ANCSA rolls, a person holding a CDIB card, or eligible children in an Alaska Native family who may be non-Indian such as foster children, adopted children, or step children until they are 19 (Langdon, 2016). Lineal descendants could hold a CDIB card of 1/128<sup>th</sup> and receive services.

The use of blood quantum is not consistent in the Native context in Alaska. Tribes, regional corporations, village corporations, federal acts, scholarships, and healthcare services all have different requirements. A Native person could be a member of a tribe, receive healthcare, and be eligible for some scholarships based on their tribal membership if they are 1/128<sup>th</sup> blood quantum, but if they are in the Sealaska region of descent, they would not be eligible to be a shareholder in that regional corporation. They would also not be eligible to hunt marine mammals or process their raw bones or furs. It is important as a Native person to be educated on all the different laws to be able to receive the services allowed and also not break any laws developed under the colonizing government.

## Land

Since colonization, Indigenous people in Alaska have been denied their land and rights to subsistence on that land. Subsistence is an integral part of Alaska Native identities and cultures. Alaska Native people interpret subsistence as more than just gathering food. The colonization of subsistence rights means a loss of sense of wellbeing, source of nutrition, culture, and a

multitude of other holistic definitions around wellness (RuralCAP, 1994). Along with the loss of subsistence rights, Indigenous people have had their land taken and it has been disguised through terms such as, “land claims” and “self-government” (Moses, 2000, p. 163). In Alaska, Native land claims resulted in the Indigenous people getting to keep just under 45 million acres of land through the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* in 1971, approximately 12% out of the 100% of the state they used to possess, a loss of 88% (Chaffee, 2008).

There are many other examples of colonization happening today for the Alaska Native people. Stern (2017) provides a thorough but not exhaustive list of examples. These include: (a) U.S. military presence, (b) churches established by missionaries, (c) the influx of outsider population brought by the gold rush, (d) resource development and extraction, (e) year-round Native settlements due to established schools which reduce the sustainable lifestyle of subsistence, (f) cultural oppression, (g) having to bring back dance and potlatches as those were outlawed, (h) boarding school trauma, (i) cash based economy from subsistence based, (j) fractured land ownership through the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA), (k) restricted access to subsistence resources, (l) imposed forms of government, (m) layered government (tribal, municipal, borough, state, and federal), (n) contested tribal sovereignty (further described in the next section), and (o) a high dependency on external funding especially for infrastructure. Regardless of the removal of racist overt acts of colonialism, the more subtle “colonial agenda” remains through systematic control that privileges the colonizers to the detriment of Indigenous peoples’ rights (Jackson, 1992). Colonizers continue to benefit in three major ways. First, their majority population, achieved through military action and disease, second, the imposition of their laws, discussed further below, and third, the religious missionary and civilizing movements leaving Native people detached from their cultures and philosophies. Alaska Natives utilize their sovereignty and self-determination to address these issues of colonization and hegemony (Smith, 2016).

### ***Background Summary***

Alaska Native peoples are working to achieve political, economic, cultural, and social decolonization through a variety of means, including through U.S. litigation (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). They seek to be respected for their differences from other nations and the right to live their cultures with support from documents such as the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the*

*Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was rejected until recently by the United States, and even now within the U.S. this declaration retains only advisory status and is not fully implemented (U.S. State Department, 2010). Alaska Natives are involved in autonomous self-determination, that is culturally rooted, in order to move away from U.S. state-determination, dependence by exploitation, and being seen as ‘problem people’ (Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 38). They are due compensation through treaties and by court order. They are not needy welfare cases “trembling” at the mercy of their colonizer (Fanon, 1968, p. 59). Alaska Natives strive for ownership and control of their lands, including control of development, and with the Department of the Interior removing the Alaska exception, tribes had the opportunity to put land into trust starting in 2015 (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2014). As of June 2018, the Trump administration decided to stop taking Alaska tribal land into trust to review the legality of the decision, as described in detail in the section on Alaska Specific Acts and Cases found later in this chapter (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 2018). Alaska Natives, as other with Indigenous people, maintain their inherent tribal sovereignty<sup>4</sup> regardless of how they are recognized by the U.S.

When discussing Alaska Native sovereignty, as I continue to below, it is important to identify what the term means in the Indigenous context. Sovereignty in the Indigenous context in the U.S. does not focus on secession from the U.S. but instead on self-determination and self-governance in Indigenous communities (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). The term “sovereignty,” like the terms “self-determination,” “nation,” and “peoples” are Eurocentric terms traditionally used in international law to refer to states and are not easily applicable to Indigenous groups. I recognize that I am borrowing these terms and applying them to an Indigenous context. I do this not to diminish Indigenous goals by boxing them into an existing framework common to these words, but to have a language to address Indigenous autonomous self-determination for wellbeing. Indigenous tribes are inherently sovereign, as their communities existed long before the formation of the U.S. treaties with European nations negotiated with tribes as independent sovereign nations (Case & Voluck, 2012; Erasmus & Sanders, 2002). They have rights to self-determination, their land and resources, practice their own forms of governance, and both maintain and develop their cultures (Dodson, 1999). Indigenous tribes have the right to exercise

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<sup>4</sup> See page 17 for the definition of tribal sovereignty.

their sovereignty regardless of territory, but in the U.S., Indigenous sovereignty has been limited through court cases and acts (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Tribal sovereignty is not considered inherent by the U.S. government but is instead “practical sovereignty.” However, Indigenous tribes in the U.S. still claim to retain and exercise their inherent sovereign powers, and at no point have they relinquished such sovereignty. The U.S. federally recognized tribes engage in a nation-to-nation relationship with the U.S. government, regardless of how the U.S. government views the extent, or limitations of, a tribe’s inherent sovereign powers.

## **Alaska Native Sovereignty**

### ***Domestic U.S. Cases***

In order to understand how the Ninilchik Village Tribe defines and perceives their prospects for tribal self-determination, it is important to understand the foundations of U.S. federal Indian law and the legal theory behind U.S. federal recognition of tribes. This helps to explain how U.S. federally recognized tribal status and sovereignty may further Ninilchik community wellbeing. Through treaties and litigation, tribes in the U.S. have the right to self-government and sovereignty over their land and members—even though they live in a colonized state.

The processes of European colonization of the Americas, the United States governmental assumption of their “discoverer’s” rights, and subsequent U.S. federal law, have all recognized and limited the pre-existing, inherent, and previously “absolute,” tribal sovereignty of federally recognized tribes in the United States (Case & Voluck, 2012; Erasmus & Sanders, 2002). Tribal sovereignty, in a practical (not inherent) sense, has been limited by Congress and by U.S. Supreme Court decisions since the treaty era. Three important U.S. Supreme Court cases, known as the Marshall Trilogy, both recognized pre-existing tribal sovereign power and rights to land and limited the tribes’ external sovereign powers. In 1823, via the *Johnson v. McIntosh* decision, the U.S. government established ownership of, and dominion over, tribal Aboriginal lands originally claimed by the British. This was accomplished by reiterating the international law, the Doctrine of Discovery, even though there were no “empty” lands to be discovered in America or elsewhere (Cohen, 2012; d’Errico, 2000; Erasmus & Sanders, 2002). The court decision also recognized the pre-existing, persisting powers of the tribes over their Aboriginal lands and people. The Court, therefore, recognized the tribes’ persisting right of occupancy to their



Aboriginal lands. However, the case limited tribal sovereignty, saying tribes could only sell or cede land to the federal government, not private citizens. Early American leaders and jurists appeared to be uncertain as to whether tribal people traditionally held their property like Western-style private property was held.

The second case in the Marshall Trilogy is *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831). In this decision, the Supreme Court characterized Indian tribes as “domestic dependent nations” with a relationship to the United States as a “ward to his guardian” (Cohen, 2012). The Court recognized persisting nationhood, albeit dependent upon the U.S. government. With respect to the status of “ward,” the Court recognized that the U.S. government had a trustee relationship with obligations to protect the tribes, their resources, wellbeing, and educational services. In regard to property, it was decided that Natives had rights to the land they occupied until they voluntarily ceded it to the federal government.

In the third case of the Marshall Trilogy, *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), Native sovereignty was recognized, although limited. In this case it was determined that the Cherokee Nation did have a “right to self-government,” even though they were still “dependent” on the U.S., that tribes still had their powers they had prior to colonization and were not dependent on federal law for their self-government (Cohen, 2012). This perspective stemmed from European colonization and how European colonizers entered into treaties with tribes, recognizing their sovereignty. Looking specifically at property, the Court decided that Indian land could be acquired by the federal government by purchase or through wars. The Marshall Trilogy cases were consistent in ruling and together recognized a persisting but limited tribal sovereignty over a tribe’s Aboriginal lands and its members. The cases limited the tribes’ external powers in that they could not make agreements with foreign governments and could only sell their land to the U.S. government or to third parties the government approved.

Traditional Native governing bodies and entities were and are inherently sovereign, as they existed long before the U.S. came into being. Yet, in practice, their sovereignty is limited, as described above. This “practical” tribal sovereignty may be extinguished by the U.S. Congress pursuant to its “plenary power” after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in 1886 in *United States v. Kagama* (d’Errico, 2000; Kalt & Singer, 2004). The inherent but limited sovereignty of tribes was recognized in the Marshall Trilogy cases and later, in 1978, when *United States v. Wheeler* identified tribes as having a “third kind of sovereignty,” a tribal sovereignty, that consisted of

“inherent powers of a limited sovereignty which has never been extinguished” (Cohen, 2012, p. 207). The federal courts consider tribal sovereignty to be limited.

The *Indian Reorganization Act* (IRA) of 1934 provided the means by which the U.S. government could both recognize and reorganize tribal governing bodies. The IRA incentivized the drafting and adoption of tribal constitutions. However, the draft constitutions the tribes developed had to be reviewed and approved by the Department of the Interior. This directly impacted the sovereignty of the tribes as the Department of the Interior could decide whether the tribal constitution would be finally approved (or not). The IRA was extended to Alaska in 1936, and tribes in Alaska worked to adopt constitutions through the Department of the Interior. In 1955, tribal sovereignty was additionally limited in the *Tee-Hit-Ton v. United States* case. The Tee-Hit-Ton tribe lost its petition for compensation for timber taken by the U.S. government from its Aboriginal land in Alaska. The federal court decided that timber taken from mere Aboriginal lands, absent some formal recognition of title by Congress, e.g., a statute, is not compensable under the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. government can take a tribe’s Aboriginal land without compensation, absent Congressional legislation recognizing tribal title, as a byproduct of the Doctrine of Discovery set out in *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823). During this same timeframe, the United Nations (UN) was developing international law in support of self-determination, as Africa and Asia, among other regions, were undergoing decolonization. In the U.S., and in Alaska specifically, the U.S. Congress was enacting laws, and the U.S. federal courts were setting down case law that limited tribal sovereignty.

### ***International Law***

This next section outlines the many conventions and declarations that pertain to this project from the international stage. It is important to understand the evolution and provisions of the relevant international law instruments, including the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) in order to further understand how the Ninilchik Village Tribe might determine their prospects for self-determination. This helps explain how U.S. federally recognized tribal status and sovereignty may be the only practical option for the Tribe, given the U.S. has not ratified the UNDRIP, nor enacted any domestic legislation or regulations to enforce the broader array of rights set out in the UNDRIP.

“International law itself was founded on the preeminence of four specific European biases: geographic Europe as the center, and Christianity, mercantile economics, and political imperialism as superior paradigms” (Mutua, 2002, p. 18). These four biases were behind European colonization and the horrific treatment (e.g., murder, land dispossession, human rights violations) experienced by Indigenous populations (Webb, 2012). Land dispossession was explained through the Doctrine of Discovery, justified in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and later formalized in the U.S. in the 1823 *Johnson v. McIntosh* decision (Cohen, 2012; Webb, 2012). Nation states used international law, such as the 1648 *Peace of Westphalia*, to establish their sovereignty over their territory (Anaya, 2004). In the 1884 Berlin Conference, European states divided up Africa so that they would not war so frequently over the territories. This eventually led to the formal colonization of Africa. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries European states used international law, described above, to justify colonization (Webb, 2012). International law explained the rights of states, state sovereignty, the fact that law was only between states, and lastly, that Indigenous people not in Europe did not have rights (Anaya, 2004). Indigenous people were considered inferior and lacked recognition as nation-states. They were not a part of international law until they began to challenge colonization through self-determination on the world stage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Self-determination, as a term, was not a part of international law until after World War I (Webb, 2012). After the war, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson spoke of self-determination as a means for peace as states in Europe were rebuilding following the war. Some of the victors of World War I formed the League of Nations (of which the United States was never a part, though Wilson was instrumental in its creation) and adopted *The Covenant of the League of Nations* in 1919. This Covenant included articles on peace, security, and minority rights, especially considering the people in Eastern Europe. Members of the League, under the Covenant, were to “undertake to secure the just treatment of the native inhabitants of territories under their control” (League of Nations, 1919). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was created in 1919 as an independent but affiliated organization to the League of Nations and almost immediately began to address Indigenous issues (Xanthaki, 2007). In 1921, the ILO began research into the conditions of Indigenous workers. From this research they formed the Committee of Experts on Native Labour in 1926 that went on to produce studies addressing Indigenous issues and disparities worldwide.

The formation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, succeeding the League of Nations and maintaining the relationship with the ILO, after World War II brought forth a *Charter* that speaks of respecting self-determination and human rights but does not explicitly say people have a right to self-determination (UN General Assembly, 1945, art. 1, para. 2, 3). Instead, the Charter emphasized sovereignty as the right of states (Daes, 2008).

Both the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations, revitalized and confirmed European-American domination of international affairs. In the postwar period, non-European states were trusted or mandated to European powers or became client states of one of other European states. (Mutua, 2002, p. 18)

This is seen through the colonization of Africa. By trusting or mandating non-European territories to European powers, this enforced ideas of colonization as opposed to asserting the self-determination to Indigenous people and the original inhabitants of the lands. Originally the mandates and trust territories were planned to be temporary with reconstruction aid offered by the Europeans or through American oversight. Not all European countries followed this plan. The British Empire did leave territories such as Egypt and Kenya to the original inhabitants relatively peacefully, but countries like France fought violently against efforts of the original inhabitants to decolonize and achieve independence. These territories came to form unstable multi-ethnic states based on colonial borders in which the colonially favored ethnicity was given power over the former colony. This accounts for ongoing instability and so serves as a model to avoid in decolonization.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (UN General Assembly, 1948) also did not state the right to self-determination. In fact, the UDHR maintained support for the Western-dominated world, not taking into account developing world or Indigenous perspectives as Western countries dominated the UN (Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Mutua, 2002). The UDHR viewed human rights through norms and principles grounded in Western thought and Western democracy, focusing on individual rights instead of group or collective rights (e.g., group self-determining autonomy) and commonalities/universality within humanity instead of the differences and lack of uniformity between groups by which Indigenous peoples identify. In the Americas, the Organization of American States (OAS), of which the U.S. is a member along with 34 other states including Canada, and countries in Central and South America, adopted the *American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man* in 1948. This document was passed to

protect human rights within the American States specifically. Like the UDHR, this document dealt primarily with individual rights and did not address self-determination or the rights of peoples and Indigenous individuals (Maaka & Fleras, 2005).

During this time, the ILO continued their work on Indigenous issues and protections and published a study in 1953 that addressed “the living and working conditions of indigenous and tribal populations in all the parts of the world” (Xanthaki, 2007, p. 49). The ILO later formed the Committee on Indigenous Populations. Then at the 40<sup>th</sup> ILO session in 1957 they adopted Convention No. 107, *Convention Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries*, and Recommendation No. 104, *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Recommendation*. Recommendation 104 outlines protections for Indigenous peoples. Convention 107 specifically addressed the “rights of indigenous peoples” (p. 49). As much as Convention 107 addressed Indigenous rights and ownership, it promoted integrating Indigenous people into the nations they lived in. It did not promote self-determination, but it instead gave cultural protections to the Indigenous people within the nations they lived in. Convention 107 was ratified by 27 countries, not including the U.S., which found it too binding, lacking the flexibility necessary for execution.

Following this work in the ILO and the UDHR in the United Nations came the UN *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* in 1960. This Declaration gave voice to the decolonization taking place in Africa and Asia. The Declaration explicitly stated that people had the right to self-determination (UN General Assembly, 1960). Indigenous people were using the principle of self-determination to work towards imperial and cultural decolonization (Mutua, 2002). The UN Charter and *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* laid the groundwork for Indigenous people to assert their rights on the international stage today. The statement on self-determination in the *Declaration*, that “all peoples have the right to self-determination: by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development” is included in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966a; 1966b). While the statement quoted directly above, on self-determination, is in paragraph 1 of both Covenants, paragraphs 2 and 3 also address self-determination:

2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

Following the two Covenants, the UN adopted the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* in 1969. This Convention recognized that all humans are equal and stated that, in accordance with the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, colonialism is condemned by the UN and no one is superior to others based on race. Also, in 1969, the Organization of American States passed the *American Convention on Human Rights* that went into effect in 1978. This document reflected the UN *Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Charter* of the OAS, and the OAS *American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man*, recognizing that all people were equal and had rights and freedoms without discrimination.

In 1989, the International Labor Organization held and passed the *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169*. This document outlined many key rights and protections of Indigenous people and removed the integrationist language used in *Convention 107*. In Part 1, state governments were called to action to work and consult with Indigenous peoples to protect the peoples' rights, property, religion, environments, and culture and improve health, education, and economic development. Part 2 of the document applies to land. Article 14 states that:

The rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy shall be recognised. In addition, measures shall be taken in appropriate cases to safeguard the right of the peoples concerned to use lands not exclusively occupied by them, but to which they have traditionally had access for their subsistence and traditional activities. (International Labor Organization, 1989)

This protects the rights of Indigenous peoples to natural resources.

Article 16 specifies that Indigenous people, “shall not be removed from the lands which they occupy” unless relocation is necessary, but then they should be allowed to return to their lands if when possible. Article 23 stipulates that:

Handicrafts, rural and community-based industries, and subsistence economy and traditional activities of the peoples concerned, such as hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering, shall be recognised as important factors in the maintenance of their cultures and in their economic self-reliance and development.

*Convention 169*, like *Convention 107* addressed protection of Indigenous people but went beyond *107* with regard to Indigenous land rights, adding more extensive protections.

*Convention 169* recognizes the differences between Indigenous people and the states they live in but calls for equal treatment, ignoring any discussion of self-determination. *Convention 169*, like *107*, was not ratified by the U.S.

In 1992, the UN adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*. Section 1 of Article 1 asserts that, “States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.” Additionally, these people have the right to practice their own cultures, religions, and languages without being discriminated against. These rights may be individual or communal. From this 1992 *Declaration*, it is clear that Indigenous peoples’ rights were intended to be protected by the states they inhabited. Although UN member states signed this document, they needed to pass domestic laws to set out and enforce the rights contained within the 1992 *Declaration* and not all countries have done so thus far, so the document in many places has done very little to change Indigenous lives. The UN adopted a declaration specific to Indigenous people in 2007. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). The 2007 *Declaration* sets out an impressive array of Indigenous peoples’ and individual rights (UN General Assembly, 2007). It includes Indigenous peoples’ rights to all aspects of life, culture, and education. The 2007 *Declaration* asserts that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination.

The 2007 *Declaration* is non-binding, and member states have to agree to endorse it (Panzironi, 2006). Even if a country endorses it, nothing changes within the given country until the national government adopts laws to enforce it. In 2001, at the very end of the Clinton

administration, the U.S. defined self-determination as “internal” where Indigenous peoples have rights to internal self-determination, meaning that “they may negotiate their political status within the framework of the existing nation-state and... have the internal right of autonomy or self-government in matters relating to local affairs” (Bratke, 2001). This understanding of self-determination includes no rights to secession (Anaya, 2004). With this definition of self-determination, at first, the U.S. did not support the UNDRIP during the President George W. Bush administration—the U.S. voted against it alongside Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. During his Presidency, Barack Obama said, "Washington can't – and shouldn't – dictate a policy agenda for Indian Country. Tribal nations do better when they make their own decisions" (U.S. State Department, 2010).

The 2007 *Declaration* was supported by the Obama administration in 2010. Yet, officials in the U.S. government maintain that they have concerns (Bankes & Koivurova, 2015). U.S. concerns are apparent in U.S. court decisions to date relating to Native peoples, as well as the understanding of “internal self-determination.” The U.S. has not adopted laws establishing and enforcing the rights detailed in the 2007 *Declaration*, demonstrating that although the government may support it, they are not instituting it. Instituting the 2007 *Declaration* would require challenging the deeply rooted order created and maintained by federal Indian law, both statutes and case law, and the U.S. seems unready to undertake reform through Indigenous consultation to both implement and enforce progressive legislation outside of colonial norms that serve Indigenous interests (Maaka & Fleras, 2005).

The OAS passed the *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in 2016. In section 1, article III, the American Declaration states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” This statement echoes Article 3 in the UNDRIP. In section 4 article XXI the American Declaration states that, “Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.” The American Declaration ultimately lays out the rights stated in the UNDRIP but makes those rights specific to Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Like the UNDRIP, however, states need to implement the American Declaration in order for it to have an



effect on the lives of Indigenous people. Like the UNDRIP, the U.S. has not adopted laws that would establish and enforce all of the provisions of the American Declaration.

The U.S. did not ratify *Conventions 107* (1957) and *169* (1989). Additionally, while under existing U.S. federal Indian law many of the UNDRIP rights are established and enforced, the U.S. has not enacted laws to establish and enforce all of the rights set out in the UNDRIP (2007), nor in the *American Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People* (2016). By failing to ratify the Conventions and to adopt domestic laws to enforce these declarations, the U.S. is effectively denying Indigenous people the rights that are supported by many in the international community. This partial enforcement of UNDRIP may be construed as a lack of support for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determining rights in the U.S. Federal officials and courts instead maintain that U.S. federal Indian law, established with the Marshall Trilogy—and the Congressional statutes and federal common law that is derived from these cases—defines and governs the relationship between the U.S. government and the Indigenous tribal people in the country.

Moses (2000) explains that “the very survival of indigenous people depends directly on respect for the rights contained in that concept” of self-determination (p. 155). He references *The Right to Self-Determination: Implementation of United Nations Resolutions* study (Espiehl, 1980, Section 59): “[H]uman rights and fundamental freedoms can only exist truly and fully when self-determination also exists. Such is the fundamental importance of self-determination as a human right and a prerequisite for the enjoyment of all the other rights and freedoms.” Mutua (2002) shares this sentiment, saying that:

The most fundamental of all human rights is that of self-determination and that no other right overrides it. Without this group or individual right, no other human right could be secured, since the group would be unable to determine for its individual members under what political, social, cultural, economic and legal order they would live. Any right which directly conflicts with this right ought to be void to the extent of that conflict. (p. 108)

It is clear from this review that under international law Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determine.

### *Alaska-Specific Acts and Cases*

It is important to understand the history and progression (or the back and forth nature of) Alaska-specific federal and state laws. Alaska tribes are “federally recognized” with territorial jurisdiction (a.k.a., “Indian Country”) over lands in trust. The tribes have the ability to regulate (i.e., make and enforce tribal laws). However, the State of Alaska has competing (concurrent) jurisdiction over some of the same areas. Knowing the federal and state law limits placed on tribal power in Alaska and the areas where the federal government and the State of Alaska has competing power will help to understand how Ninilchik community members might define and perceive their prospects for tribal self-determination, and how U.S. federally recognized tribal status and sovereignty might further community wellbeing.

Today, Alaska-specific federal laws and federal court decisions have both reaffirmed the federal recognition of tribes in Alaska and limited tribal territorial jurisdiction. The Alaska Supreme Court has also reaffirmed the federal Indian law principle that tribes in Alaska continue to have inherent powers and jurisdiction with respect to their members, despite the absence of territorial jurisdiction due to the lack of Indian Country. After Alaska became a state in 1959, claims to land by the state, federal government, and Alaska Natives began to overlap. This resulted in a land freeze by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Udall, so that the Alaska Native land claims could be settled (Gallagher, 2001). To address these land claims, the U.S. Congress enacted the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA) in 1971, further explained in Chapter I. ANCSA extinguished Aboriginal land rights, including Aboriginal subsistence rights, and did not preserve or establish Native off-reservation hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. ANCSA also abolished existing reservations, except for Metlakatla.

In 1980, the U.S. Congress passed the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act* (ANILCA), which established a rural preference in subsistence takings of fish, moose, etc. Alaska Natives were included in the rural preference, but the law was not set out to protect Alaska Native people’s hunting, fishing, and gather rights exclusively. The rural preference also included non-Native rural residents. Both ANCSA and ANILCA ignored the issue of tribal sovereignty. ANCSA facilitated Alaska Native corporate ownership of tribal Aboriginal lands. Most notably, Alaska Native regional and village corporations were given fee-simple title to former Aboriginal and other lands. Congress did not set aside tribal Aboriginal lands as reservations under ANCSA.

Treaty and statute-based principles of U.S. federal Indian law recognized tribal jurisdiction over tribal territories and Indians within those territories in 1867 (Russian-U.S. *Treaty of Cession*). However, the question of whether Alaska tribes had jurisdiction over their members and land remained when the United States acquired Alaska from Russia (see e.g., *Ex Parte Crow Dog*). These principles were further codified for more general applicability in federal law by 1959 when Alaska became a state but still Alaska tribal jurisdiction was questioned (see the Indian country statute adopted by Congress: *Intoxicants dispensed in Indian country*, 18 U.S.C. § 1154, 1948). With regard to members, this was resolved with the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit's 1991 *Native Village of Venetie I.R.A. Council v. Alaska* decision. In this case, the court decided that Alaska Native tribes are inherently sovereign and they have jurisdiction over their members.

Additionally, the question of whether ANCSA (1971) altered the above principles for lands held by ANCSA corporations in Alaska was answered in the 1998 case of *State of Alaska v. Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government, et al.* In that case, the U.S. Supreme Court held that ANCSA lands were not "Indian Country," and that therefore the Alaska Native tribes lacked regulatory authority over them. Alaskan tribes were "sovereigns, without territorial reach." In 1999, the Alaska Supreme Court, in *John v. Baker* reaffirmed that, regardless of a land base, Alaska Native tribes had jurisdiction over domestic matters between tribal members. In the 2001, Alaska Supreme Court case, *In the Matter of: C.R.H.*, the lower Alaska courts, in following the *Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978* (ICWA), were required to transfer cases to tribal courts under the appropriate conditions and by petition of the tribe (Jaeger, 2015). Regardless, in 2004, the Alaska state Attorney General Gregg Renkes stated that Alaska tribes do not have jurisdiction over children's cases and that jurisdiction over tribal children is exclusive in the Alaska state courts (Kendall-Miller, 2011). He further argued that Alaska tribes only have jurisdiction if the tribe previously petitioned the Secretary of the Interior for jurisdiction under ICWA or if an Alaska Superior Court judge transferred jurisdiction to the tribal court under ICWA. Without one of these two circumstances, Renkes stated in his opinion that tribal court decrees should not be given full credit under ICWA because, "Alaska tribal courts have no subject matter jurisdiction over Indian child adoptions." The Renkes opinion is in direct conflict with the Alaska Supreme Court's opinion in *In the Matter of: C.R.H.*, and thus the Renkes' opinion does not hold up in the Alaska courts, but it demonstrates the State of Alaska's position on tribal sovereignty.

The ruling on *In the Matter of: C.R.H.*, stated that transferring cases to tribal courts was in accordance with ICWA, not due to shared jurisdiction under *Public Law 83-280 (Public Law 280)* as *Public Law 280* only applies to Indian Country, which ANCSA lands are not. The Alaska court stated that “ICWA section 1911(b) authorizes the transfer of jurisdiction to tribal courts regardless of P.L. 280” (*In the Matter of: C.R.H.*, 2001). In 2011, with *State of Alaska v. Native Village of Tanana*, the State of Alaska Supreme Court said that tribes have concurrent jurisdiction with the state over ICWA regardless of territory (Case & Voluck, 2012). This is the tribe’s sovereign right unless extinguished by Congress through plenary power. The Alaska Supreme Court stated that, “ICWA creates limitations on states’ jurisdiction over ICWA-defined child custody proceedings, not limitations on tribes’ jurisdiction over those proceedings” (*State of Alaska v. Native Village of Tanana*, 2011). ICWA was recently challenged in Texas through *Brackeen v. Zinke* (2018). The judge of the Northern District of Texas court ruled the act unconstitutional as it gives preferential treatment to Native American families adopting, which violates the Fifth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection. The case is currently looking to be appealed and the decision has yet to affect Alaska (Flynn, 2018).

The *State of Alaska v. Native Village of Tanana* 2011 Alaska Supreme Court decision acknowledged that Alaska Native tribes have inherent sovereignty. As established already in *John v. Baker* (1999), Alaska tribes are sovereign nations that have the authority over domestic disputes among their members. In continuation of tribal jurisdiction, in 2013, with the amendments to the federal *Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013*, Alaska Native tribes lobbied for and won the right to be included in the act so that they could exercise jurisdiction to issue protections orders, and if desired, prosecute some crimes committed by both Natives and non-Natives against Natives (Horowitz, 2014).

Due to the *Indian Reorganization Act (IRA)*, passed in 1934 and extended to Alaska in 1936, the federal government can take land into trust for individual Indians and tribes. Alaska used to be considered an exception to this part of the IRA due the Department of the Interior adjusting regulation 151 in 1980 and adding the Alaska Exception as the final sentence in regulation 151.1 (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2014). In the 2013 case, *Akiachak Native Community v. Salazar*, regarding IRA regulation 151.1, the higher federal court vacated the lower federal court’s decision and order, thus recognizing the original federal rules that allowed Alaska tribes to seek to put land into trust. Even though ANCSA ended all reservations, it did not

remove tribal governments, and it did not explicitly remove the Secretary of the Interior's authority to take land into trust in Alaska under the IRA according to current understanding of the law, but this is now under review as of June 2018 (*Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act*, 1971; U.S. Department of the Interior, 2014; *Indian Reorganization Act*, 1936; U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 2018).

In 2013, Secretary of the Interior Salazar formed a Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform to evaluate the relationship between the federal government and the tribes (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2013). This Commission recommended Alaska tribes be allowed to put their fee simple land into trust. In 2014, the Indian Law and Order Commission, formed by Congress, put out *A Roadmap for Making Native America Safer* (Indian Law and Order Commission, 2014). This report noted that there were strong arguments for making Alaska Indian Country and said that there was nothing in ANCSA banning Alaska tribes from putting land into trust. The Commission recommended Alaska tribes be allowed to put land into trust. The Alaska Exception, which was comprised of the last sentence in 25 CFR Part 151.1, that excepted the taking of land into trust on behalf of tribes in Alaska, was removed by the Department of the Interior in 2014. The revised regulations at 25 CFR Part 151 pursuant to the IRA, became effective on January 22, 2015 (Federal Register, 2014; *Indian Reorganization Act*, 1936). The revised regulation did not change any part of ANCSA. Instead, the new regulation recognized the existing authority of the Department of the Interior (DOI) to take land into trust in Alaska (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2014). In consultations the DOI held in Alaska, the State of Alaska made known they did not want the Exception removed. They did, however, choose not to appeal *Akiachak Native Community v. Salazar*. As of 2014, Alaska tribes were deciding whether to put the fee simple land that they own into trust. They seek to do this to create tribal territorial jurisdiction similar to tribes that have trust lands (e.g., Indian reservations) in the continental U.S. A tribe's application to put land into trust is not approved automatically but goes through stages of approval and review, including allowing the state to provide an opinion.

With the presidential election in the U.S. and the Trump administration taking over from the Obama administration, as of June 20, 2018 Alaska Natives tribes' ability to put land into trust is under review and the Bureau of Indian Affairs is no longer taking Alaska Native tribal land into trust (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 2018). The DOI is reviewing their

January 13, 2017 opinion that stated the Secretary of the Interior could take land into trust under the IRA in Alaska with the Alaska Exception removed (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017). The DOI invited Alaska Native tribes and corporations to consult on the Secretary's authority to take land into trust in Alaska in regards to legislation that happened after ANCSA. According to Executive Order 13175, signed by President Clinton, the federal government is supposed to have "meaningful consultation and collaboration" with tribes to strengthen the government-to-government relationship (Executive Order 13175, 2000, p. 1). Due to this the tribes are consulted around policy that affect them, including land into trust.

If land is taken into trust by the federal government, it is then considered Indian Country, where tribes then have jurisdiction over both their members and the land, and limited jurisdiction over non-members when they are on that land or conducting business on that land (Illingworth, 2014; Strommer, Osborne, & Jacobson, 2015). Alaska is a *Public Law 280* state, but that law only applies to Indian Country (trust lands). *Public Law 280* does not apply to ANCSA fee simple lands held by the regional and village corporations in Alaska. Currently the only land in Alaska under *Public Law 280* is the Metlakatla reservation and the 1.08 acres the Craig Tribal Association put into trust. If more land is able to be taken into trust in Alaska then it will fall under *Public Law 280*. The U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted *Public Law 280* to give the mandatory states (such as Alaska) concurrent/shared jurisdiction with the tribes over crimes committed in Indian Country (and to give the state courts civil jurisdiction over civil lawsuits arising in Indian Country, but filed in the state courts, and excluding state regulatory jurisdiction over Indian Country) (Case & Voluck, 2012). The U.S. Supreme Court also decided that *Public Law 280* did not terminate tribal jurisdiction. In accordance with *Public Law 280*, the State of Alaska would likely have concurrent adjudicatory jurisdiction with the tribes over both lawsuits and crimes committed on trust lands, as the land taken into trust would be considered Indian Country (Illingworth, 2014). However, currently the state has concurrent adjudicatory jurisdiction and regulatory jurisdiction over Alaska Native corporation lands, because they are merely fee simple lands, private property, within the exterior boundaries of the state. It is arguable that the state would no longer have regulatory jurisdiction over trust lands if ANCSA lands are taken into trust, as concurrent regulatory jurisdiction is not part of *Public Law 280* and would be an area of tribal jurisdiction.

Tribes with trust land have taxing authority over members and non-members on tribal land. Trust land increases self-determination through self-government and frees tribes from some outside state regulation of their lands while giving them access to additional funding for housing, education, and other aspects of wellbeing (Strommer et al., 2015). Land in trust allows tribes to increase public safety in communities with tribal policing, increasing the protection of vulnerable women and children. Having land in trust also gives tribes greater sovereignty and access to increased self-determination through tribal courts having both adjudicatory and regulatory jurisdiction. Tribal courts exercise adjudicatory jurisdiction over not only their members, but also non-members who enter into consensual relationships with tribal members or with the tribe (Case & Voluck, 2012). The courts also have jurisdiction over non-members who threaten the tribe's health, safety, welfare, or political integrity. Tribal legislatures (tribal councils) are able to exercise regulatory jurisdiction by adopting laws to manage and protect their land, such as subsistence laws. With land in trust, Alaska tribes can support their currently underfunded justice systems through taxes and increase infrastructure through taxation as well (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2014).

### ***Alaska Native Rights***

Regardless of federal law, Alaska, both as a territory and a state, has gone back and forth over whether to recognize tribal sovereignty, and has fought efforts by Alaska Natives to gain more sovereignty. Alaska Natives began to challenge this in 1912 with the formation of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) followed by the formation of the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) in 1915 to advocate for the rights of Alaska Natives (Native American Public Telecommunications, 2009). Then, in 1920, Alaska Natives focused on individual rights and fought for citizenship and the right to vote. During this time, they were not considered citizens and were treated like the African Americans living under the Jim Crow Era in the South. They were considered uncivilized and attended segregated schools and movie theatres. They were also barred from some establishments, such as restaurants and stores. In 1924, the U.S. Congress granted citizenship rights, with the right to vote, to all Native Americans, including Alaska Natives. In 1925, the territory of Alaska countered this new right by requiring voters to be proficient in both reading and writing English, something many Alaska Natives were not.

Both Tlingit Alaska Natives, Roy and Elizabeth Peratrovich were born in Alaska and later met and married in Washington State. Their experiences with discrimination and Native segregation after moving to Juneau, Alaska, in the late 1930s led them to be active in Native organizations to end racial discrimination of Alaska Natives (Olekse, 1994). In 1940, the Peratrovichs became head of the ANB and ANS respectively. In 1939, President Roosevelt named Ernest Gruening governor of the Alaska Territory; Gruening was a Democrat (Cole, 1996). Governor Gruening was appalled by the treatment of Alaska Natives and sought support in fellow Alaskans. He found little if any support. The Peratrovichs appealed to Gruening for his help in ending discrimination. This appeal, in addition to Gruening's own interests in ending discrimination in Alaska, resulted in Governor Gruening submitting an anti-discrimination bill to the Alaska territorial legislature in 1943. The legislature was all non-Native even though Natives were half of the Alaska population, which resulted in the bill being difficult to move through the governmental body.

In 1944, a political uproar ensued in Alaska when a 17-year-old woman, Alberta Schenk, with an Iñupiaq mother and Euro-American father was jailed, for sitting in the “white” side of the theatre with her Euro-American army sergeant-date in Nome (Cole, 1996). Her experience rallied Nome soldiers and Natives around the antidiscrimination movement. This brought support for the bill from some politicians and garnered support for Alaska Native rights from some non-Natives as well. Following this, Elizabeth Peratrovich gave moving testimony to the legislature in support of the bill, which further swayed the vote. The bill passed in 1945 and was signed into law on February 16<sup>th</sup>. The law for racial equality in Alaska, *Anti-Discrimination Act* (1945) passed nearly two decades before the U.S. Congress passed the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964. At this point, Natives were legally considered equal citizens, but tribally they were not recognized by the state.

This changed in 1990 when Governor Cowper's Administrative Order No. 123 recognized that Alaska Native tribes existed (Case & Voluck, 2012). In 1991, Governor Hickel overturned this order and declared that Alaska did not recognize tribes in Administrative Order No. 125. In 1999, Governor Knowles' Administrative Order No. 186 recognized the existence of tribes in Alaska and advocated for “establishing a comprehensive and mutually respectful State-Tribal relations policy in an effort to promote and enhance Tribal self-government, economic development, a clean and healthy environment, and social, cultural, spiritual, and racial



diversity.” The State of Alaska recognized tribal sovereignty with the *Commemorative Millennium Agreement* in 2001 under Governor Knowles, strengthening his Administrative Order 186. The *Agreement* was signed by the tribes and the state to develop a working relationship as two sovereign entities. The opinion of recognizing tribes did not stand for long and Governor Frank Murkowski again challenged tribal sovereignty over the right to initiate children’s cases in 2004 (Federal Recognition of Alaska Tribes and Relations with the State of Alaska, n.d.). Governors Palin and then Parnell in 2009 followed this same vein, protecting state sovereignty over tribal jurisdiction.

The problem with upholding the court rulings in Alaska about the sovereignty and jurisdiction of tribes has to do with the state and others denying the existence of tribes in the first place. This is due to the state history and politics, administrative orders, and the Alaska state courts inconsistently ruling against tribes, Indian Country, and sovereignty. These rulings have been in conflict with U.S. Supreme Court decisions and the canons of construction declaring that in murky areas, the court should rule in favor of the Natives, not the state governments, a precedent established in *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) where the court interpreted ambiguous terms in treaties by deciding in favor of the Indians. Additionally, statutes should also be “literally construed, doubtful expressions being resolved in favor of the Indians” (*Alaska Pacific Fisheries Co. v. United States*, 1918). This is something the State of Alaska needs to recognize as tribes move to put land into trust. This behavior of the Alaska state court is not specific to Alaska and is common in other state courts and governments who see the federal government overshadowing state rights. These state rights then come in conflict with the rights of Natives in the states and results in a diminution of Native rights as state rights are seen as primary.

Governor Walker departed from this conflict with Natives and worked with tribes while he was in office. Walker, who left office in December 2018, ran with an Alaska Native (Tlingit) lieutenant governor, Byron Mallott in 2014. He was originally running as an Independent while Mallott was running as a Democrat and they combined their ticket to defeat Parnell, the incumbent Republican (Mauer, 2014). Walker had many decisions while in office that positively affected the Alaska Native peoples and tribes. While in office the Walker administration directly recognized the existence of tribes and formed the Governor’s Tribal Advisory Council (GTAC) to improve relations between the state and the tribes in Alaska (Office of the Governor Bill

Walker, “First People,” 2018). The GTAC has 11 representatives to represent tribal interests to the state.

Additionally, when Walker entered office the *Akiachak Native Community v. Salazar* case was ongoing, it had begun in 2006 (State of Alaska Department of Law, 2016). This case was to look at whether Alaska tribes could put land into trust with the federal government. The state of Alaska was against Alaska tribes putting land into trust. During the Walker administration the Department of Interior removed the Alaska Exception which allowed tribes to put land into trust, and the Walker administration decided not to appeal the case. Instead they began looking at how to review land into trust applications and deal with their issues on the subject outside of litigation. Towards the end of his time in office Walker passed Administrative Order 300 which recognized the emergency facing Alaska Native languages to survive; the order supports language revitalization efforts and government-to-government relationships between the state and the tribes (Office of the Governor Bill Walker, “Gov. Walker recognizes,” 2018). Governor Walker also issued a historic apology to Alaska Natives at the Alaska Federation of Natives conference in October 2018 (DeMarban, 2018). He apologized for boarding schools, being forced to not speak Native languages, and the historic and cultural trauma Alaska Natives experienced at the hands of colonizers. Walker’s time in office was largely spent working with the Native people of Alaska instead of fighting them on their rights.

Alaska Native tribes are currently involved in consultations over whether they can still put land into trust so they are no longer without “territorial reach” due to the Trump administration deciding to review the legality of the Secretary of the Interior to take land into trust for Alaska Native tribes as described above. Putting land into trust opens up doors for Alaska tribes having increased sovereignty and self-determination through having Indian Country. While inherently they have rights to practice their sovereignty however they choose, through Indian Country and working with the federal and state governments they have the right to funding for their own police, courts, taxation, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and many more opportunities. Their sovereignty is both inherent and practical as outlined above. However, their opportunity for self-determining acts is ripe. Their sovereignty is much more in their own hands than it has been in centuries. It is vital tribes act now to legally gain a foothold to set precedence for sovereignty and self-determination in order to work with future federal governments.

## **Self-determination, Sustainability, & Wellbeing of Alaska Native Peoples**

The movements for decolonization in Africa played a large role in the international community rejecting colonization (Fanon, 1968; Memmi, 1967). These struggles against colonialism highlighted the injustice the colonized were experiencing. In the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, the UN Covenants, and UNDRIP, self-determination was considered paramount over colonialism (Anaya, 2004). This writing helped to give a voice to the colonized struggling to end colonial rule in Africa, Asia, and other areas of the world. There are some holdovers of colonialism today. Countries like New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada—who are United Nations members—are still mostly run by the descendants of the colonizing populations. In most Latin American countries, those in power are also descendants of the original colonizers; Bolivia is a notable exception as it is run by an Indigenous Aymara person, President Evo Morales. However, Indigenous people are not complacent under this colonization and work daily to better their lives. As Maaka and Fleras state, they continue to challenge:

...stereotypes that depict them as doomed victims and perpetual losers, with only themselves to blame. They have evolved into astute political actors who are shaping their destinies, largely outside of white control, reinventing indigenous models of justice and education, exploring the principle of sovereignty to determine their place in modern society, and seeking compensation to right historical wrongs. (2005, p. 12)

In *Aotearoa*, New Zealand in Māori, one way the Māori articulate their agency is through shifting the wording and perspective from decolonization to “conscientization” or “consciousness,” Māori scholar Graham Smith (2003) explains how to work under the current system of rule. Decolonization emphasizes the colonizer while conscientization puts the colonized first. Through conscientization Alaska Native tribes utilize self-determination to meet their needs. Currently, “self-government is the overarching political dimension of ongoing self-determination” for Alaska Native people (Anaya, 2004, p. 150). In the U.S., the 1968 *Indian Civil Rights Act* (ICRA) explained what governmental powers a tribe possesses in the opinion of the U.S. government:

...executive, legislative, and judicial, and all offices, bodies, and tribunals by and through which they are executed, including courts of Indian offenses; and means the inherent

power of Indian tribes, hereby recognized and affirmed, to exercise criminal jurisdiction over all Indians. (Sec. 1301)

Tribes have more rights than this under their inherent sovereignty, but under practical sovereignty and colonial rule by the U.S., the ICRA prevails.

Exercising these rights of self-governance in culturally appropriate manners have resulted in economic growth in continental U.S. American Indian tribes (Kalt & Singer, 2004). This is vital, as for years the U.S. government has been pushing their own forms of governance and laws on the Native people, ignoring Indigenous leadership forms, as demonstrated by the IRA (Voyageur, Brearley, & Calliou, 2015). Looking at evidence from the American Indian tribes in the continental U.S., it is likely that self-government in Alaska could improve wellbeing through governmental accountability and local decision-making (Cornell & Kalt, 2003a). The challenge is for tribes to conduct self-determining acts, assert their governance, use their powers, and be effective (Cornell & Kalt, 2003b). With self-governance, Alaska Natives are able to most effectively make better decisions for their rural, often difficult-to-access communities.

Taking control of governance is vital in Indigenous nation building. Indigenous politics is no longer based around needing U.S. government solutions to Indigenous issues but, instead, is based around Indigenous rights for nationhood including autonomous and self-determining communities and sovereignty (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Jorgensen (2007) identified the following elements are necessary for sustainable nation building: (a) sovereignty, (b) institutions such as law and policy, (c) culturally appropriate institutions, (d) strategic thinking about the long-term, and (e) uncorrupt inspiring leadership. This idea of nation building is tied to asset building as well. Tribes build capacity to serve their own needs, maintain wellbeing, and be sustainable. This can be done by first creating government that reflects the tribal culture. Tribes that created IRA boilerplate constitutions, which includes many Alaskan tribes, need to rework their constitutions to reflect their needs and governing structure, whether written or oral. Tribes need strong leadership and laws to foster economic development and also need to map the assets they have now. Tribal sovereignty is key; tribes need to exercise it through self-determining acts. The community must be involved in order for the government to be adapted and sustainable.

The actions of being involved and controlling service delivery are self-determining acts. Graham Smith (2003) speaks of the Māori revolution and the actions the Māori took in the 1980s. He says that it was, “a shift away from waiting for things to be done to them [the Māori],

to doing things for themselves; a shift away from an emphasis on reactive politics to an emphasis on being more proactive; a shift from negative motivation to positive motivation” (p. 2). This is a shift that is resulting in the Māori sustaining their communities, cultures, and language. With the passage of the *Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975* and the amendments to the act, Alaska Natives became more involved in contracting and compacting with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Indian Health Services (IHS) to provide services for their people. Although tribes can negotiate directly with the BIA, in Alaska many of the contracts and compacts are through regional non-profit organizations that represent a large number of tribes.

The Ya Ne Dah Ah (Ancient Traditions) school in Chickaloon, Alaska is an Alaskan example of a tribal self-determining action leading to wellbeing. The school was founded in 1993, after Katherine Wade, a clan grandmother of the community, began a Saturday school where she shared stories and history of the Athabascan culture (Davidson, 2004). The students learn the conventional math, English, science, and social studies subjects but also learn Ahtna Athabascan language, history, art, and music. The Ahtna Athabascan skills are valued by Chickaloon and taught by the community members and the school (Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, 2002a).

Not only does the Ya Ne Dah Ah School address cultural loss and disconnect, it also improves educational quality and removes dropouts entirely (Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, 2002a). Students in the school have higher scores on standardized tests than their national counterparts. Tribal members who had left the community are moving back so their children can attend the school. The school maintains its accomplishments through annual reviews to monitor progress and communicating these reports to parents. Their accomplishments have not gone unrecognized and in 2002 the school won a \$10,000 award from Harvard University. They were one of only eight tribal government programs to win nationwide. Their curricular units have been integrated into the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District in a near-by city center (Davidson, 2004; Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, 2002a).

Another success story of Alaska Native development is the Yukaana Development Corporation (YDC). This was created in 1997 by the Loudon Tribe as a response to environmental issues in the Yukon River and Galena, Alaska area (Harvard Project on American

Indian Economic Development, 2008; Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, 2002b). The United States Air Force Galena Air Station had been dumping 55-gallon drums used to transport petroleum on the tribal subsistence land near the base since the early 1940s. With the periodic flooding of the Yukon, tens of thousands of drums were spread on sloughs behind Galena. The drums were leaking fuel contaminants on top of the community aquifer.

In 1992, the Loudon Tribe conducted planning sessions to give strategic direction to the Tribal Council and strengthen the Tribal government (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2008; Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, 2002b). They decided on the goal of self-governance and created a theme for their mission, “Neel ghul neets niy,” “We Work Together, We Help Each Other.” The tribe applied for grants and with funding conducted environmental studies. Contamination was discovered and instead of litigating against the military, the Tribe chose to work cooperatively keeping with their goal for self-governance, self-sufficiency, community wellbeing, environmental health, and job creation.

The Tribal members did not have any certification or experience in environmental remediation, so initially the tribe worked with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as other organizations to get training (Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, 2002b). With trained members and nowhere for them to work in the area, the Tribe created the YDC, a for-profit corporation, to do environmental remediation. Any profit the YDC makes are used to expand Tribal programs and services in order to benefit the community. The YDC has become a method of self-governance, community capacity, and a boost to the Tribal economy. They emphasize local hire. They are also reaching out to youth and working on an environmental protection curriculum for the schools.

The Ninilchik Traditional Council has been approved by the Department of the Interior to operate through the self-governance program. This eliminates the need for them to contract everything through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and instead they do a Compact of Self-Governance. It also reduces the number of reports they need to write on their programs each year, saving time and allowing for increased efficiency. Self-governance was started in 1988 with the Tribal Self-Governance Demonstration Project (The Office of Self-Governance Communication & Education, 1995). It became permanent legislation with the passage of the *Indian Self-Determination Act Amendments of 1994*. The original Project was only available to a few tribes and this legislation allowed many tribes to be involved. Self-governance is designed to

give the tribes greater control over federal funding with less federal involvement. It changes the government-to-government relationships between the tribes and federal government allowing the tribes more agency with less oversight. Self-government is directly tied to sovereignty and is a way for tribes to utilize self-determination.

The self-determination programs, including self-governance, give tribes and Alaska Native non-profits the opportunity to build capacity and utilize self-governance. By taking ownership of the programs, the tribe is able to tailor them to the needs of their community (Strommer & Osbourne, 2015). When tribes take over the programs from federal agencies the programs are more effective. Self-determination in healthcare has improved health care for Natives throughout the U.S. through local control (Shelton, Dixon, Roubideaux, Mather, & Smith-Mala, 1998). In Alaska, Alaska Native non-profit organizations act on behalf of the tribes at times. Compacts and contracts range widely in scope and cover road repair to moving villages affected by coastal erosion. A very large arrangement between the Indian Health Services (IHS), Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), and the Southcentral Foundation (SCF) provides medical care to Natives throughout the state with a large hospital in Anchorage, regional Native hospitals run by local Alaska Native health non-profits, and telemedicine reaching smaller villages (Gottlieb, 2013; Sherry, 2004).

Self-determination is not just political, it includes, “hunting, fishing, and trapping... the land... the water, the trees, and the animals” (Moses, 2000, p. 162). Sovereignty is ecological and economic, as well as political. Land rights are a vital part of Indigenous self-determination. In international law, Indigenous subsistence rights are protected in both the UN *International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights* and the *International Covenant Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Article 1, line 2 in both Covenants state that, “In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence” (UN General Assembly, 1966a; UN General Assembly, 1966b). Denying rights to land and subsistence violates Native rights to self-determination. However, these Covenants are not a part of U.S. law and the U.S. Congress can extinguish Indian lands at any time through plenary power.

Alaska Natives are involved with the State of Alaska and the U.S. Federal Government in co-management of land, fish, and animals in order to maintain their subsistence rights. Some co-management is at the international level, such as the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission being involved in talks with the U.S. delegation to the International Whaling Commission (Case &

Voluck, 2012), as well as the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council (AMBCC) based on international migratory bird treaties. There is also co-management of polar bears, seals, fish, walrus, and the land and water. Some co-management agreements are in the *Marine Mammal Protection Act* (1972) as well. Alaska Natives are involved in these discussions on an unequal power level with international, state, and federal actors, which demonstrates their colonized state. Their cultural interests in the land often conflict with economic goals that other actors have. Co-management can also create problems (Caulfield, 1997). These problems include burdens experienced by the Indigenous people when negotiating and sharing management with the federal and state governments, and developed hierarchy and elitism within the Indigenous community. Co-management can become a relationship where the Indigenous people cooperate while the federal government does the managing. However, co-management is one method of Alaska Native self-determination. Natives work to maintain their rights to land and subsistence as a demonstration of self-determination for their cultural survival (Moses, 2000; Suagee, 1998).

In this project, I worked with the Ninilchik Traditional Council (NTC). NTC is the governing body of the Ninilchik Village Tribe and they are directly involved in co-management. In Alaska, the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) is made up of members from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Forest Service, and three public members who act on the behalf of rural subsistence users like the Ninilchik community (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2018). This Board makes decisions on what subsistence can be practiced, including fish and animal seasons. No Ninilchik community member is on the federal board, but the Ninilchik Traditional Council president—R. Greg Encelewski—is on the Southcentral Regional Advisory Council (RAC) of the Federal Subsistence Board. The Ninilchik tribe worked through the board and court system for years to be able to put a net in the Kasilof and Kenai rivers to fish for salmon (*Ninilchik Traditional Council v. Towarak et al.*, 2016; Summers, 2016). In 2016, they were finally allowed to put nets on the rivers for subsistence fishing through rural ANILCA rights to benefit the Ninilchik community, not just the tribe. It is the tribe that does the fishing for the benefit of community members who have signed up to have the tribe fish for them. Any Ninilchik resident can sign up, whether enrolled in the tribe or not, as they qualify under the rural requirements of ANILCA.

As colonization changes from overt slavery and forced relocation, it has taken new forms, such as: (a) indebtedness, (b) hegemony, (c) policy manipulation, and (d) the commodification of



knowledge (Smith, 2016). Through hegemony, Natives accept ideas that contribute to their own oppression and colonization. Manipulation of policy keeps Natives from being full managers of the fish and wildlife they subsist on, as demonstrated by the Ninilchik example of putting nets on the Kasilof and Kenai rivers. Smith (2003) explains that Natives need to become conscious of what they want in order to overcome this oppression, and not to be burdened by what the colonizer is telling them to want. Ultimately, Smith sees the Māori revolution as a “struggle for our [the Māori] minds.” That same struggle is going on in Alaska today, seeking “control over one’s own life and cultural well-being” (Smith, 2003, p. 10). Indigenous people in the U.S. do not see themselves as “wards” of the U.S. government, as they are referred to in the Marshall cases, but instead as equal partners in a relationship with the U.S., focused on “mutual consent rather than force, on difference rather than assimilation...and on notions of self-determining autonomy rather than institutional accommodation” (Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 15). This shift in perspective moves the focus from the past to the future, “from problems to capacities, from litigation to relationships, and from citizenship to peoples” (Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 15).

Looking to the future as something one can move toward to get out from under colonization and oppression can help a person achieve wellbeing. Among the Eveny culture in Siberia is a concept of a spirit (a part of them) going before them into the future, achieving what they envision as their future, *djuluchen* (Ulturgasheva, 2016). This is a vital concept to understand in this project as I employed ethnographic futures research, asking people about their future and how to achieve an optimistic future. By foreshadowing the future, the Eveny desire, they are more able to achieve that future. In Ulturgasheva’s study, six years after interviewing youth she returned to the community and saw that many had fulfilled their narrations about the future. Their original predictions were not a guaranteed likelihood, they initially negotiated between their agency and the situations constraining them to predict the future they wanted. When a person catches up to their *djuluchen*, their narrated future has been achieved. Alaska Native people are not Eveny, but any future they talk about has the potential to be achieved through self-determination. This project allows an optimistic future to be articulated and the steps to achieve that future identified.

The sustainability of a community depends on the ability of the community to control their own fate through self-determination and movements towards wellbeing. Transmitting culture and traditional knowledge to future generations adds to the sustainability of a community

(Corntassel, 2008). Corntassel describes “sustainability as a critical benchmark for an Indigenous self-determination process” (2008, p. 107). Natives are involved in environmental sustainability as well to maintain their cultures that are so linked to the land (Suagee, 1998). The tribes also use their “governmental authority to protect the environment so that present and future generations can carry on tribal cultural traditions can be described as acts of self-determination” (Suagee, 1998, p. 236). Sustainability of the community includes not only community survival, but cultural and environmental sustainability as well.

These self-determining steps toward sustainability are being taken in Alaska. One example is the co-management described above. Another example is the Iñupiat and other culture groups in Alaska, including the Yupiit, bringing back dance after it was banned by missionaries (Barker, Fienup-Riordan, & John, 2010). Bringing back dance is a self-determining act for the wellbeing of the individuals and the community that sustains Alaska Native cultures. Topkok and Green (2016) write about how the Iñupiaq people of Arctic Alaska achieve wellbeing through internalizing and living the *Iñupiat Iitqusiat* (Iñupiaq values). These values are: (a) knowledge of language, (b) sharing, (c) respect for others, (d) cooperation, (e) respect for Elders, (f) love for children, (g) hard work, (h) knowledge of family tree, (i) avoid conflict, (j) respect for nature, (k) spirituality, (l) humor, (m) family roles, (n) hunter success, (o) domestic skills, (p) humility, and (q) responsibility to tribe. Living life through these values brings people wellbeing. Practicing cultural activities like dance are one way to live the *Iñupiat Iitqusiat* and promote wellbeing.

Self-determination is directly tied to wellbeing through: (a) self-government, (b) subsistence, (c) fate control, (d) freedom, (e) cultural regeneration and maintenance, and the many other examples given above (Cornell & Kalt, 2003a; Einarsson et al., 2004; Moses, 2000; Topkok & Green, 2016). It is a “prerequisite” for wellbeing (Panzironi, 2006). Self-determination must be grounded in the culture of the community if it is to lead to wellbeing (Cornell & Kalt, 2003b). There are different examples of this cultural self-determination for wellbeing happening in Alaska, especially around health. Communities are developing programs to address drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, pollution, and many other areas of concern with the assistance of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and also through collaboration with researchers through the Center for Alaska Native Health and Research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, 2018; Center for Alaska Native Health and Research, 2018). These are culturally specific and tailored to the needs of the

community, as determined by the community (Segal et al., 1999). Communities are drawing on traditional ways of healing to address the results of colonization and oppression. They are empowered through developing and controlling projects that emphasize their strengths as the avenue to deal with their needs. Segal et al. (1999) emphasize that “‘well-being’ involves community and individual ‘empowerment’ – the ability to take responsibility for one’s behavior to control one’s destiny – and being part of the process that makes decisions affecting individual and community life” (p. 103). This empowerment and accountability describe self-determination.

## **Summary**

Examples such as revitalizing dance in Alaska and the IHS compact for Natives to provide Native healthcare in Alaska are some examples of self-determining acts Natives in Alaska are taking to improve their wellbeing and the sustainability of their people. Empirical research on how Natives perceive these as self-determination and leading to their wellbeing and sustainability is lacking. This chapter analyzed the perspective of living as colonized from both a historic and contemporary time period. The contemporary perspective addressed the court cases and laws that restrict tribes from their inherent sovereignty. Finally, I identified the gap in literature and the importance of conducting research on self-determination, sustainability, and wellbeing. I follow this chapter with my discussion of methods. In the Methods chapter I detail ethnographic futures research, the method I used for this research. I explain the setting and participants I worked with. I explain my theoretical foundation, and I go over how grounded theory was used to code the interview and focus group data and address the ethical considerations of working with Native people.

## **Chapter III: Methods**

### **Introduction**

This research project investigates the intersections between Alaska Native self-determination and community sustainability and wellbeing in the Ninilchik Village Tribe community under the Ninilchik Traditional Council. This study specifically addresses the perspectives Natives have of the future and how they see self-determination affecting their sustainability and wellbeing. Existing research on self-determination and wellbeing primarily considers self-determination to be one indicator of wellbeing. My question explores how a community understands self-determination to be an active agent in community sustainability and wellbeing. In this study, I used ethnographic futures research (EFR) to bring forth information on how the Ninilchik interviewees see their community in the future. There are three scenarios in the interview: the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely. The interviews were transcribed and coded to see how self-determination played a role in the sustainability and wellbeing of the communities in the future. In this chapter I also look at theoretical perspectives including: (a) the Capabilities Approach, (b) Self-Determination Theory, (c) social science development theories, (d) the Elements of Development Model, and (e) international Arctic wellbeing indicators that inform the work. I begin with describing the project participants.

### **Participants**

The project was conducted in Ninilchik, Alaska (population 851 as of 2017) (DCRA Information Portal, 2017). The community of Ninilchik is on the ancestral land of the Ninilchik Village Tribe. The tribal boundaries extend from Ninilchik and Happy Valley to Kasilof in the North, the Caribou Hills in the East, Homer in the South, and across the Cook Inlet to Mt. Iliamna in the West (Ninilchik Traditional Council, 2013). The community has a post office, a general store, four liquor stores, a health and wellness club, tribal buildings (administration, resource, subsistence, health clinic with behavioral health, and community center), a borough school, three preschools (one through the tribe), an emergency services/fire station, a gas station, a library, a gift shop in the old village, a gift shop at the Russian Orthodox church, an art shop (The Peddler), and more than five churches.

The participants in this research were a purposive sample chosen by the tribe (Coyne, 1997). This was helpful since the people that participated had an interest in the study, ideas about

the potential future of the community, and were able to inform the research project. The Ninilchik Village Tribe decided to include non-tribal members so that they are able to use the project results to apply to grants. Many grants they apply to are not Native specific and require community data. They find that community-wide data will be the most beneficial type of results this project can provide. All the interviewees lived within the tribal boundaries.

The Ninilchik Traditional Council, the government of the Ninilchik Village Tribe, was established in 1979 and its constitution was revised in 2004 (Ninilchik Traditional Council, 2013). The tribe has 937 members living all over the world, and is comprised of many different peoples (personal communication with Ninilchik Village Tribe Executive Director Ivan Encelewski, August 21, 2018). According to the 2017 DCRA Information Portal, American Indian and Alaska Natives are 11.49% of the population (DCRA Information Portal, 2017). This does not count people who identified as more than one race; with that the Native population in Ninilchik is closer to 20%.

The Ninilchik tribal area was originally inhabited by the Dena'ina people, but through trade, waterways, Russian settlement, proximity to other tribes, the U.S. purchase of Alaska, the gold rush, and the building of the road system, the Dena'ina mixed with other Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina people, Ahtna, Yup'ik, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq, Russian, Europeans, and Americans (Ninilchik Traditional Council, 2013). The tribe is further mixed to include other Alaska Native, Native American, and Native Hawaiian people due to their semi-open enrollment policy. They allow other Bureau of Indian Affairs-recognized Natives who are permanent residents of Ninilchik to join the tribe as nonvoting members. The Russians had cultural influence within the tribe as they built a village on tribal lands in the early 1800s and a Russian Orthodox Church in the early 1900s (Ninilchik Traditional Council, 2013). They are extensively mixed within the tribe through intermarriage policies established in the early Russian colonial period.<sup>5</sup>

The interviewees and focus group participants either worked for or were involved with the Ninilchik Village Tribe, the senior center, the American Legion, the chamber of commerce, local businesses including business owners, charters and commercial fishermen, the library, the Ninilchik Natives Association Inc., Ninilchik Emergency Services, the clinic, the teen center, and/or the school. This encompasses every large organization in the community.

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<sup>5</sup> For an extensive history of the old families of Ninilchik, see *Agrafena's children: The old families of Ninilchik, Alaska* (Leman, 1993).

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Age (interviewees were 26 to 79 years old)</b>	
20-29	1
30-39	9
40-49	5
50-59	7
60-69	5
70-79	3
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	11
Female	19
<b>Tribal Affiliation</b>	
Tribal Member	21
Non-Tribal	9
<b>Employment</b>	
Work for the Tribe	17
Work Elsewhere	9
Retired	4
<b>Where Raised</b>	
Ninilchik	16
Alaska-not Ninilchik	7
Continental U.S.	7
<b>Education</b>	
Some High School	1
GED	2
High School Diploma	4
Certified Nursing Assistant	2
Trade School	3
Some College	7
Associate's Degree	2
Bachelor's Degree	5
Master's Degree	4
<b>Ethnicity (self-identified)</b>	
Russian-Alaska Native-European/white (Alaska Native included Dena'ina Athabaskan, Aleut, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq)	12
Russian-Alaska Native (Alaska Native included Dena'ina and Aleut)	4
Alaska Native (Alaska Native included Athabaskan and Alaska Native in general)	2
European/white	7
European/white-Native American (tribes from the continental U.S.)	4
European/white-other	1

## **Procedures**

I worked with the Ninilchik Village Tribe on this study. This research was approved through the Ninilchik Traditional Council, and I was assigned a community liaison to work with on the project. In my discussions with the tribe, primarily my contact who the tribe appointed, the tribe explained to me the level of involvement they desired. First, I was to work through my assigned primary contact. Second, they gave me an office in the tribal resource building to work from. Third, I presented the project to their tribal board, what they call their Council, before I began the interviews. Fourth, they chose who they wanted me to interview. Fifth, they were involved in participating in the interviews and focus groups. Sixth, they wanted me to do well on this project and offered to help where they could. After a preliminary research visit with the tribe in July 2017 to set up the project, this research was conducted from February through April 2018 prior to the start of the subsistence season, because during the subsistence season many people are away from home or busy hunting and fishing. The dissemination presentations back to the tribe and community were completed in January 2019.

## ***Ethnographic Futures Research***

I conducted ethnographic futures research (EFR) scenarios with 30 community members over the age of 18 in the tribal resource building (Textor, 1980). By the 30<sup>th</sup> interview I was still getting some new information but much of what I heard echoed comments from previous interviews. I stopped at 30 interviews as that was how many the tribe and I had agreed to do. Additionally, I looked for four criteria presented by Charmaz (2005): credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. When I was able to draw a holistic picture of the future from the interviews that included these four criteria, I considered my sample complete, recognizing that the more interviews I collected the stronger my data and analysis would be.

Ethnographic futures research was devised by Robert Textor in 1976 and has cultural anthropology and ethnography components; see Figure 1 for a model of the method. The method is non-directive and open-ended with some set probes from an interview protocol. Textor details how to utilize the method in his handbook (1980). All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Before starting each interview I went over the consent form with the participant and we both signed it (see Appendix A for consent form). In the interview we covered areas such as government, infrastructure, culture, and education (see Appendix C for Interview Guide). The

interviews explored self-determination, sustainability, and wellbeing through the perspectives of each interviewee as they talk about these different areas of life in the future and how they got to be the way they are over the last 20 years since the interviews are set in year 2038. The method is done through scenarios about the interviewees' future society. The scenarios are interviewee-developed "future histories," with the interviewee talking about the future as if it already happened (Textor, 1995). There are three scenarios: the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely. It is important to remember these scenarios are future histories, not projections, forecasts, or predictions. This is vital when working with Indigenous people that are often not comfortable making projections about the future.

Following a brief biographical sketch to be used to look at gender, tribal affiliation, and/or generational differences to ascertain whether there are different visions about where the community should go and how to get there, the interviewees were asked to place themselves 20 years in the future, in year 2038. From year 2038 they were asked to look around in the present, year 2038, and back over the last 20 years and identify changes that had taken place. The first scenario the interviewees participated in was the optimistic scenario. On a scale from 1 to 100 this is future 90. It is not a utopian future, a perfect 100, but a very positive future that is realistic; this future is more positive than the one interviewees think most likely to occur. This future is the most detailed and I asked many probing questions to get the interviewees to describe the optimistic world around them (see Appendix C for probing questions).

Following this optimistic future, we talked about the pessimistic future. This is future 10 on a scale of 1 to 100. It is a very negative future. This future is much shorter as it is very bleak and requires little description as most things were opposite those in the optimistic future, if they are even still in existence. The next future was the most likely or most probable future. This is not on the scale of 1 to 100 but is instead what the interviewee sees as most likely to happen over the next 20 years. They were able to use the optimistic and pessimistic futures to orient themselves in what they considered the most likely. Finally, the interviewee was asked to avoid the pessimistic future, surpass the most likely future, and describe how to make the optimistic future a reality. By having the pessimistic future and most likely futures identified, the interviewee has the ability to compare and contrast to see what the difference is between these futures and the optimistic to describe how to achieve the optimistic. The last question asks the interviewees to describe their personal role in achieving the optimistic future. Here the



interviewee becomes a part of the project, seeing themselves and their agency reflected in their beliefs of an optimistic future for their community.

Transcripts of the interviews were checked for accuracy by the interviewee, per standard IRB protocol (see Appendix E for IRB Approval Letter). I addressed validity and reliability throughout the project by having the interviewee check the interview transcripts so they could make sure that they said things the way they wanted to (Duneier, 1999; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). After this initial member check of the transcript, I began analysis through grounded theory coding. I used the constant comparative coding method, inductively coding for categories, writing memos about my coding scheme, moving my codes into trees and hierarchies, and developing my ideas into a theory on self-determining actions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I coded the data as I received it, using NVivo qualitative analysis software. Upon receiving new data and developing new codes, I went back to the previous data, and coded for those new codes. I used a variety of the search and graphing functions in NVivo to get a better look at the data and ways to explain it. Additionally, I reviewed the meanings of the previous codes to further refine them with additional data. I treated coding as a reflexive process.

Following my analysis, I went back to the interviewees to make sure I took their ideas in context and did another check for validity and reliability. I brought the interviewees together in focus groups to discuss results in order to see what people actually think can be done to achieve their optimistic futures (see Appendix B for consent form and Appendix D for Focus Group Guide) (Duneier, 1999; Morse et al., 2002). This stage is where the project looks at practice and identifies if there is some form of community development in which component the community is interested. Finally, I held a meeting in January 2019 with the tribal board and a community meeting, both for data dissemination.

Ethnographic futures research promotes wellbeing by engaging the interviewees in an optimistic future and asking them how to achieve the optimistic future. Having an optimistic outlook is linked to wellbeing. Having an optimistic outlook leads to coping strategies that improve quality of life through healthy adaptive behaviors and cognitive responses (Conversano, Rotondo, Lensi, Della Vista, Arpone, & Reda, 2010). Research also links optimism to protecting physical health as people take steps to protect their health (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). Finally, the task-focused aspect of optimism is linked to goal achievement and benefits

socioeconomically. Utilizing this method engages people in detailing an optimistic future and how to achieve it, emphasizing their own personal role in reaching the optimistic future as well.

Ethnographic futures research (EFR) is a mutually beneficial research method for both the researcher and community. It allows the researcher to collect data while the community gathers information on how to make their community the most desirable as seen through the eyes of the interviewees. Thus, the method is collaborative in the construction of knowledge. Huntington and Fox (2005) found that collaborative research methods provide the best opportunity to involve Arctic Indigenous people in research. Community involvement in EFR can occur in deciding whom to interview, all the way up to training community members to conduct EFR interviews (Domaingue, 1989). Collaborative research empowers communities by building capacity that can be used for community development (Berkes, 2002). Additionally, involving the community members in the research process contributes to their wellbeing through assisting them to be empowered and in control of a process that addresses problems in their lives (Dudgeon, Scrine, Cox, & Walker, 2017). A participatory project creates many opportunities for the researcher to give back to the community they are working with. They can give back through collaboration and increasing community capacity, by providing interview data for community development, and by working on community development following the EFR research phase.

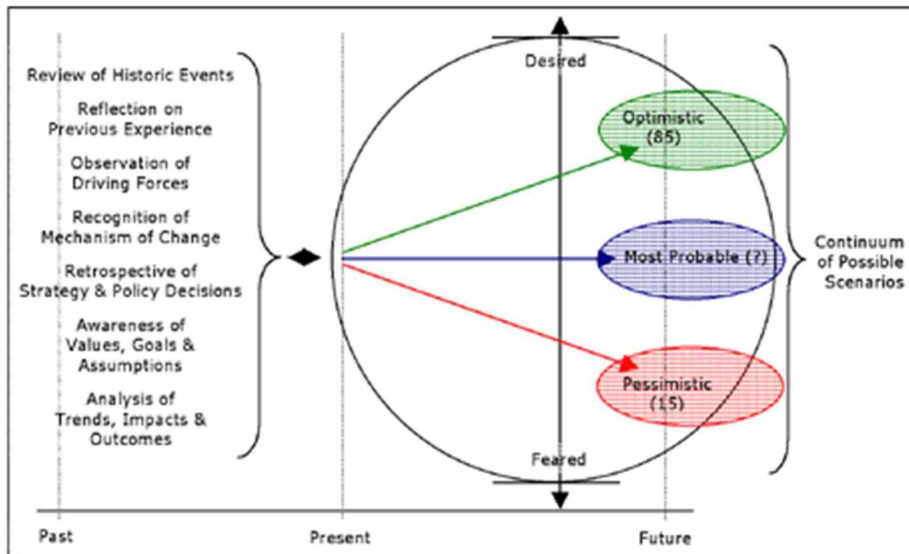


Figure 1. Ethnographic Futures Research (Mitchell & Gillis, 2006)

## ***Indigenous Methodologies***

Participatory research and EFR are directly relevant to Indigenous research methodologies. Through working together, issues of power between the researcher and community are addressed and hopefully resolved so that they can work on equal footing. EFR is action-based. The results from the interviews demonstrate ways communities can exercise self-determination for their own benefit (Brayboy & McCarty, 2010). EFR is participatory which allows people from the community to exercise self-determination through being involved in the project, working with the researcher, and making decisions (Cornell & Kalt, 2003b). The EFR researcher needs to prioritize Indigenous knowledge and beliefs in order to foster self-determination, which is the underlying goal of this research project (Brayboy, 2005; Smith, 1999). Both the researcher and community need to nurture and maintain a sense of reciprocity, where each is accountable to each other (Kovach, 2005).

Ethnographic futures research supports Indigenous methodologies by turning to the people for knowledge and valuing that knowledge (Textor, 1980). The method allows people to critically evaluate their possible futures. When considering the drug, alcohol, violence, and suicide status in the Alaskan Arctic, thinking about what the future might look like is very important. EFR is done through interviews that describe scenarios. In my experience in Greenland working with Indigenous people, speaking in the future tense elicits very little information, as people prefer to not speculate but instead live in the present. The same sentiment was expressed by an Alaska Native woman in her dissertation working with Alaska Natives (Cheney, 2014). In EFR, the interviewee talks about the future as if it *is* the present. This method thus provides a great way to talk about the future with Indigenous people in the Arctic. In addition to being accommodating to Indigenous people in present tense speaking, EFR provides a means of storytelling (Squetimkin-Anquoe, 2013). Storytelling is a large part of Native cultures as prior to missionary exposure Native languages were primarily oral and still maintain oral traditions to this day. Storytelling is also a method useful in planning for communities (van Hulst, 2012). The results of this project produced a booklet for Ninilchik about all their future ideas for self-determining actions (see Appendix F). These could serve as the basis for a 20 year community plan if the community decides to engage in planning type development.

Indigenous peoples becoming actively involved in research elaborate the importance of conducting research according to how an Indigenous culture defines its values, protocols, and

behaviors. Researchers need to give back to the community they work with and privilege Indigenous knowledge, experiences, accounts, thoughts, and analyses (Smith, 1999). Indigenous methodology is not a new type of research method. It is a way to look at Indigenous peoples within research and address the power relationships between Indigenous peoples and researchers. Indigenous methodology views each part of research from the assumptions and questions to interpretation and dissemination through an Indigenous lens (Martin, 2003). Research involves a commitment to the Indigenous people and a sense of reciprocity, where researchers are accountable to the Indigenous community and vice versa (Kovach, 2005). The community anticipates the knowledge produced is available for practical use (Hart, 2010).

Kennedy and Wehipohana (2006) describe the most prominent principles for researchers working with Indigenous peoples as: (a) respect the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples, (b) benefit the community researched, (c) acknowledge and respect a non-Western worldview and ideology, (d) value an Indigenous culture and protect Indigenous knowledge, (e) approach the community without a deficit approach, and (f) work with the community in research to build capacity. Defining respect through a “community-up” format, instead of a “top-down” researcher definition, brings community definition of ethical research behaviors to the forefront (Smith, 2005). Building a relationship with the community prior to beginning the project creates a lasting connection built through understanding. I conducted a preliminary research trip in July 2017 and was constantly in contact with the community building a relationship.

When working with Indigenous people, many ethical issues are at play. The researcher has to constantly be thinking of how to decolonize the research process. It is ethical for researchers to meet people face-to-face, pay attention and listen, share and host, be reflexive and non-judgmental, be respectful of dignity, demonstrate reciprocity and responsibility, and avoid flaunting knowledge (Smith, 2005). Researchers need to also build and maintain reciprocal relationships with people, the tribe, and community. In my master’s research, I found that trust is central to a research relationship and it takes eight primary actions to create, build, and sustain it (Gordon, 2017). These actions are:

Knowing extensive community history, developing strong local contacts, communicating openly about the project, treating the community members as equals, displaying [culturally appropriate] manners and etiquette through honesty and reciprocity, acting ethically in [I]ndigenous cultures...exchanging knowledge to build...capital, and giving project results to the community so they can be put to practical use. (p. 237)

My work on ethics and trust leads me to consider ethics through all parts of the research process. It must be further stressed that ethics are not only the institutional ethics of the university, or federally imposed through regulations such as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), but include ethics from within the culture in which researcher is working.

### **Ethical Considerations/Respecting Cultural Knowledge**

Alaska Native peoples have experienced abuses in past research. I will provide two examples. First, in the 1950s, the Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory, a former division of the U.S. Air Force, began a study to identify what the human thyroid gland did in regards to adaptation to cold weather (Hodge, 2012). The Laboratory convinced Native Elders to help recruit members for the study. The study participants, many non-English-speaking children and other individuals, were unable to provide legal consent. Regardless, the 120 Alaska Native participants were exposed to high levels of radioactive Iodine (I-131). The participants received doses far above medicinal limits typically used to treat thyroid cancer. No follow-up medical testing was done and there are no records of who was in the study.

Second, the documentary, *History of the Inupiat: Project Chariot* (2012) details the nuclear testing conducted in Point Hope, Alaska in 1958. The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission had plans to construct a new harbor by detonating eight thermonuclear bombs at Cape Thompson, 25 miles from Point Hope, an Inupiaq village that is the oldest continually inhabited community in North America. The plans of detonation were never carried out but deep holes were drilled for the bombs, studies were conducted in the area, and now cancer is the leading cause of death in Point Hope. The film interviews multiple Point Hope residents about the current deaths and how hard they are struggling trying to care for their families and stay healthy. It also shows real film and audio from when the Atomic Energy Commission came to Point Hope to answer community questions. The Commission stated directly, when asked about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, that the nuclear bombs had no adverse effects on the Japanese

survivors. Most recently, the community of Point Hope was negotiating with the Obama administration for more information on the project and what remains at the site (History of the Iñupiaq, 2012).

Scientists need to recognize that there are people in the communities, the land is private, belonging to the Native people or tribes, and the history of “helicopter research” of flying in, taking data, and leaving, is no longer ethically accepted (Berkes, 2002). Even if a specific project is not abusing the community, the communities can still be exhausted by research. Some communities are known for working well with researchers so many researchers will do their projects there. Although this is helpful to the communities in some ways, it wears them out as well. Due to “helicopter research”, ethical violations, and being studied exhaustively, many Indigenous people do not want researchers in their communities. Communities tend to mistrust researchers and be suspicious of their motives (Bastida, Tseng, McKeever, & Jack, 2010). Some participants do not feel that they receive any benefit from the researchers; once the researchers leave they get nothing in return (Ball & Janyst, 2008). Outside actors need to understand the issues of tribal sovereignty, informed consent and ethics, and the intellectual property rights of knowledge holders (Harding et al., 2012). Many ethical abuses could be avoided if the researcher would have an informed consent process that is culturally acceptable, open the project to contributions by the community, and resolve to contribute resources to solve issues that develop (Brydon-Miller, 2009).

Increasing numbers of researchers in the Arctic has resulted in increased contact with Indigenous peoples. This has prompted research funding organizations and Native serving organizations to develop Arctic specific ethical guidelines in an attempt to explain to academics how to respect Indigenous Arctic peoples and their knowledge, work with Indigenous people respectfully, and take into account Indigenous worldviews. These ethical guidelines also help researchers new to working with Arctic communities understand some Arctic policy and protection of Native people. This list is in no way exhaustive but mentions documents in wide use.

The first document is the *Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic* published by the NSF Arctic Social Sciences Program (IARPC, 1990). The second, *Guidelines for Improved Cooperation between Arctic Researchers and Northern Communities* was developed primarily by the NSF Office of Polar Programs Arctic Sciences Section and Barrow Arctic

Science Consortium in collaboration with many Alaska Native organizations (Arctic Sciences Section of the Office of Polar Programs at the National Science Foundation, 2004) and is still in draft form. The third was developed by Arctic Research Consortium of the United States (ARCUS) in 1997 for the NSF. It is entitled, *People and the Arctic: A Prospectus for Research on the Human Dimensions of the Arctic System (HARC)*. The *Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge* is the fourth document and was published by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (2000), which was produced through an effort of multiple Native organizations in Alaska and has since been adopted by the Assembly of Alaska Native Educators in 2000. The fifth, *the Alaska Federation of Native Guidelines for Research* is a short document by the Alaska Federation of Natives (1993) to help prevent abuse in Native organizations and villages. Finally, Harding et al., (2012) have a comprehensive table on codes of ethics that relate to tribal research.<sup>6</sup>

The specific ways I respected cultural knowledge in this project are grounded in my epistemology, described in the Introduction. I endeavored to understand the worldview of the interviewees and worked with them to make sure I correctly interpreted their statements and ideas. I did not write up ideas considered too sacred to be put out into the wider world. Additionally, I made sure to clarify in my writing that people are speaking for themselves and not for all Native people or even their tribe, as Indigenous people tend to emphasize that they can only speak for themselves and not others. Working with the interviewees through the project enables me to be close to them and thus be constantly aware of how they desire to be respected. This is not just an ethical consideration or an issue of respecting cultural knowledge but instead a moral issue to me. I seek to demonstrate my gratitude to the communities I work in and be involved in any development if they ask me. I am not only working towards my dissertation with this project but also giving to the community through a community meeting, meeting with the tribal board, and producing a booklet on the results (see Appendix F for dissemination booklet).

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<sup>6</sup> Additional resources on ethical research can be found through the University of Alaska Fairbanks website: <https://www.uaf.edu/irb/professional-standards>.

## **Theoretical Perspective**

While this project used grounded theory to analyze the interview and focus group data on self-determination, the theory produced from the data was compared to existing theories including the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, social science development theories, and the Elements of Development Model discussed in Chapter VI (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999). Sen's Capabilities Approach is set in economics and explains how freedom is utilized to achieve values, and ultimately wellbeing, through capabilities (1999). Ryan and Deci (2000) are in the discipline of psychology and look at self-determination and how it can lead to wellbeing. Two social science theories of development—Dependency and World Systems—attempt to explain why Indigenous peoples have the economic problems they do, and how to fix them (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Black (1994) looks at which self-determining acts could lead to the wellbeing and sustainability of a Native American tribe. These theories provided an informative lens through which to look at the project data. Additionally, Arctic wellbeing indicators articulate another way to look at the data. These indicators are helpful to a community to allow them see what makes their community a sustainable place with wellbeing.

### ***Capabilities Approach***

The focus on capabilities is based on the approach developed in the 1980s by Amartya Sen, an economist. The theory is primarily an economic development theory, but when focusing on its discussion of self-determination and wellbeing through freedom and values, it is directly applicable to Indigenous people practicing self-determination to improve their wellbeing. The theory looks at the opportunities people have through their *freedom* and how it leads them to act on what they *value* to improve their wellbeing (Panzironi, 2006). While freedom has an *opportunity aspect*, when it is acted on, that is the *process aspect* of freedom. The opportunity is the *ability to achieve* while the process is the *process to pursue achievements*. Given the circumstances people are living under, they have different opportunities to pursue freedom (Sen, 1999). *Unfreedom* can come about from either inadequate processes or opportunities. An example of inadequate processes includes living with violated civil rights. Inadequate opportunities prevent people from achieving what they would like to achieve, and these opportunities can be limited by inadequate processes—taking away freedom of choice.



Additionally, there are *functionings* and *capabilities*. A *functioning* is what someone values doing or being while a *capability* is a freedom a person can draw on to achieve a functioning (Sen, 1999). A person's set of capabilities is determined by their "inheritance and situation" (Gasper, 1997, p. 283). Sen provides examples of capabilities that include "political liberties, the freedom of association, the free choice of occupation, and a variety of economic and social rights" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 36). Nussbaum expands on this and provides a list of ten central human capabilities that are "requirements of a life with dignity;" Sen never endorsed this list (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 40). These are capabilities that are important to all humans and relate to human rights. The capabilities include: (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) senses, imagination and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) affiliation, (8) other species (living and having concern for animals, plants, and nature), (9) play, and (10) control over one's environment (described with detail in Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 41-42). This list is not set in stone but open to revision and thought. Self-determination is thus the *freedom* Indigenous peoples have to choose their *values* and act on them for their *wellbeing* (Panzironi, 2006). This freedom alone "may be directly conducive to well-being" (Sen, 1993, p. 39).

Moses (2000) says, "The demand for the self-determination of Indigenous peoples cannot be abandoned or softened or modified" (p. 163). Indigenous people have the collective capability for self-determination. This means that as a people they are capable of practicing self-determination, defining their communities, practicing their culture, and making "laws and policies that best reflect the values and priorities of the members of" their communities (Murphy, 2014, p. 326). Exercising these capabilities brings "an increased sense of communal self-mastery, which in turn has beneficial effects on the psychological well-being of individual community members" (Murphy, 2014, p. 327). The benefits of self-determination are not just psychological but the Harvard Project has shown self-determination promotes economic development of the tribe as well (Cornell & Kalt, 2007).

As the United States and individual states, such as the State of Alaska, suppress self-determination through a variety of laws, policies, and land claims, wellbeing in Indigenous communities declines and is linked to high rates of suicide, alcohol abuse, and domestic violence (Craig & Hull-Jilly, 2012; Duran & Duran, 1995; Fienup-Riordan, 1990; Kawagley, 2006; Kirmayer et al., 2000; Kirmayer et al., 2003; McEachern et al., 2008). When "self-determination

is denied, the repercussions are felt by its individual members and overall Indigenous communities are destroyed or become vulnerable to destruction” (Dorough, 2014).

The available evidence indicates not only that the suppression of Indigenous forms of self-determination has caused severe and ongoing distress to Indigenous individuals and communities, but also suggests that one of the most promising ways of healing this damage and making real and lasting improvements to the quality of life in Indigenous communities is for Indigenous peoples to regain the collective capability for self-determination that was lost to them as a consequence of colonization and modern state-building practices. (Murphy, 2014, p. 329)

By practicing self-determination Indigenous people can improve their wellbeing (Murphy, 2014).

### *Self-Determination Theory*

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is cross-cultural and looks at both physical and psychological health. SDT begins with seeing people as “by nature active and self-motivated, curious and interested, vital and eager to succeed because success itself is personally satisfying and rewarding” with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2008a, p. 14; Ryan & Sapp, 2007). SDT explores “people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). In SDT, someone with wellbeing is defined as a “full and vitally functioning” human being, with or without happiness, that is in good physical health, interested in their surroundings, confident in their abilities to form and act on their goals, and motivated to continue striving even when facing challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2011, p. 47; Ryan & Sapp, 2007).

Ryan and Deci (2000) identified that people have three psychological basic needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. People need all three of these basic needs fulfilled to grow and integrate through self-motivation or, if deprived, their wellness, integrity, and growth decline (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Sapp, 2007). Additionally, having these needs fulfilled leads to “social development and personal well-being” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). The first need, autonomy, is described in detail below. The second need, relatedness, is feeling connected socially. This comes about from feeling cared for and significant to other people as well as being integrated into larger society (Ryan & Sapp, 2007). The third need, competence, is “feeling able

to attain outcomes and to operate effectively within the environment” (Ryan & Sapp, 2007, p. 76). SDT provides a framework to explore wellbeing through autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

Autonomy is self-regulation “for living in a healthy, full-functioning way” (Ryan & Deci, 2011, p. 49). Autonomy is not selfish individualism or independence in SDT, but rather a willingness (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Ryan & Deci, 2011). This autonomy is essential for the wellbeing of the individual. At its basis, autonomy is chosen actions that the person both values and is interested in, not actions due to motivation by external controls. Autonomy leads to connectedness and community. When considering motivation there are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is when people choose to act with full willingness out of their own interest for their enjoyment. People who are intrinsically motivated act because of the positive feelings they get from their actions (Deci & Ryan, 2008a).

Extrinsic motivation, controlled motivation, can be relatively autonomous but involves taking action to achieve an outcome that is separate from the action being taken; the person feels pressured to act (Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Ryan & Deci, 2011). Extrinsic motivation is further divided into four categories, each becoming more autonomous than the last: (a) external regulation, (b) introjected regulation, (c) identified regulation, and (d) integrated regulation. External regulation is when someone acts to achieve an external reward or to avoid a punishment. Introjected regulation has to do with a person acting on a regulation or demand they see as controlling; people act out of pride, ego-involvement, and to avoid internal feelings of guilt or disapproval (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Ryan & Deci, 2011). Identified regulation is when someone identifies with the regulation and accepts it as their own. They act due to obligation or duty; the person is acting willingly and is thus more autonomous than the last two types of regulations. The most autonomous form of regulation is integrated regulation. In integrated regulation the person acts willingly and mindfully as they identify with the legitimacy of the regulation on their actions. These regulations include rules, norms, and values within their society and culture.

Intrinsic motivation is tied to intrinsic aspirations, which include valuing physical health, contributing to the community, personal growth, and close relationships (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Extrinsic motivation is tied to extrinsic aspirations which include such aspects as wealth, having a nice personal image, and fame. People valuing intrinsic aspirations rated themselves as having

a higher wellbeing than those placing more emphasis on extrinsic aspirations. People who not only pursue but attain intrinsic aspirations benefit their psychological wellbeing as opposed to those attaining extrinsic aspirations who either do not benefit their wellbeing or contribute to their ill-being (Ryan & Deci, 2011).

Stemming from psychology, SDT is an individual approach to wellbeing. It is directly applicable to the interviewees and their perspectives in this project. However, like the Capabilities Approach, it can be applied at the community level, taking the community or tribe as the individual because, like an individual, the tribe conducts autonomous actions, has motivations, and fosters social connections to benefit its wellbeing. Since the beginning of colonization, Indigenous people “have been deprived of the very basic right to determine our future, to choose how we would live, to follow our own laws” (Dodson, 1999, p. 44). Through SDT Indigenous communities can achieve wellbeing when they have an autonomous approach toward self-determination, fulfill intrinsic motivations, foster social connections, and are competent in achieving their goals.

### *Social Science Theories*

Social science literature addresses global inequality of poverty and powerlessness through two main theories: Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory. These theories attempt to explain the causes of social problems and the solutions to those problems. These development theories are a way to get people to change their lives, traditionally stemming from colonial notions in the 1950s of both the colonized, and recently decolonized developing countries, needing to be controlled and assimilated in order to be functional (Cooper & Packard, 1997). Dependency and World Systems Theories see the industrialized economies as harmful to developing countries (Evans & Stephens, 1988). These two theories see exploitative economic ties to developed countries as the reason there are developmental problems in other countries.

Cardoso and Enzo (1979) work from a Dependency Theory perspective. They espouse that the economic, political, and social cannot be separated and must be given historical context. Developing nations cannot be expected to follow the same path as other nations like the U.S. Cardoso and Enzo (1979) also stress that social change and development are complex, as countries are hindered by external exploitation and internally ridden with class struggles. Poor states are impoverished and the wealthy are enriched due to the way poorer states are integrated

into the economic system. Overall, developing nations need to independently work toward economic development, recognizing that both external and internal economic, political, and social factors led to where they are today (Frank, 1966). These developing nations can then pursue their own agendas and be less dictated by external pressures. World Systems Theory, as opposed to Dependency, sees the entire world as one economic system to be analyzed together (Wallerstein, 1976). The system, the capitalism of today, developed out of class dichotomy and economic specialization in the core countries, as opposed to the periphery. Both class and economic specialization were forms of exploitation of the upper classes over the lower classes, as the upper classes controlled access to resources and production and reaped the profits.

Both Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory explain Indigenous political economic problems through over-involvement in modern capitalist economies (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Dependency and World Systems Theories see the global economy as exploiting Indigenous people, and corporate structures “systematically and systemically... [generating]... patterns of marginalisation, impoverishment and disempowerment” (Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 36). These theories blame the system instead of the Indigenous people for the inequality Indigenous peoples live under. The proposed solution is to fix the system to include Indigenous people through their “self-determining autonomy.”

### *Elements of Development Model*

This project is based around self-determining acts leading to sustainability and wellbeing. It is not a development project, economic or otherwise. However, I would be remiss to not mention the Elements of Development Model, developed by the First Nations Institute. This model was established to provide a Native American worldview on development; it demonstrates individual, project, community, and national level Native American interests that lead to wellbeing (Black, 1994). The model also includes ecology in the intersecting axis. The Elements of Development Model provides a good example in which to see where self-determination can take Alaska Native tribes. In the model, development is seen as holistic, sustainable, and resulting in wellbeing.

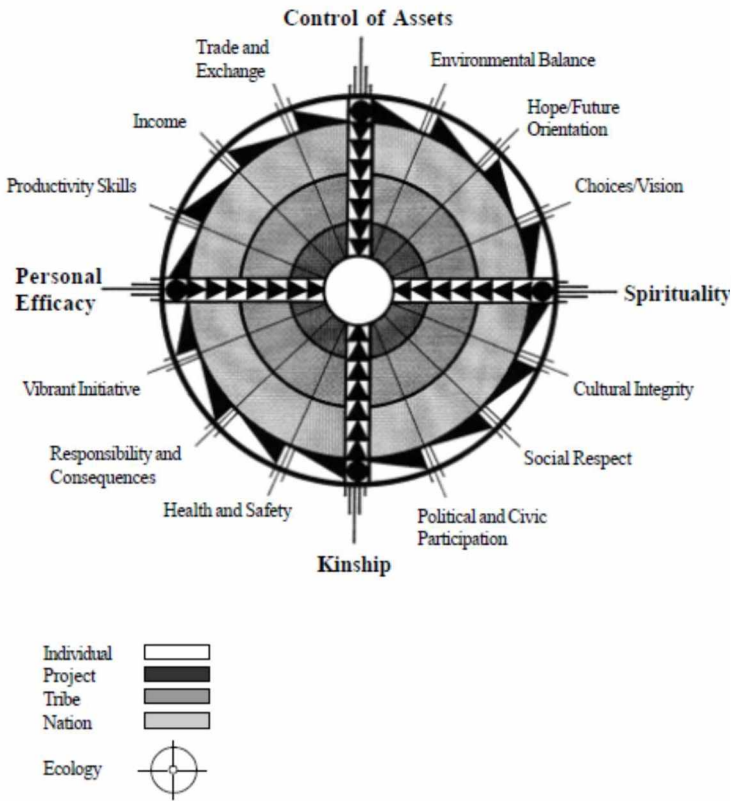


Figure 2. Elements of Development Model (Black, 1994)

There are multiple strengths associated with the Elements of Development Model. It recognizes traditional leadership roles, knowledge systems, etiology, communication systems, and tribal institutions and organizations. Along with recognizing the role of traditional knowledge, lifestyles, and education, the model looks at economics. The model stresses five principles which underlie First Nations and the model's economic philosophy: (a) the development of people themselves through household income activities, (b) win-win economic partnerships and markets, (c) organizational activities to generate money and reduce federal fund dependency, (d) diverse local economy, and (e) encouraging leadership among the people.

The model's four main categories include control of assets, personal efficacy, kinship, and spirituality. These four categories are explained extensively by Black (1994); however, this dissertation will address each briefly. The first category, controlling assets, includes many aspects of control. A few of these are control of Native land, resources, businesses, and the spending of federal money given to tribes. Like all four of the categories, the self-determining act of controlling assets leads to strengthening tribal sovereignty, which underlies the opportunity

for successful Native development. Second, kinship deals with the circulating services and goods. This was initially done in a manner that included reciprocity and sharing wealth for the benefit of the tribe. The system of kinship has been imposed upon by Western models, which are deteriorating the effectiveness of the tribal kinship model.

Third, personal efficacy involves people having a sense of confidence and adds to a strong economy and community by providing human capital. Spirituality is the final and most difficult element to articulate. Broadly, it is where a community gets their vision and sees where they are able and want to go. According to Black, this includes reinstituting adapted Native systems, values, and beliefs. Each of these four categories is divided up into smaller sections comprising a total of 16 elements (see Figure 2). These sixteen elements include the four main elements of control of assets, spirituality, kinship, and personal efficacy along with: (a) environmental balance, (b) hope/future orientation, (c) choices/vision, (d) cultural integrity, (e) social respect, (f) political and civic participation, (g) health and safety, (h) responsibility and consequences, (i) vibrant initiative, (j) productivity skills, (k) income, and (l) trade and exchange. Goals can be articulated from these elements and monitored through indicators (Black, 1994). Indicators allow a community to see if they are approaching their goals and give an avenue in which to document success. The indicators can be quantitative and qualitative. Indicators have to be developed in each community separately to best fit the needs of the community (Smith & Taylor, 2000). As the community develops their own program, they build capacity. Capacity leads to an empowered community, which is vital to community success in development.

The Elements of Development Model looks at the many areas of development that lead to a community being sustainable and self-sufficient with a strong economy, spirituality, environment, culture, and community capacity, wellbeing, as well as numerous other traits mentioned above. It also recognizes that development happens at multiple levels, and all the levels need to be kept in mind: individual, project, tribe, and nation. The model provides a balance. Development needs to promote community capacity, self-efficacy, and a belief and hope in sustainability of the community. Money cannot be the desired result of development. Development needs to be people-centered, sustainable, and self-reliant (Black 1994).

### ***Arctic Wellbeing Indicators***

In Arctic literature, the *Arctic Human Development Report* (AHDR), *Arctic Human Development Report: Regional Processes and Global Linkages* (AHDR-II), and *Arctic Social Indicators* (ASI) and *Arctic Social Indicators II* (ASI II) address indicators of wellbeing. The AHDR looked at three key determinants of wellbeing they find specific to the Arctic: contact with nature, cultural integrity (being part of a viable culture), and fate control (Einarsson et al., 2004). The AHDR adapted these determinates from looking at the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index and what was missing related to Arctic wellbeing. The ASI report took on the task begun by AHDR and developed indicators in six domains: (a) health and population, (b) material wellbeing, (c) education, (d) cultural wellbeing and cultural vitality, (e) contact with nature, and (f) fate control (Larsen, Schweitzer, & Fondahl, 2010). Each of the six domains has indicators that measure development for the domain. The *Arctic Social Indicators II* report followed up the ADHR and ASI. The ASI II report is about using the ASI six domains and indicators to measure the different regions in the Arctic (Larsen et al., 2014).

The AHDR-II talks about studies that were done to measure community wellbeing or quality of life (Larsen & Fondahl, 2014). In the first study, the Canadian Community Well-Being Index used indicators such as census data, education, and income to measure levels of wellbeing over the years. The second study was also out of Canada, the Aboriginal Economic Benchmark Report. This study used over 100 indicators to compare economic development of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Canadians. The third study was the Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic. The study involved a long questionnaire that asked people to self-evaluate different aspects of their lives to assess wellbeing. The study used self-evaluation as the researchers felt that indicators were not capturing the whole story about Arctic Indigenous quality of life and wellbeing. Fourth, the Rethinking the Top of the World: Arctic Security Public Opinion Survey interviewed 9,000 people about their quality of life. Fifth, the North Slope Social Indicator Survey in Alaska looked at wellbeing of residents who may be affected by oil and gas development. These studies utilized census, indicator, and survey data to understand the wellbeing of Arctic residents.

The Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, social science development theories, Elements of Development Model, AHDR, ASI, ASI II, and AHDR-II all provide different methods to measure wellbeing. Some approaches are more subjective while others are



based on statistical indicators. This project employs a subjective approach through interviews and focus groups. I did not go into the project with specific indicators and I did not borrow indicators from other projects. The AHDR and other projects that develop global indicators attempt to have a broad perspective so that they can encompass many communities. However, indicators are very specific to communities and come out of local knowledge (Smith & Taylor, 2000). The indicators developed out of this project are in Chapter IV and they explain what an optimistic future looks like for the community when it has sustainability and wellbeing.

### **Summary**

Ethnographic futures research is a mutually beneficial, participatory, future-focused, and storytelling method that connects well with Indigenous methodologies and working with Alaska Native people. Additionally, my epistemology aids in my data collection, analysis, contextualization of the results, and in respecting the knowledge and culture of the interviewees. Potentially sharing a worldview with the interviewees helps me both to relate to them and understand their comments. It helps in data analysis as well to contextualize the interviews. In this chapter I also reviewed the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, social science development theories, and Elements of Development Model as informative theoretical perspectives for the work (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999).

Using ethnographic futures research brought to light the interviewees' opinions of how to arrive at their most desired community. From this—further explained in the next three chapters on results, IV, V, and VI—I saw that the interviewees described self-determining acts as playing an important role in reaching this most desirable community. Additionally, the interviews showed how these acts lead to a community that the interviewees see as having increased sustainability and wellbeing over the most probable and least desirable community.

## **Chapter IV: Sustainability and Wellbeing**

### **Introduction**

The first question of this dissertation was also the first question I asked the interviewees. I asked them to define sustainability and then wellbeing. Part of the definitions below come from this initial question. A fullness of the definitions came from the interviewee describing the optimistic future as a sustainable place with wellbeing, and the pessimistic future as a place without sustainability and wellbeing. The definitions were elaborated on and described in these scenarios. I want to emphasize that interviewees spoke from their own experiences and knowledge. They do not speak for others, the tribe as a whole, or even the community, but each spoke about their own experiences and their own opinions. This point is especially important to make because some interviewees were Native people and culturally, as explained in Chapter III in the section on Ethical Considerations/Respecting Cultural Knowledge, Indigenous people speak from their own experiences and their own opinions. They do not speak for others. I begin this chapter by explaining how interviewees defined sustainability which is followed by their definition of wellbeing. Table 2 provides a list of sustainability and wellbeing indicators for Niniichik. Then I explain some of the implications of the interviewees' definitions.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability was thoroughly described in the future scenarios as a long-term existence. One interviewee described sustainability as, "Something that's going to, you know, be implemented and then carry on through generations and be here and wherever it goes for those to come. You know, for my kids, and my future grandchildren" (personal communication, interview 6, February 26, 2018). This sentiment of providing for today without harming the ability of future generations to persist echoes the definition of sustainability provided in the Introduction (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Twelve interviewees stressed that for the community to exist in perpetuity and be sustainable, it is important to maintain access to resources and the tools needed to sustain people. This does not just mean environmental resources but the tools people need to exist like jobs, the health clinic, the school, and roads, as well as the fish and environmental abundance. Interviewees value the place they live. One interviewee explained that a sustainable community is able to support a population with employment and provides for families to live there without

feeling they have to move elsewhere to have their needs met. The tribe plays a key role in meeting these needs in the community. Not only are they one of the largest employers in the community but they continue to grow and expand their services, offering more employment. The tribe also has gone to the courts to argue for ANILCA fishing rights for the community to fish in federal waters (*Ninilchik Traditional Council v. Towarak et al.*, 2016). Beyond longevity, sustainability was described through three main areas: the economic, social, and ecological dimensions. These same dimensions were identified in the definition of sustainability provided in the Introduction from Berkes and Folke (1998).

### ***Economy***

Interviewees explained sustainability through different areas in the community; the first is economy. In regards to the economy, sustainability was heavily emphasized as employment and tourism. Twenty-seven of the 30 interviewees, 90%, explained that economy is closely tied to employment, and nineteen interviewees, 63%, tied the economy to tourism. These are practical and daily concerns tending to be at the forefront of community economic need. The school and the Ninilchik Village Tribe are the two largest employers in the community and without them, many people would not be able to stay in Ninilchik. Interviewees emphasized that in a sustainable world the tribe will continue to offer employment through third party revenue ventures and getting grants from the government and running programs. For the tribe to continue these endeavors they are working toward gaining more income from third-party revenue than grants in order to be sustainable if the grant funding changes. Currently the tribe gets third-party revenue through the health clinic, the health club, and the Cheeky Moose laundromat in Anchor Point. The tribe is exploring ways to expand their revenue, and in the optimistic future four people explained this could include animal farming, and five people said the tribe could build a casino. Starting an animal farm is something the tribe has been discussing for a while and they could lease land from the village corporation NNAI to have the animals on.

Jobs are vital to sustaining the economy in Ninilchik, as they will keep young people from moving away and turning the community into a retirement community, something interviewees described as a possible future but not the optimistic future. Instead, a sustainable community in the future would have youth and young families throughout the population. Eighteen interviewees, 60%, emphasized that youth in their late teens will leave and not come

back unless there are jobs available for them. They explained that Ninilchik needs to create jobs so that these young people can return after getting an outside education and be a central part of the sustainability of the community. A sustainable Ninilchik has a broad age range of people who want to live in Ninilchik from retirees to young families with children for the school. One interviewee explained that having a strong retiree population is vital as it gives Ninilchik an economic base but there needs to be a mix in the population of retirees and families.

Looking at the efforts the tribe is involved in through their grants and third-party revenue, it is clear that Ninilchik is able to continue to develop along these lines identified by the interviewees. As of the community meetings in January 2019, since the interviews in February through April 2018, the tribe has already hired more people at the clinic, offering employment to people with higher education degrees in the medical field. These job opportunities provide circumstances for younger people to move back to the community with their families and utilize their education. Young people who seek higher education after high school do have the opportunity to use their degrees in working for the tribe running grants, working in the clinic, working for behavioral health or even working for the borough school.

Sustainability revolves around the economy and there being money for people to make and live on. Tourism is one way that money comes into Ninilchik. Growth in ecotourism is also important as it capitalizes on the beauty of the area and brings tourists into the environment on the terms set by the community so that things are not destroyed. Interviewees explained that there could be rafting on the Kasilof and Ninilchik rivers or hiking trails in the Caribou Hills. Six interviewees, 20%, mentioned oil and gas exploration and development another source of jobs and economic prosperity. However, three interviewees, 10%, specifically identified oil and gas development as a negative thing in the community due to the wells being drilled closer and closer to the community. These people worried about pollution and the pads being eyesores. Oil and gas development is a contentious issue in the community and it was not thoroughly explored in this project.

Twenty-two interviewees, 73%, identified that people in the community need to start more small businesses as well, such as plumbing, hair cutting, small engine shop, or an auto shop. Two interviewees explained that one way to accomplish this is by reducing the rent of the vacant buildings along the highway so that people can afford to start businesses in these buildings. Additionally, two interviewees explained that a specific project that will benefit the

sustainability is the renovation of the Inlet View restaurant turning it into a restaurant, hotel, and RV park. On a larger scale, three interviewees pointed out the necessity for the state and federal governments to maintain strong and balanced budgets to support the community.

The community of Ninilchik is approximately 39 miles from Soldotna and 37 miles from Homer, communities with larger populations and more services. Due to this distance, starting small businesses in Ninilchik is a viable idea to build the economy and to create jobs for people to serve the community members in the area. An auto shop actually in Ninilchik would allow people to get their cars worked on locally. It would be convenient and also economical to cut out the need to tow their cars over 30 miles to the nearest auto shop if one was available in town. A small engine shop was another idea expressed by an interviewee. This shop could service snow machines, boat engines, and ATVs. People living in Ninilchik, a rural community, have many of these machines and having a small engine shop to service them locally would prevent the need to travel so far for service and also create more jobs in Ninilchik, building the local economy.

### *Social*

The second area of sustainability identified was the social aspect, that the whole community is important in its sustainability. This includes the tribe, the fairgrounds, the school, the retirees, the Elders, and all parts of Ninilchik. Participants explained that part of being sustainable is not being overpopulated but having a population that is a mix of families and retirees so that the school can flourish. Maintaining a school and educating community members was important to all 30 interviewees. Fifteen participants, 50%, included the need for more vocational education. Additionally, valuing early childhood development and investing in early childhood would create sustainability and lift up the whole community as these young people grow to be contributing members of society. Through parenting classes, preschools, after school programs, engaging youth away from video games, and the teen center, this youth investment builds young people with self-esteem and high education. Twelve interviewees, 40%, emphasized that youth need to be taught life skills as well such as cooking and financing.

Interviewees described ways to make the community more attractive to draw people to Ninilchik and to keep people there. Being able to maintain population in the community was key in interviews as the school is often threatened with closure due to low numbers. This is a common problem throughout rural Alaska, and schools are having to close if they have fewer

than ten students (Hanlon, 2017). Ninilchik currently has close to 100 students in their kindergarten to twelfth grade school. The whole school will not likely close but two participants said it could be turned into a kindergarten through sixth or eighth grade instead of going through high school.

Youth are an important aspect of the community in Ninilchik. The tribe takes youth education and investment seriously and runs the Youth Education Leadership Program (YELP) and also has an employee who works specifically in youth outreach. They also have a grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to reduce suicide and substance abuse. Youth programming and engagement are ways in which the tribe utilizes the grant for youth wellbeing. I further explain the tribe's involvement with the youth in the Youth Engagement section in Chapter V.

According to interviewees, in a sustainable Ninilchik, there will be continued growth in medical care and behavioral healthcare. Twenty-three participants, 77%, talked about the health clinic growing. Nine people interviewed, 30%, explained that the behavioral health services will also grow. Health promoting behaviors like the health fair and weight loss programs, run through the clinic, are important in keeping the population healthy, explained interviewees. Participants said it is also important that drug and alcohol use are addressed in order to decrease the usage and the problems associated with using such as theft. Two interviewees mentioned that the community has multiple twelve-step program meetings that people attend and these are beneficial to the community.

The tribe is actively growing the health clinic in the community. They are continuing to hire more employees and offer more services at the clinic. During the interviews in February to April 2018, interviewees described not having a person specializing in psychiatric medicine to prescribe for community members. As of January 2019 the tribe has hired someone to meet this need. It is important to note that having a person to prescribe psychiatric medication was a part of the interviewees' optimistic future, not the most likely future. So, the tribe is already acting in ways that are leading to the optimistic future of the community, employing self-determining actions for wellbeing.

Interviewees emphasized the importance of continuing their culture and lifestyle, whether it be Native, Russian, or other forms of culture. Cornassel (2008) emphasized this same concept of cultural sustainability and it is included in the definition of sustainability in the Introduction.

Part of being sustainable is maintaining this culture and having pride in the community. This includes getting people more involved in the community. One indicator of sustainability was to have people taking better care of the dump. There would also be neighbors getting to know each other, more community spirit, continued fundraising to help one another, volunteering, and the start of a mentoring program for youth and young adults. Community spirit keeps the community going and a sustainable Ninilchik is tightknit with people supporting each other and taking care of one another. Putting in parks and trails allows community members to enjoy the space and see each other. There is a large area of land currently in between tribal buildings where interviewees identified as a place to build a park. There is social, household, mental, and emotional sustainability as well, one interviewee noted. People can become more involved through community activities, youth engagement, and the churches coming together. One suggested activity was community cross-country skiing where people would bus out together to the Caribou Hills to ski and end with a bonfire.

In regards to the government, one interviewee cautioned that the federal government needs to maintain its strength and not collapse. Another interviewee had this same perspective on a local scale when thinking about the history of the tribe and some of the arguments that have divided its leadership. Currently, the board has strong leadership and that needs to be able to continue without fractioning. The tribe serves the whole community and 24 people interviewed, 80%, emphasized that the tribe is important to the wellbeing of Ninilchik. These people discussed the importance of the tribe in great detail without being asked directly if the tribe was important to the sustainability of the community. One interviewee noted specifically that the tribe makes the community a better place that is sustainable and values wellbeing through programs such as the clinic, behavioral healthcare, and outreach.

Throughout the 30 interviews, interviewees discussed social, household, mental, emotional, and many other important aspects of sustainability. Sixteen interviewees, 53%, explained that sustainability means the community is able to support itself, where people can provide for themselves and their family through gardening and subsistence. A sustainable Ninilchik has adequate food for everyone. Two interviewees mentioned that if a disaster were to occur, Ninilchik is a safe place to be as people can provide for themselves off of the land.

Doing things together as a community was seen as an important aspect of social sustainability. Building community spirit and maintaining the close-knit aspect of the small

community was desirable to the interviewees. People help each other out in the community through fundraising and donating food and goods to one another when people are in need. This connectivity is explained in depth in Chapter V in the Helping Each Other and Community-Wide Events sections. Interviewees explain the importance of starting a mentoring program in the community. In one focus group the participants discussed that the tribe could start a role of community organizer for the community. This person could organize the mentoring program and schedule community-wide activities for the community. This could also be a role of the tribal outreach program that currently exists.

### ***Ecological***

Interviewees detailed that ecological sustainability involves subsistence and being able to get food from the land such as fish, moose, clams, berries, healthy soil for gardening, and timber as well for firewood and building. Being able to subsist means more to Native people than only gathering food, it is an integral part of identity and culture that is a part of wellbeing (RuralCAP, 1994). Natural resources are important to sustain Ninilchik, as a large part of the community depends on fish for subsistence, commercial fishing, and charters. Avoiding harming natural resources and managing them in a way that allows them to flourish is important. Sixteen people, 53%, discussed the necessity of involving local perspectives in management. “Community sustainability is having enough resources for residents to be healthy, resources that are renewable or at least if they're not renewable are valued and respected in a way that they'll be sustainable” (personal communication, interview 21, March 13, 2018). Participants are conscious of what needs to be done to maintain the beautiful environment of Ninilchik. One interviewee explained that gardening was a part of keeping historic Ninilchik sustainable, and it can be today as well. Local food production and starting a food bank were other ideas to help end hunger in the community. Interviewees explained that homes can be heated with renewable resources like alder wood, solar, water, or wind energy as well to save money and provide a sustainable means of heat.

Using renewable energy was discussed throughout the interviews. One interviewee stressed that people will keep burning wood but they can switch from burning spruce, which grows more slowly, to burning alder which grows quickly and can be harvested sustainably. Another interviewee suggested people get personal wind mills to augment the energy used in



their homes. This suggestion may be difficult to achieve as buying individual windmills is expensive and although the energy produced would be cheaper, it would take many years to pay off the wind mill. Due to this expense, other interviewees suggested the tribe start a windmill farm with their regional corporation Cook Inlet Regional Incorporated (CIRI) in the Caribou Hills and the whole community can then utilize the wind power. Tidal power was also discussed in the interviews. Interviewees explained that tidal power has been discussed for many years in the community due to the extreme tides Ninilchik has. However, interviewees explained this is not yet considered a viable option for the power companies in the area and it has not been acted on.

### ***Sustainability Summary***

Self-sufficiency was very important to the interviewees. People talked about subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering as ways to provide for their families. They put value on Ninilchik as a place of safety and abundance. Subsistence gardening was another way discussed to have fresh produce. One interviewee mentioned the importance of having a root cellar so that the abundance from gardening can be stored and accessed year-round. Self-sufficiency was seen as a part of sustainability by the interviewees. This self-sufficiency was part of the local culture and lifestyle that interviewees wanted to see continue in the optimistic future. Self-sufficiency manifested in many different ways in the interviews from providing for one's family to the community taking care of its own members. Overall, it was a clear important value to the interviewees.

According to the research participants, a sustainable community is composed of many interwoven parts, including the economic, social, and ecological, to ensure the longevity of the community. Interviewees utilized this definition of sustainability when describing their optimistic future, a future community that is sustainable has these attributes described above, many which are currently missing in Ninilchik, which residents worry in a pessimistic or most likely future will continue to be missing, creating a community that is not sustainable. The next question I asked in the interview was for interviewees to define wellbeing.

## Wellbeing

Tagalik's (2010) definition of wellbeing (including mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, cultural, and social health which fulfill needs of identity, purpose, and belonging) was encompassed by the interviewees. Respondents also echoed Tagalik (2015) when they explained that there are individual, community, and cultural aspects of wellbeing that are inseparable. People defined sustainability first and then wellbeing. To have wellbeing it was important to be sustainable to four of the interviewees, 13%. This demonstrates how closely tied together sustainability and wellbeing are in the community of Ninilchik. The interviewees described the same three aspects of sustainability—economic, social, and ecological—in their definition of wellbeing. Their optimistic futures used these definitions in explaining what Ninilchik would be like in 20 years. The economic, social, and ecological aspects of sustainability and wellbeing create a whole community that is able to thrive. Alongside the definition of sustainability two interviewees described thinking of coming generations as important to wellbeing. One interviewee had a comprehensive definition of wellbeing, "I think it would be lots of different parts health, mental wellness, nutrition, families, economy, so nobody living in poverty, everyone having access to education, everyone having access to healthcare, access to jobs" (personal communication, interview 21, March 13, 2018).

Another interviewee emphasized that the soul is an aspect of wellbeing also:

I think wellbeing is body, mind, and soul. And for me I think at the end of the day if you're strong with your body but you're mentally toxic or your soul is longing in ways, you're not going to be healthy overall even if you're actively healthy in your physical self... And if we stop growing then we're not actively participating in that in our lives. If we think we've already accomplished that and we're not actually, you know, having daily mantras or talking to, you know, God or whoever your higher power is or that aspect or you're not sharing, you know, your table with friends or family and you're not participating in that kind of lifestyle where you're not giving it away then internally you're just going to be lonely. So you can be as healthy as you want to be but if it's not body and mind too and soul then it doesn't matter. (personal communication, interview 30, April 11, 2018)

Wellbeing according to the interviewees included health as well, something that mentioned in sustainability only in regards to the health clinic. This was not just physical health but also spiritual, emotional, and mental health.

### ***Economy and Ecological***

Like sustainability, the economy and natural environment was considered an important part of wellbeing by the research participants. Seven interviewees, 23%, included the importance of being employed and getting a paycheck to support themselves as part of wellbeing. One interviewee talked about the tribe and economic growth of the tribe leading to wellbeing in the town through the different grants and programs the tribe runs. Similar to sustainability, wellbeing was linked to culture and subsistence. Interviewees described that wellbeing is tied to spiritual fulfillment met by a subsistence lifestyle—maintaining subsistence opportunities and continuing the culture and way of life. Three interviewees, 10%, stressed the importance of beautification of the community to improve wellbeing. Looking at trash and old broken-down vehicles does not lead to wellbeing in their perspectives. Seeing old run-down cars and broken vehicles demonstrates that things are not well cared for and this is not a positive atmosphere, especially for young people, according to one interviewee.

One focus group participant described how they once tried to start a beautification project in the community but they could not get enough volunteers. According to this participant there are many needs in the community, including a food bank and housing, and some of the needs take precedence over beautification goals. Additionally, the town is small and the group of people that volunteers to help out tends to be the same people so people get tired of volunteering. However, this participant still spoke of the importance of beautification to improve tourism and the local economy. Beautification was discussed in the interviews as well. I do think a beautification project could be successful in Ninilchik if enough people get on board to volunteer and help out. The project could be framed as an economic stimulus plan to boost tourism and the local economy.

### ***Social***

The social aspect of wellbeing was considered by interviewees as well. Wellbeing is seen by the participants as people being happy, people taking care of one another, people being

content with their lives and what they have and getting along with one another. In Ninilchik people help each other through fundraising when someone is in need. Participation in community events is another part of social wellbeing. One interviewee talked about a community with wellbeing as one that makes decisions together and solves current problems for future generations. In Ninilchik people see connection as a part of wellbeing and being aware of the needs different people in the community have. It was described as:

We all say hi to each other in the grocery store. We know who had a baby last week and who's getting married next summer. And we know who died and who's bringing that family lunch tomorrow because they're grieving. (personal communication, interview 16, March 7, 2018)

According to one interviewee, wellbeing involves people teaching each other. It is positivity and mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical health, eating well, socializing, attending community activities, and exercising. One interviewee describes wellbeing as being "...at peace with yourself. You have to be comfortable with your surroundings, comfortable with what you're doing. You have to feel safe" (personal communication, interview 12, March 1, 2018). Starting a mentoring program in the community was one way to create that feeling of inclusiveness and teaching. This is further described in Chapter V in the section on Helping Each Other.

The tribe plays a large role in community wellbeing. The housing program the tribe runs through the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) allows people who are not able to afford it to own a home and have a low-interest or interest free mortgage. One interviewee explained that people get self-worth from being able to pay for their own housing and live in a nice home providing for their family. Two interviewees explained that the health club is important to wellbeing; it is operated by the tribe. The tribe operates the health clinic as well, and people in the field of health promote the wellbeing of the community according to interviewees. Participants described that the community needs to have services for the populace to have wellbeing, the senior center, health and wellness club, and others. One interviewee explained the importance of the Elders' lunch on the tribe holds on Mondays. This gives Elders the chance to meet and reminisce, get a good meal, and get to take leftovers home. This same interviewee explained that wellbeing is the tribal preschool as well as the educational scholarship the tribe offers. Another interviewee said that having a good education situation is important to wellbeing, one without bullying.

The tribe is very active with the Elders in the community just as they are with the youth. They have an Elder Outreach Program Coordinator. This person plans and cooks the Elders luncheon each Monday. They also visit the homes of Elders to bring them food if they were not able to attend the luncheon and help them in their homes. The Coordinator works with youth as well to teach them subsistence activities and how to process that subsistence food, such as cleaning and canning fish, which they then give to the Elders. The Coordinator plans trips clam digging across the inlet for youth and they learn to process the clams and give those to the Elders as well. This youth-Elder involvement is an important aspect of tribal culture and a value they are teaching the youth.

### ***Wellbeing Summary***

Like sustainability, respondents described wellbeing as composed of economic, social, and ecological components. Additionally, the idea that this generation takes care of things for future generations was also prevalent. The definitions of sustainability and wellbeing also involved feeling safe and comfortable in one's surroundings in the community. There was a mixing of the definitions of sustainability and wellbeing in the interviews as the interviewees see the two as closely related. Defining wellbeing directly after defining sustainability could also result in some of the mixing of definitions.

In contrast to sustainability, the definition for wellbeing included health, something that in the definition of sustainability was only mentioned in regards to the health clinic. When discussing health and wellbeing, interviewees described it as not just physical but included mental, emotional, and spiritual health as well. Wellbeing included self-worth as well, something community members are able to get through paying for their own housing or that tribal Elders experience when attending the Elders' luncheon on Mondays where they reminisce with each other.

### **Using Indicators**

As explained in Chapter III, four prominent Arctic reports brought forth the importance of Arctic indicators. The *Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR)* (2004), *Arctic Human Development Report: Regional Processes and Global Linkages (AHDR-II)* (2014), and *Arctic Social Indicators (ASI)* (2010) and *ASI II* (2014) address indicators. The AHDR called for a

development of Arctic indicators around the three domains of fate control, cultural integrity, and contact with nature, and the ASI followed up with developing a list of Arctic specific indicators of wellbeing based on those three domains combined with material wellbeing, education, and health/demography from the UN Human Development Index. The ASI developed lists of indicators under each domain. The ASI-II presented case studies based around these indicators. In the AHDR-II the authors gave an update to the AHDR on Arctic human development utilizing in part the indicators that had developed through the ASI in 2010 since the original AHDR in 2004. These reports provide examples of how sustainability indicators are being used in the Arctic.

Indicators are a way to comprehensively understand how the interviewees described sustainability and wellbeing. They need to be developed by each community as they are specific to the community and are developed through local knowledge (Smith & Taylor, 2000). Ultimately, indicators are “the most effective tools for facilitating community sustainability and development” (Smith & Taylor, 2000, p. 187). They are useful in governance and developing policy (Pires & Fidélis, 2014). Indicators can direct the government in how to achieve sustainable development for the community. The Ninilchik Traditional Council, the local tribal government, can utilize these indicators for community sustainable development (see Table 2).

Participants identified sustainability and wellbeing indicators relevant to Ninilchik. Interviewees see a sustainable community with wellbeing when these indicators are present. Not all of these indicators are present now. The indicators of sustainability and wellbeing provided in Table 2 give the reader an opportunity to picture what that community would look like in year 2038 as a sustainable well place.

Table 2. Identified Indicators of Sustainability and Wellbeing

Economic	Social	Ecological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs/employment</li> <li>• Oil and gas development</li> <li>• Growth in small businesses</li> <li>• Inlet View redeveloped</li> <li>• Reduced rent for vacant buildings</li> <li>• Return of strong charter, commercial, and guides due to fisheries</li> <li>• Growth in tourism/ecotourism</li> <li>• Less economic disparity</li> <li>• Tribe less dependent on grants and more revenue</li> <li>• New cannery opens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community care of the dump</li> <li>• Increased affordable housing</li> <li>• Controlled growth of population</li> <li>• Growing transportation (BUMPS service)</li> <li>• Parks and trails</li> <li>• Neighbors getting to know each other</li> <li>• Community Spirit</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Early childhood investment</li> <li>• Quality education system with daycare, preschools, and school</li> <li>• Vocational education</li> <li>• Teaching youth life skills</li> <li>• Volunteerism</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• More tribal members turning out to vote and attend board meetings</li> <li>• Access to quality healthcare, including EMS/fire and behavioral health</li> <li>• Health promoting behaviors, (e.g., health fair and weight loss program)</li> <li>• Thriving retirement and Elder populations</li> <li>• Youth returning to the community to live</li> <li>• Wider availability of natural gas</li> <li>• Cultural and language development and preservation with museum/cultural center</li> <li>• Churches working together, including Russian Orthodox church</li> <li>• Community Activities</li> <li>• Youth engagement</li> <li>• Strong tribal leadership</li> <li>• Less drug and alcohol use</li> <li>• Maintain subsistence culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased counts of fish, especially kings and halibut, clams, crab, abalone, shrimp, moose, and caribou</li> <li>• More berries</li> <li>• Community using renewable energy</li> <li>• Ocean not polluted</li> <li>• Healthier soil</li> <li>• Sustainable management</li> <li>• More people raising animals like goats/chickens and gardening</li> <li>• Local production of food to eliminate hunger (start a food bank)</li> </ul>

The definitions of sustainability and wellbeing provided in the sections above and through the indicators, fall into the *Domains of Northern Wellbeing* (Kimmel, 2018). There are five domains in this model. The model works like a hierarchy of needs, building up from basic needs to a fully vibrant community. The first domain is access to basic needs and it includes housing, health care, jobs, public safety, and education, all things identified by the interviewees. The second domain is being healthy and connected through communication and transportation networks, parks and trails, with access to energy and food security. This domain was identified by interviewees in the optimistic future but contains things the community does not have now such as a park or a network of trails. The third domain is engaged and educated. This includes a strong education system and government. Ninilchik has three different pre-K options in the community but is not able to offer as much to high school students with so few students in the classroom. The local government is the tribal government and they work to be representative of the entire community, meeting the needs of everyone. The fourth category is innovative and entrepreneurial. This is something interviewees identified in the optimistic future of the community. Right now the community is working on getting faster internet, more employment opportunities, and building small businesses. The final category is community, where the people are self-reliant, connected to place, and vibrant culturally. This is the Ninilchik described in the optimistic future, a place with sustainability and wellbeing and community spirit. This model is unique to northern communities and the interview data fits into it well. The hierarchy of the model shows community achievements as Ninilchik aspires to reach the optimistic future.

### **Implications of Sustainability and Wellbeing Indicators**

The sustainability and wellbeing indicators identified by the interviewees provide a list of what the community looks like in the optimistic future. Right now the community does not encompass all the indicators but the list demonstrates what community members want in Ninilchik. When the pessimistic future was described, nearly all these indicators were lacking. It was important to interviewees that the community develop and have these indicators in order to achieve the optimistic future. The next steps are for people in Ninilchik to come together around these indicators to try to make them a reality for their community through self-determining actions. These actions are described in detail in Chapter V. A Ninilchik with all these indicators present is a sustainable place with wellbeing.



This list of indicators provides a starting place for the community to work from in conducting further research and community development. Table 2 is a list of what the community wants. Chapter V describes what the community needs to do to get these indicators. The next steps are to come up with how to conduct these projects in Chapter V in order to make the indicators a reality. The indicators are specific to the community of Ninilchik. This makes them relevant to the tribe, the interviewees, and the community. The list of indicators includes both sustainability and wellbeing indicators as the definitions were thoroughly mixed in the interviews.

Participants tended to mix the definitions of sustainability and wellbeing through the interview process. This mixing could be due to defining wellbeing right after defining sustainability. The two words are similar and defining one right after the other could cause interviewees to conflate the definitions. Additionally, the mixing could demonstrate that the two terms are closely related and that demonstrates how important sustainability is to wellbeing of the community. Four interviewees, 13%, specifically called out that sustainability was necessary to have wellbeing. I think that the definitions were similar in the interviews due to both defining them one after the other and due to sustainability being important to the wellbeing of Ninilchik. Additionally, the terms are related and have to do with a community that is doing well. Both of these factors contributed to the definitions sharing social, economic, and ecological components as well as carrying a definition of longevity of the community.

## **Summary**

The first question I asked in the interviews was how the interviewee defined sustainability and then wellbeing. The definitions contain multiple parts. The definition of sustainability included components of longevity, caring for future generations, value of place, self-sufficiency, as well as economic, social, and ecological components. The definition for wellbeing was similar to sustainability but also included all aspects of self-worth and health from physical to mental, emotional, and spiritual. The definitions are detailed as they are composed of not only answers to my initial question, but descriptions of an optimistic future with sustainability and wellbeing, and a pessimistic future that lacks sustainability and wellbeing.

Sustainability and wellbeing are displayed in Table 2 in the form of indicators. These indicators are useful to identify what Ninilchik looks like when it has sustainability and

wellbeing and can be used by the community in order to achieve their optimistic future. In the next chapter I look at the self-determining actions that could be taken by individuals, the community, and the tribe to achieve a community with sustainability and wellbeing. The chapter explains self-determining actions that lead to a community with sustainability and wellbeing in order to avoid the pessimistic future and surpass the most likely future.



## **Chapter V: Self-determining Actions for a Future with Sustainability and Wellbeing**

### **Introduction**

The tribe and I wanted to conduct this project to understand how community members utilize self-determination to achieve sustainability and wellbeing in the Ninilchik Village Tribe community of Ninilchik, Alaska. We set out to learn how self-determination could address challenges to sustainability and wellbeing faced by an Indigenous community. I spoke to Ninilchik community members about their optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely futures. We discussed how they would reach the optimistic future and what they personally would do to make the optimistic future the one that will occur. These interviews resulted in comprehensive pictures of what each possible future for Ninilchik could be like. The perspectives are detailed, ranging from infrastructure to education and natural resources and many additional aspects of the community. Each aspect of the optimistic future that was identified was tied to a reason why it promoted sustainability and/or wellbeing in the future. Interviewees provided examples of how to achieve the optimistic future through personal, community, and tribal efforts.

This chapter addresses the second question of this dissertation: how do Ninilchik community members utilize self-determination to achieve sustainability and wellbeing? Interviewees explained roles for themselves, the tribe, and the community in conducting self-determining acts toward achieving community sustainability and wellbeing in the optimistic future. When describing the pessimistic and most likely futures, interviewees expressed that community members would take no action to make improvements. Three interviewees, 10%, saw community members in these futures as apathetic and not caring as opposed to the engaged members in their optimistic futures. This led to the pessimistic and most likely futures both being rather negative and not ideal for the sustainability and wellbeing of the community when compared to the optimistic future. Interviewees based this perspective on their perceptions of the community in its current state with the loss of jobs since the cannery burned down. They also saw the community not doing well in the pessimistic and most likely futures due to increased drug use and associated thieving. The optimistic future was full of self-determining acts. This chapter explains the different self-determining actions and how they lead to wellbeing and sustainability.

Additionally, part of the interview was to describe how to achieve the optimistic future and what, personally, the interviewee would do to get to that future. After this question the

interviewee would go into detail about how to achieve the goals set out for the optimistic future, such as the mentorship program. The focus groups also explored how to achieve different things the interviewees have identified as part of the optimistic future (e.g., a harbor, a mentorship program, etc.). Both tribal and community self-determination were listed in much more detail than individual self-determination as the interviewees saw an optimistic community in a future where people are working together and the tribe is strong. The interviewees explained that sustainability and wellbeing cannot be achieved by one person alone or a strong leader; the optimistic future needs the involvement of everyone.

To begin, one interviewee stressed that to create sustainable positive changes in Ninilchik, the community has to be ready for change:

Everybody's not going to advocate for everything but if you had your subgroups advocating for each thing, the people at the clinic are like "healthcare." The people at the school are like "education." The people at the tribe are like "traditions." If all those different groups were advocating for those things, they would be sustainable. And they would put in their time and their energy into improving those things so it's a matter of getting them engaged and you have to do that, I think, through the change process that the tribe could certainly help with before it moved forward to providing the services. So, engagement I guess equals sustainability equals wellness... Increase engagement to increase sustainability to ensure wellness. (personal communication, interview 21, March 13, 2018)

This perspective of engagement leading to sustainability and ultimately wellness was prevalent in the interviews. When interviewees were asked how to achieve the optimistic future they identified self-determining actions of individual, community, and tribal engagement leading to a sustainable and well community, such as building a new harbor or working on community parks and trails.

### **Individuals Utilizing Self-determination**

When regarding their personal role in the future, 27 interviewees, 90%, explained how they would be engaged in the optimistic future while three other interviewees, 10%, described themselves as unable to do anything or wanting other people to do something instead of themselves. Even those interviewees who did not identify themselves as being actively engaged

emphasized engagement as key to achieving the optimistic aims, just that other people would be involved in the engagement. Multiple interviewees were surprised by the question of what they personally would do and said that they had never thought about what their role in achieving an optimistic future would be. One interviewee said, “[The interview] helped me realize that I'm not doing anything. I'm just kind of there” (personal communication, interview 27, March 21, 2018). This question about one’s personal role in the optimistic future was a form of motivation that this interviewee interpreted as the need to become more involved in the community immediately, recognizing that their engagement plays a role in achieving the optimistic future.

### *Engaged*

Three interviewees explained that their level of engagement in the community and commitment is based on the time they have, and they do not have time outside of their family responsibilities. Employment schedules take up a lot of people’s time along with being a parent or grandparent. Grandparents care for their grandchildren so their children can work without needing a daycare. Three of the interviewees emphasized that they could volunteer more and go to community meetings and workshops if they had the time. People do feel they help by donating and going to fundraisers so they still are active participants in the community even if they are unable to volunteer or go to community meetings. Even people who have moved away will still donate during a fundraiser to support their home community.

Other interviewees are involved in the community through a variety of different ways. Three interviewees emphasized the importance of being a role model to others through gardening, farming, and recycling. These people emphasized the importance of leading by example and demonstrating to others how to live sustainably in the community. One interviewee explained that gardening has historically been important in the community since Russian settlers moved to the area in the early 1800s. People grow subsistence gardens and there is also a community garden. Another interviewee explained that the tribe first put in a community garden in 2012 by the Ninilchik Senior Center and moved it in 2015 to clinic property. Any community resident can utilize this garden. No less than half the food goes to the tribal Elders’ luncheon on Mondays. In one focus group a participant explained that the garden is currently not being used much and it has a lot of potential. This person sees the garden as a way to bring people together for unity in purpose. Gardens teach people how to provide for themselves. One interviewee who

helped establish the garden elaborated to explain that people also need to learn how to store, can, and freeze vegetables for the winter. They said that some locals have root cellars and this is one way to store vegetables in the winter. This same interviewee explained the importance of small family farming. Not many people farm animals in the community but some raise cows, chickens, ducks, goats, and pigs. This is another way to be self-sustaining, which is a very important value in the community. Another interviewee emphasized their role in recycling and how it also promotes sustainability. There is recycling at the local dump and initiatives in the community to promote recycling.

People are also engaged in the community through work with youth. Seven interviewees, 23%, explained that they are engaged through mentorship with youth whether through the teen center, the school, the tribe, or just on their own. Two retirees explained that they devote a lot of their time to raising their grandchildren and caring for them while their parents are at work. Involvement with the youth is seen as very important in the community to help keep the youth out of trouble and away from drugs. The teen center, organized through the tribe, is a space in the community center upstairs for youth to do homework and spent supervised time with one another. It has couches, computers, food, a pool table, video games, and a foosball table as well as other games. Three participants explained that the teen center also holds informational sessions on different life skills (e.g., credit cards, drug awareness, and safe sex), movies, and coordinates Future Farmers of America (FFA) activities. Currently not all youth can go there because some have to catch the bus home to Kasilof or Anchor Point after school and would not have a ride home from the teen center otherwise, one interviewee explained. Another participant thought that some parents could not afford the gas to bring their children to and from the teen center. They suggested that the tribal bus system, BUMPS, could possibly be able to provide rides for the youth. This was seen as creating a community with sustainability and wellbeing in the optimistic future. Another suggestion was to move the teen center to its own building closer to the school for easier access.

Two of the 30 interviewees are volunteer fire fighters for Ninilchik Emergency Services (NES). One interviewee explained that volunteer fire fighters are needed in the community as the positions are not paid, and after getting training through Ninilchik some people move to another community to get a job as a paid fire fighter, so the Ninilchik fire fighters are always in need of more volunteers. Interviewees worry about the NES in Ninilchik and in the pessimistic future,

they talked about no longer having NES due to lack of volunteers and funding. However, in describing the optimistic future, one interviewee explained that there will be paid positions for Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and fire fighters. They did not say where the money will come from, but NES does do fundraisers throughout the year.

Four tribal members said they plan to become more engaged with the tribe. These interviewees, all of whom are under 40 years old, said they wanted to become more involved with the tribe and do more through their tribal jobs. One said they would possibly run for the board. Two interviewees in positions of leadership in the tribe expressed excitement about younger people getting more involved in the tribe and providing input. One of these leaders is looking to pass on their knowledge and then move on from their position, leaving younger people in charge.

Community forums offer another space for people to be involved in the community. Three interviewees said they need to speak up more and share their opinions and ideas about the future with others and that community forums are one space to do this. The tribe holds community forums on different issues that are important to the community. On a larger scale, one of these people said they need to not only be active in the community, but politically writing to their state representatives as well. They noted that the community of Ninilchik needs support from the borough and the state and writing to representatives and those in leadership could be helpful.

Another way to be active in the community is through the local churches. Two interviewees identified themselves as very much involved with their local churches. There are many different denominations of churches in Ninilchik. The Russian Orthodox Church is the oldest and is a tourist destination for pictures. This church has an elderly congregation. When looking at the pessimistic future, interviewees stated that the Russian Orthodox Church would no longer have attendants but would just be a tourist destination. Yet, in the optimistic future interviewees see the congregation will grow through younger members who have been baptized, returning to services and attending classes on the religion. Since the interviews in 2018, the Russian Orthodox Church has gotten a new priest; in 2018 they did not have a priest. This helped to renew the church. One interviewee sees that in the optimistic future the churches in the community “would work together for the common good” (personal communication, interview 15, March 6, 2018).



One interviewee explained that they will push for involvement and engagement in order to help the community:

So for me, the way I look at things is, I'm going to keep pushing for the things that are going to be best for what I think is the ultimate best scenario for the community... You know, and I want to work with people that want to do those kinds of things. I want to work with people that want to see better outcomes for our Elders. I want to work with people that want to have better outcomes for not just our Elders but for the people in their forties, you know... You know, I don't care if it hasn't worked 150 times in the past. I want to try again. You know, I think the worst thing you can do is give up hope. (personal communication, interview 30, April 11, 2018)

Being engaged as individuals helps bring sustainability and wellness to the community.

Engagement is necessary to reach the optimistic future as people need to be involved in actually doing the self-determining actions. When people are individually engaged they set an example for other members in the community and that engagement can spread to others, inspiring them to become involved as well.

### ***Not Engaged***

I was not expecting to hear the perspective that interviewees felt they were not responsible in helping the community achieve the optimistic future. However, three interviewees, 10%, did feel this way but emphasized that engagement by others is necessary in reaching the optimistic future with sustainability and wellbeing. One interviewee spoke about subsistence management, and said:

There's nothing I can do, as a person, you know, no one wants to listen to the people that actually are out here doing anything... So, there's nothing really that I can do. They don't listen. They're not listening to me. I mean, I don't have a college education, so, that goes right out the window right away, anything I say. 'Cause I'm too dumb for them to listen. (personal communication, interview 1, February 21, 2018)

This person feels they are on the ground and seeing the fish and wildlife, but no one in subsistence management positions listen to subsistence users. This interviewee identified the role of the tribe as highly important in engaging in self-determining acts for the optimistic future but saw their own lack of a college education as problematic in their ability to be heard in policy

changes. This interviewee continued explaining the role of the tribe in subsistence management and noted the importance of the tribe in taking a stand on subsistence, like they have on fishing in the Kenai River. The Ninilchik Traditional Council sued the Federal Subsistence Board, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Interior over being able to have a subsistence gillnet on the Kenai River to fish for sockeye salmon (*Ninilchik Traditional Council v. Towarak et al.*, 2016). They sued because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Federal Subsistence Board denied their request to have a subsistence net on the Kenai in federal waters, which is allowed according to the *Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act* (ANILCA) (1980). Ninilchik won the right to put a gillnet in the Kenai River to fish for sockeye salmon in federal waters. This interviewee recognizes the capacity of the tribe to get their voices heard and looks to the tribe to be engaged in self-determining acts to benefit the community.

The other way interviewees described themselves as not responsible in the optimistic future was due to age. Two older interviewees were tired of being so engaged all their lives and wanted to see the younger people in the community now take up that role so that they could relax in their retirement. They had what could be described as “volunteer burnout.” One of these interviewees explained they do not see themselves doing anything for the optimistic future, but they do see their children being involved. These interviewees described the importance of involvement and the community coming together but did not see themselves being a part of that. These people valued the community doing well, but also valued their retirement and relaxing in their homes, spending time with family. They felt their civil engagement responsibilities should be done now that they are retired, and they wanted to focus more on themselves and less on the community.

### ***Implications of Individuals Utilizing Self-Determination***

Individuals being involved in the community is important to community sustainability and wellbeing. Nothing can be accomplished if individuals all say it is not their responsibility. In Ninilchik, interviewees explained that community members would be very involved in the optimistic future. Involvement through Ninilchik Emergency Services, fundraising, leading by example through farming, gardening, and recycling, and volunteering for the nonprofits are all ways community members see individuals involved in the optimistic future. In order to achieve the sustainability indicators identified in Table 2, individuals in Ninilchik will need to be

involved and active in their community. Lack of involvement and apathy were parts of the pessimistic future that need to be avoided.

For the three people, 10%, who identified they would not be engaged, age led people to be tired of being so involved all their lives and lack of education had one interviewee feeling like no one cares about what they have to say. Both situations left these people feeling engagement was not their responsibility but they did identify others to fill that role. From my perspective, this has many potential consequences in regards to engagement in the community. First, if individuals do not take the reins themselves and wait for others to step up, the community may not have anyone step up. Each person needs to be a responsible member of the community. There are many reasons to not engage, lack of time, retirement, lack of education. However, anyone can come up with a reason not to be engaged and then no one will be working to get anything done. Second, expecting the Ninilchik Traditional Council to take care of matters puts a lot of pressure on the tribe and removes pressure from individuals that are so vital to things getting done in the community. Group efforts are helpful, and the tribe does have a platform to speak from. Yet, individuals must also see their roles in helping the community achieve an optimistic future. It is easy for everyone to pass the responsibility on to the next person but then nothing will ever get done, so individual engagement is an important part of the sustainability and wellbeing in Ninilchik.

### **Community Self-determining Actions**

When interviewees were asked to describe the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely futures they detailed what the community looked like in each future. Interviewees were then asked how to achieve the optimistic future and they detailed the steps to make it a reality. This section of the chapter explains the community self-determining actions that will be taken to achieve the optimistic future and how these actions lead to sustainability and wellbeing in the community. The actions are divided into sections: (a) infrastructure, (b) helping each other, (c) community-wide events, (d) public school, (e) population, and (f) economics. Each of the actions promotes sustainability and wellbeing in the community through the indicators in Table 2. It is not yet clear how all of these actions will take place. These are ideas for the optimistic future. To discover the steps to implement the ideas requires further research.

## *Infrastructure*

All 30 interviewees, 100%, gave accounts on how to improve the infrastructure of the community. Different types of new infrastructure lead to sustainability and wellbeing for Ninilchik. To begin with, two interviewees suggested building an art shop or renting a building as a space where people could work on their art and teach others art. This space would also be a place of cultural expression that could pass on artistic techniques and symbols of culture. This can provide a boost to the economy for people to sell their art as well and promote wellbeing through happiness and getting people involved with one another. The community could put in a small golf course like the nine-hole course in Homer, a nearby community. This is a new activity for residents to engage in and also something for tourists. Interviewees also suggested building a skate park at the school where the old tennis court is. This would offer a place for youth to play and would bring the community together in the construction. Finally, although it is very expensive, interviewees would like to have a new harbor and dock built, one that can be used regardless of where the tide is at. The current one is mostly only accessible at high tide and is crowded with boats during the fishing season. A new harbor would offer safety in a storm so boats would not have to go to Kenai or Homer. One interviewee explained that the oil and gas companies could ship natural gas and oil out of the harbor as well.

There were four additional suggestions for new infrastructure from the interviewees. The first suggestion was that the town needs to find a place for a new cemetery. Both of their cemeteries are full. The second idea for new infrastructure was to build a new and bigger library, modeled after Homer's open bright library with lots of windows. The current library is a big improvement from what Ninilchik had previously. It came about when a woman died and willed her money to the library. However, having a new building would be ideal according to one interviewee. The library could be used to house visitor center type information as well. This way when new people came to town they could come to the library and get some information on Ninilchik and suggestions of places to go, explained the participants in one of the focus groups. The third type of infrastructure suggested was to put in faster internet to the community. This would allow people to work technology jobs from home. This way people would not have to move as much for jobs but could keep living in Ninilchik and working from home. The final suggestion is to develop trails. Trails could go along the Ninilchik and Kasilof Rivers and also

along Oil Well Road. This improves the beauty of the community and access to nature. Both locals and tourists could make use of the trails for recreation.

Interviewees had suggestions on how to improve existing infrastructure as well. To begin with, existing roads and bridges need to be improved. Oil Well Road may also need to expand as population grows in the Caribou Hills. The Russian Orthodox Church needs to be preserved. It would help if membership increased and church classes were started to educate the younger members about the church. Now that they have a priest, the Church will start taking some of these actions. This allows the church to continue and to encourage tourism into the community. The church is a very popular tourist destination as it is a historic building and also very picturesque.

The school is another building that could be improved. Interviewees worried about the school being too close to the bluff and wondered if it could be moved. The school could also be improved with a bigger gym and updated science and home economics rooms. This would provide better facilities for the students. The infrastructure at the fairgrounds is also due for improvement, as many of the buildings are old. If not torn down, some of the old buildings could be used more—as they sit empty for large parts of the year. One interviewee suggested the old roller rink could be reopened or used as a place to teach yoga, Zumba, or karate. This person explained that this gets community members together for exercise which is a healthy activity promoting wellbeing. Another interviewee also discussed that the room would be good for yoga. Three other interviewees talked about missing the roller rink.

Community members can also come together through beautifying the community. Being right on Cook Inlet with the volcanos across the bay, Ninilchik has a lot of natural beauty. People could work together to enhance the curb appeal of the town, planting flowers, painting buildings, and putting in park benches. This promotes tourism and encourages people to not just drive through on their way to Homer but to stop to see what the community has to offer. One interviewee said:

Economically I fear that tourism is about all we have to really focus our economy on locally right now, and if we're going to improve our tourism the only thing that we can really do is make it look prettier and slow people down and let them see what a neat town it is. (personal communication, focus group 4, participant 2, April 25, 2018)

Beautifying the community would potentially increase tourism and be a project that would bring community members together.

Some infrastructure goals are more easily achieved than others. For example, building a new harbor/dock was discussed extensively in one focus group. This is a difficult goal to achieve as it costs millions of dollars. One focus group participant could see a new dock going in more easily if the oil and gas companies put it in themselves instead of the State of Alaska and Kenai Peninsula Borough funding it. A new library is also not easily achieved as the current library is a great upgrade from the last library they had and there is not funding available at this time for another upgrade. Moving the school away from the bluff is extremely costly. More likely, if erosion continues, I foresee the bluff will be built up with more rock and fencing to help stop the erosion instead of moving the school.

More easily achievable infrastructure goals include finding a place for the new cemetery and community members coming together to preserve the Russian Orthodox Church. Another achievable goal is beautification of the community that just requires volunteers to participate and some money for things like benches and flower pots. Putting in trails can be done in the community as well if volunteers come together to break trail and put in volunteer hours. However, the trails will likely not be paved as that is very costly and there is not money to do that.

### ***Helping Each Other***

Interviewees identified many ways they help one another in the community and actions they can take to further help each other in the future. Helping one another improves the wellbeing of the community by fostering relationships. Interviewees had many different ideas on self-determining actions that could be taken. One suggestion was to have a place to donate clothes and blankets to those in need. An interviewee suggested that the tribal subsistence building might be a good location to take donations. Currently, Feed Ninilchik's Hungry is coordinated through the subsistence building and the Twin Rivers liquor store where a local clerk advertises on Facebook when she hears of need, and people bring food and money donations to the store. The food is then stored at the subsistence building and handed out to people in need in the community. Interviewees suggested forming a food bank to better meet the needs of residents. The community comes together to help one another in regards to food needs. When it

was identified that students in the school did not have enough food at home, the community came together and fundraised. Now children can take home a bag of food every Friday from school to make sure they have food over the weekend in their homes.

Another way to address food needs is through the moose roadkill program. An education session could be held to help people get on the call list so if there is a roadkill they can get the moose meat. Some people are not on the list because they do not know how to butcher, and interviewees in one focus group suggested the community come together to butcher roadkill and hand it out to people in need of food. Lastly, food needs can be met through more local food production, gardening, and raising chicken and other livestock. One person in town helps people start raising chickens by lending them an incubator and giving them chicks to start their own flock.

People also help each other in the community through fundraising. Whenever someone is in need, whether medically or if they lost their house to fire, the community pulls together and fundraises for them. People fund-raise for the local non-profits as well, such as the library and Ninilchik Emergency Services. One interviewee suggested that the community could come together through more people putting in effort to know their neighbors. This way people could watch out for each other if someone is out of town and it would grow the cohesiveness of the community.

Volunteering and mentoring were two other ways that community members suggested they can help one another. The community could have a hotline so that they know what people need help with. In one focus group, interviewees discussed putting up a message board at the community center. People can post needs they have or list volunteer opportunities or other events going on. This focus group explained that volunteering helps make sure needs are being met in the community and organized volunteering creates a space for people to get involved and engaged in the community. The more people get involved in the community, the more wellbeing the community will have through engagement and community spirit. One interviewee explained:

Everybody has to work their own little corner and do what you can. Because really it's overwhelming. The need is overwhelming and you can't do it all. But if you can do your part in doing as much as you can as often as you can and you know we try to get more people on board with that like you know get a movement going. Get everybody involved. (personal communication, focus group 4, participant 3, April 25, 2018)

Nine interviewees, 30%, explained that the community can start a mentorship program to connect adults to youth and older youth to younger youth. Currently youth cannot go to open gym or the health club unless they are a certain age, so having a mentor to go with gives them more opportunities to be active. All of these activities get youth away from drugs and alcohol, and help them work on building self-esteem. Allowing older youth to mentor younger kids helps youth learn about responsibility and teaching. Mentorship offers one way to educate youth as well and they can learn about exercise, being healthy, and doing fun activities.

Policing is another way the community can help each other. Interviewees discussed needing a fish and wildlife trooper stationed in Ninilchik. This will help people feel safe and improve trooper response time. It will also have someone dealing with illegal hunting and fishing to help in management practices. Community members can advocate to bring a trooper to the community. Interviewees identified all these actions to help one another in order to improve the wellbeing of the community. According to the interviewees, being there for one another and getting involved in the community better the lives of the residents.

The ideas identified by interviews of ways the community can come together to help each other are all very achievable goals. This is largely due to the fact that some people in the community are very active in volunteering and helping out others. The main requirement for achieving a mentoring group and a food bank is people being willing to donate their time to volunteer. It would take volunteers to be involved in harvesting moose through the road kill program to hand it out to families in need. One focus group discussed a large problem with volunteering, that it tends to be the same people over and over. These people could get tired of volunteering and if they burn out more people in the community will need to become engaged. The tribal outreach program holds events to bring community members together and to promote engagement.

A more difficult goal to achieve is getting a trooper stationed in the community. This is something the State of Alaska will have to find funding for and the State is currently making cuts in their budget. Community members can write their legislators and lobby the Alaska legislature to get funding for more troopers. Regardless of whether they get a trooper, the community is coming together to start a neighborhood watch program to see what they can do to improve the safety of their community. These self-determining actions being taken by community members to better their community leads to a sustainable future with wellbeing.



### *Community-Wide Events*

Ninilchik is a small town with 851 year-round people, as of 2017 (DCRA Information Portal, 2017). The population swells in the summer with tourism. In the summer many people are busy working with the tourist industry but interviewees lamented the long winters with not much going on in the community. One focus group spent time coming up with winter activities for the community. Currently a community member holds painting nights at the fair; this is good and should continue. Interviewees suggest another event to be held at the fairgrounds in the winter, “The Taste of Ninilchik,” with different local restaurants and people cooking. Another suggestion was to use the gym at the school and hold a movie night with a projector. They could also hold a play or talent show at the school. This way existing infrastructure is being taken advantage of and people are getting together to socialize.

The fairgrounds offer infrastructure to host different activities. The rodeo and Salmonfest are hosted every summer at the fair. These events could include local vendors at a reduced fee to promote the town bring some money into Ninilchik's economy. The local coffee shop and restaurants typically do not have booths at the fair events and the vendors are from outside the community. Interviewees suggested the fairgrounds could also host a circus, quilting retreats, or even a comic-con (comic book convention). These are ideas the community can further explore together to see if they want to implement them. The community center that the tribe recently renovated is another place to host events. They have held a poetry reading there as well as a music night. They hosted a Polynesian dance group in 2017, and interviewees suggest having a powwow there. It would be another place, like the fairgrounds, to host arts and crafts. With its full kitchen, there could also be cooking classes. The community needs to come together to discuss what kind of events they would like to have to promote unity. Currently the tribe, through their programs, plans many events and holds potlucks at the community center to bring residents together. For example, in September 2017 they held a chili cook off and potluck.

Other suggested activities were outdoor, in nature. One suggestion was to do a regular community cross-country ski/snowshoe outing. Everyone could meet at the tribal community center and take one of the tribal BUMPS busses out to a trail where they could ski and have a bonfire with hot cocoa at the end. There could even be a moonlight or candlelight ski. Other suggestions were to get together to build a large community igloo out of snow, flood the

basketball court of the school for ice skating, and to hold spring and winter carnivals, not just carnivals at Halloween and Christmas.

Interviewees explained that music is a great way for the community to come together and spend time with each other. Ninilchik has a great history of music from the village days where there were dances with music from accordions and guitars. This music has continued on and is played at the senior center on Fridays. It draws tourists in the summer. Goody Two Shoes is a new dancehall in the community that hosts line dancing and other types of dancing. Both these venues are nonsmoking ways to enjoy music and socialize, according to interviewees. In the optimistic future two interviewees explained that bands would come to the community and play at the fairgrounds with Saturday night concerts for people to get together and have fun. There can be music, and local restaurants and the coffee shop can have booths to sell food and drink. This would be an opportunity for tourists as well. Interviewees suggest that there needs to be concerts, a variety show, open mic night, and karaoke. Music brings people together and can be done in the summer outside or in the winter in some of the fair buildings or bars.

There were also suggestions for summer activities. One interviewee explained that the community could hold a four-day fishing festival or a king salmon derby at the river with prayer and celebration of the fish, including activities for people not interested in doing the fishing and food. Another fishing event suggested was a halibut derby where the boats have to start and finish in the harbor which means there is only a 12-hour fishing window since the harbor is mostly accessible at high tide. I think that both of these events are great ideas to bring more people into the community and engage tourists. They would need to be thoroughly thought out, planned, and marketed in order to get a large group of people involved and actually have the events bring some money into the community. They could be marketed with fliers and in surrounding newspapers in Homer, Kenai, Soldotna, and Anchorage. For example, derby tickets could be sold for either event where half of the income from all the tickets goes to the derby winner and the other half goes to a cause in the community to benefit Ninilchik. This way the events are benefitting the community.

Healthy activities already happening in the community include the Clam Scramble run/walk, the health fair, and the Thanksgiving run. Local community members and people from outside the community participate in the Clam Scramble; it is advertised widely on Facebook. Ninilchik residents are very involved in the health fair as well. One interviewee suggested people

come together and start a running group. There are multiple people who run in the community and this would be a way to exercise together and promote community spirit and connectivity. Another interviewee suggested softball, kickball, basketball, and soccer leagues as a great way to get people together for adults or youth. These events could be more difficult to start as the community is so small and without enough people to participate the leagues would not work. Currently residents travel to Soldotna, Kenai, and Homer to participate in leagues where more people live and the leagues are bigger and functioning. Other summer activities suggested in the interviews included a community berry picking day, sand castle building contest, kite flying, and horseback rides on the beach. The tribe could coordinate these activities through their outreach program. Currently youth are involved in the tribe through the YELP program and there are many activities geared toward youth and community-service in that program.

Overall, interviewees thought activities should be better advertised in order to include the whole community; tribal and nontribal members. “People feel special to be included... You're here. You get to do this. This means you're special. This is why you should appreciate it” (personal communication, Interview 25, March 19, 2018). Involving people makes them feel like they belong and helps people appreciate the community. Events can be advertised by posting the activity on Facebook as well as putting up fliers and educating proprietors at the different locations so that they can share the events with customers. Two interviewees explained that fliers should be put at the general store, liquor stores, gas station, post office, health club, tribal administration building, the Buzz coffee shop, the school, the NNAI building, the senior center, and at the subsistence building. People working at these places need to be educated on the events so that they can tell customers about them as well.

Many Ninilchik residents are busy working the summer months with maintaining their subsistence lifestyle and earning income through employment associated with tourism. Events hosted in the summer need to be advertised widely to include tourists and bring money into the community. However, it is the winter months that interviewees identified as an important time to focus on community activities to keep people motivated through the cold dark days and keep community spirit alive. One focus group devoted ample time to addressing winter activities. They decided that it is a good time to bring people together, out of the isolation of their homes and get them outside doing activities. The activities suggested are all very doable in the community, building an igloo together, or going cross-country skiing or snowshoeing. One focus

group member even volunteered to set the trail for people to ski and snowshoe on. Sometimes it just takes bringing people together to discuss ideas to generate volunteers and get people involved. The focus groups conducted during this project gave people from different areas in the community the chance to sit down and talk with one another about what the community could do to improve wellbeing. Many participants thanked me for bringing them together and giving them a chance to talk to people they do not always meet up with and to swap ideas and come up with plans to benefit the community.

### ***Public School***

Education plays a key role in the sustainability and wellbeing of the community. The kindergarten through twelfth grade public school is a central location drawing the community together around youth education and team sports. Interviewees discussed the importance of keeping school numbers up so that the school stays open. There is also hope of drawing some homeschoolers back to the school through eliminating bullying in the school. Dealing with bullying can be a goal of parents and teachers, and together they can deal with this issue in the school. This promotes a safe learning environment. This is one of the self-determining actions identified by the interviewees to promote sustainability and wellbeing. The school no longer offers home economics and students are not learning life skills from the school or at home. Twelve interviewees, 40%, discussed the importance of learning life skills and wanted this class brought back to the school. With more students the school could offer more classes and after school sports beyond volleyball and basketball if homeschooling students returned to the public school.

Another way to enrich the school is through more tribal, community, and parental involvement. People can get involved through M Class certifications, artist-in-residence programs, and coming in for storytelling and reading to the children. M Class certifications are for demonstrated subject matter expertise in an Alaska Native language, military science with the Junior Reserve Officer Trainor Corps, or culture or vocational or technical courses (Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, n.d.). Interviewees explained that many people in Ninilchik have vocational and technical skills. They may not have a bachelor's degree, but they have expertise and the ability to teach students. Community members coming in enriches the school programs and can serve as a draw for students to the school. It also bonds the

community together having people come help in the school and brings in mentorship and outside skills. It is important that adults engage with the youth. One focus group participant explained that it is important to show interest in the youth and demonstrate to them that their opinions have value.

Not all interviewees see promise in the public school in the future. Two interviewees do not see the kindergarten through twelfth grade school continuing, even in the most optimistic of futures. These interviewees suggested turning the school into a kindergarten through sixth or eighth grade school so that the experience could be most beneficial for youth. The higher grades could then be bused to surrounding schools. This is a way to still utilize the school in the community but meet the needs of the students. Many high school classes are currently online and some students are already choosing to go to Soldotna for school to have more classes and sports available.

### ***Population***

Twenty interviewees, 67%, identified slow population growth for the optimistic future of Ninilchik. To achieve this the community needs to make the town attractive for people to move to and for people to stay. Eighteen interviewees, 60%, talked about the need to focus on drawing youth back to the community after they leave for college and attract young families to the community to keep the school population and avoid outmigration. In this regard it is vital that the town has jobs to offer. A town with a broad population including Elders, retirees, youth, and families was seen as sustainable to the interviewees. This way the economy is stronger through young people working jobs and the economic support of the retirees needing services. A strong retirement community needs medical facilities, and this provides jobs as well. One interviewee explained:

The population, I believe, would grow with the youth and of course the Elders if there were services here that homes or assisted-living here that they could stay here in the community. So, I think, across the board there'd be population growth with all sectors [in the optimistic future]. (personal communication, interview 9, February 27, 2018)

By having retirees and Elders in the community there are people in need of care and services. This provides jobs at the health clinic and could enable an assisted living facility to be built in the community as well. The jobs that open up do to retiree needs help young educated families

move to the community and work those jobs, sending their children to the school and increasing the numbers to keep it open. The town functions as a unit, needing people from all ages to be an optimistic place that the interviewees envision.

The community of Igiugig, AK provides an example on how to draw young people back to the community after they leave for higher education. The community puts a lot of emphasis on education and encourages youth to go to college (Gram-Hanssen, 2018). They also encourage youth to return by having housing available for them. Of six homes built in the community in the last few years, five of these homes house people under 30 years old. The Village Council also provides small loans to residents to help them start businesses. The community also works to find local employment for anyone needing a job. They include the youth in leading the community and in community decisions. This involvement with youth addresses the question of how to draw them back to the community and provides them with fulfilling lives where they are contributing to their community. This provides an example to the Ninilchik Village Tribe on ways another community is retaining their educated youth.

### *Economics*

One interviewee explained that people in the community could start high tunnel gardening,<sup>7</sup> which prolongs the growing season and allows for extra production that they could sell at a farmer's market. In the optimistic future interviewees explained gardening in general will increase so that people can provide for themselves. More people in the community will be gardening and raising chickens, goats, and pigs. This brings more food into the community. It also brings sustainability by having local access to a variety of locally produced foods, including fresh produce.

Jobs could also come back to the community if a cannery was opened again. Seven interviewees, 23%, talked about losing many community jobs when the cannery burned down, and if one was rebuilt, that would offer a lot of job opportunities. Youth work through tourism jobs in the summer and the cannery would be another option for them. However, interviewees talked about how internships and apprenticeships help youth as well. This helps them learn about a new job to see if they would eventually want to work in that field. The community held a job

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<sup>7</sup> A form of gardening under a large plastic tunnel that acts as a greenhouse, elongating the growing season.

fair in 2018 at the school and plans to hold another one in spring 2019. This is a way to connect youth to employers. The economy is a key aspect of sustainability and employment allows for a stronger economy.

Small businesses are another player in a sustainable economy. In Ninilchik the tribe runs the health club. It is free for tribal members and tribal employees. One interviewee suggested starting a smoothie bar at the health club so that there is a healthy option in town for food. Small businesses in town include the Buzz Café, Keen Cow Thai restaurant, the gas station, the general store, the clinic, the dental clinic, the Inlet View, the gift shop in the Old Village and one at the Russian Orthodox church, the four liquor stores, the Peddler art store, the hardware store, one local manages CIRC land and replanted it after logging, and Roscoe's pizza place. There are multiple charter businesses in the summer. Additionally, people in the community are artists and sell their work; one community member makes salves and another organic shampoos.

Twenty-two interviewees, 73%, suggested that people could start more small businesses to grow the economy and promote community sustainability. If rent was lowered on the buildings along the highway then people could afford to open businesses in those buildings. There were many types of businesses suggested. One idea was a small engine shop. This could service ATVs, snow mobiles, and boats, all heavily used in the area, and it could be open year-round. Another suggestion was a salon to cut hair. These are small businesses that get people employed and build a sense of community in Ninilchik.

It is very possible that with the self-sufficient attitude people in the community of Ninilchik project that gardening and raising farm animals will increase. High tunnel gardening is being done in Homer and Anchor Point and people are able to do that in Ninilchik as well. There is also a master gardener in Ninilchik who is looking to teach someone in the community about gardening. He gardens without a high tunnel and stores produce in his root cellar to eat fresh year-round. Another possibility in the community is people starting more small businesses. There are vacant buildings along the highway for rent that people can start businesses in. One suggestion was that the rent is currently too high for people to afford to maintain a business. Negotiations with the building owners could lead to reducing that rent. Bringing a cannery back to the community may not be easily as achieved as gardening and small businesses. This takes investment from an outside entity or many locals pooling together their resources to start a cannery.

### *Implications of Community Self-determination*

Self-determining actions taken as a collective community are ways to work toward the sustainability indicators in Table 2. There are places where the community can come together to make things happen and other places the tribe can work as a government to utilize self-determination—further explained below. As a community there is power in people coming together. For example, if the community wants something done for the school or wants a local trooper they can go to borough meetings and advocate for that. The more people advocating increases the voice of the community and the chances they will be heard and achieve the goals they are after. One interviewee described that after the school had a fire many people in the community talked to the school board and an upstairs addition was added onto the school due to their advocating for the new build.

Seven interviewees, 23%, lamented the loss of the cannery due to all the jobs that it provided for the local economy. The community could come together to talk to different companies to encourage them to rebuild a cannery in Ninilchik. The community itself could build a cannery in Ninilchik and the people funding the project could form a cooperative. There are many different ways the community can achieve their goals by coming together and working with one another. Community members can also help each other start small businesses by the owners of the buildings along the highway lowering the rent so that a person can afford to start a business there.

A mentorship program was another idea brought up in the interviews and focus groups. If this is something the community wants to implement they will need to get a committee together to organize their strategy. This will enable them to identify mentors and place them with mentees. Any of the goals the community wants to achieve requires people coming together, forming committees, and participating. In this regard, one focus group thought the tribe could play a role in this because they are an already organized body. One participant in this focus group suggested the tribe hire someone as a community organizer to help accomplish these goals. The tribe was often brought up as a body that could do the organizing, build infrastructure, and make things happen in the community. Many interviewees, whether they were tribal members or not, look to the tribe when things need to be organized or projects funded. Twenty-four interviewees, 80%, called out the tribe as a key player in the community. The tribe has the ability to apply for



grants and is an already organized entity with employees conducting outreach in the community. This next section explains self-determining actions the tribe can be involved in.

### **Tribal Self-determining Actions**

Interviewees described self-determining actions the tribe will take to reach the optimistic future. The tribe is in a unique position to act as they are a government and have a government-to-government relationship with the State of Alaska and the U.S. federal government. They can apply for grants to help the community reach their sustainability and wellbeing indicators (see Table 2). The tribal actions are divided into sections: (a) elders, (b) infrastructure, (c) health, (d) tribal heritage, (e) tribal government, (f) youth engagement, (g) subsistence, (h) education, and (i) economics.

#### ***Elders***

Four interviewees, 13%, explained that taking care of the Elders in the community promotes the Elders' wellbeing. Right now, the tribe puts on an Elders' luncheon on Mondays. One interviewee explained that it gives them a chance to get together and reminisce and keep a community. Another interviewee told me the community garden the tribe maintains gives no less than half the food to Elders through the Elders' Luncheon. This interviewee continued to explain that the tribe, through the Elder Outreach Program Coordinator, has an Elders' program. The Coordinator brings Elders food from the luncheon if they are not able to make it there. The program also does subsistence for the Elders and brings them fish and clams. Youth in the tribal Youth Education Leadership Program (YELP) are involved in prepping the resources for Elders such as vacuum packing and canning the fish, as well as cleaning the clams. Another interviewee had an idea that the tribe could offer a program that brings caretakers into the homes of Elders. The senior center has one part-time person who goes into homes. Elders could use help and something like a personal care attendant would be nice. This interviewee said that the senior center provides care through a grant, so the tribe could get a grant for this service as well.

Working with the Elders is important to the tribe and is built into their governance through having the Elder Outreach Program Coordinator. This person already is active in the lives of the Elders in the community. However, adding the role of a personal care attendant, possibly someone with a Certified Nursing Aid certification would benefit the Elders and provide

another job in the community. This person could go to each Elder's home for a few hours each week to help them with any needs they have. This person could assist Elders who are still able to live independently at home but need some help with things around the house.

### ***Infrastructure***

For tribal involvement in infrastructure one interviewee suggested building a shop/garage so that someone could open up a business to work on cars. This would make it so people could have their cars worked on locally and also provide more jobs. There were other suggestions for new infrastructure in the community as well. The second idea was a recreation center. This could be built on the fairgrounds. It would offer an extra gym during school sports tournaments and provide a healthy place for youth to pass the time in the community. It would also be a place to have indoor activities in the winter. Four interviewees, 13%, suggested the tribe could build the recreation center. The third suggestion was for the tribe to build a drug rehabilitation facility. This would be a treatment center and would be centrally located on the peninsula. It would also be in a rural area and could thus engage outdoor and cultural components in the healing process. With the high amount of opioid prescriptions on the peninsula and the rates of dependence in the community, this rehabilitation center would help with wellness.

Interviewees identified a lot of growth in the optimistic future for tribal infrastructure. They see a tribal campus where the tribe connects all its buildings with a park in the middle and trails between the different buildings. There will also be a new tribal administration building that will house more services and have room for there to be more students in the early learning program. The tribe will expand the health and wellness club, the behavioral health center, and the clinic. They will renovate and build more homes through their NAHASDA program, including building more income-based housing like the senior housing they built, Tovarish Manor. There is a need of housing in Ninilchik and the tribe can help fulfill that. New housing could be connected to the natural gas line for ease of heating the homes or renewable energy like wind or solar could be used.

Three interviewees, 10%, suggested the tribe build an assisted living facility so that Elders do not have to leave the community when they get too old to live on their own. Having the Elders live locally is also critical for cultural continuity. The tribe is active in meeting the needs of the community; building new places creates jobs during the build and after for

maintenance and supports the local economy. The tribe could also build a museum/cultural center by the Russian Orthodox Church. This would provide a place to share tribal culture and promote tourism in the community as well. One interviewee wanted the tribe to build dorms at the school so that they could offer the school to students from surrounding small communities who wanted a larger school experience with team sports. This dorm would have scheduled activities and an Elder in residence so that rural Native youth could still have their culture away from home. This would increase school numbers and possibly bring back band, choir, art, and other courses that have been dropped due to fewer students reducing the numbers of teachers hired.

Ninilchik has hosted students from surrounding communities in the past. Before *Tobeluk v. Lind* (1979), also known as the ‘Molly Hootch Case,’ small communities did not have their own schools, and interviewees explained how students from small surrounding communities would stay with families in Ninilchik to attend school there. After the case, high schools had to be built in small communities so that students did not have to attend boarding school. This resulted in students from surrounding communities being able to stay in their own communities for school, and they quit coming to Ninilchik. If school numbers do not improve and the public school is threatened with reducing the number of grades offered or closing, another idea was to turn the school into a tribal charter school to have access to different funding streams to help keep it open.

The tribal transportation system, BUMPS, has a lot of possibilities for its future. Currently, the bus system runs a route from Homer to Fred Meyer grocery store in Soldotna with stops along the way. Interviewees see the buses being used for much more than that. In the optimistic future the bus system will grow to have more buses and a bus barn. This will provide jobs for drivers and mechanics. The buses can be chartered and used to transport people from cruise ships to visit the community, Russian Orthodox Church, and museum/cultural center. They can also be used to bus youth to field trips as a part of the tribal Youth Education Leadership Program (YELP) or home from the teen center. Using buses also helps reduce pollution, as fewer people are driving their cars.

The Caribou Hills can also be further developed with houses and businesses. One interviewee suggested the tribe could put in a snow machine jumps course on Ninilchik Native Association Inc. (NNAI) land could be put in to attract more tourism to the community in the

winter. Interviewees explained this infrastructure development as important in order to improve the sustainability and wellbeing of the community. Taking action to improve the existing infrastructure and build new infrastructure meets the needs of the community members and provides a vibrant place for them to live.

Interviewees see a lot of capacity in the tribe and when suggesting new infrastructure, many people said that it was something the tribe could build. The tribe is able to get different grants to support building infrastructure and is very capable at applying to and getting awarded grants. This inspires many of the interviewees to look to the tribe when the community is in need of infrastructure. One example was the suggestion of the tribe building a rehabilitation facility. This is a huge endeavor to take on. However, the tribe is already involved in substance abuse programming and was recently awarded a large grant to work on suicide and substance abuse. Interviewees see the tribe as a strong organization able to build and run a facility like this. The assisted living facility is another need in the community to keep continuity of the Elders in the area so they do not age out of the community. I talked to one tribal employee who said an assisted living facility is a difficult facility to run as there are many requirements with the staff and having on call doctors and nurses and people with enough education to run the facility. Even with this difficulty, three interviewees still see it being something the tribe can take on and they see it in the best interest of the community.

### ***Health***

In regards to healthcare in the community, 23 interviewees, 77%, identify growth in care as leading to greater sustainability and wellbeing in the community. This begins with offering tribal dental and vision in the community. The tribe could contract with the local dentist or have a visiting dentist come to the clinic each month. Having a visiting optometrist come to the clinic throughout the year was also suggested. There would need to be full dental and vision services in the clinic for this to work. It would provide more business locally and make it so that people will not have to travel for services. The tribal clinic would expand to include this dental and vision.

Seven interviewees, 23%, see it expanding even further into a small hospital. Even if it is not a hospital, the clinic could still add after-hours urgent care to better serve the community. One interviewee emphasized the importance of integrating the clinic so that people are asked about their behavioral health when they come to visit the doctor. This helps the whole person be

treated so that if there are connections between physical and behavioral health, the patient gets the help they need. There used to be a physical therapist in the community. One interviewee talked about how nice it was to have a local physical therapist and this is one area the clinic could expand into. With the clinic growing, community sustainability would increase with more jobs available and wellbeing would be met through healthcare. The clinic, provided by the tribe, is a huge benefit to the community, this was described by an interviewee:

Well the clinic is freaking invaluable here. It's a really massive, massive [sic] service to everybody around here. And there's, you know, some really great doctors, like Dr. Spencer, this really incredible woman. She's super, super really good at what she does and really open-minded too about alternative modes of health. (personal communication, interview 17, March 7, 2018)

In the optimistic future nine interviewees, 30%, identified that the behavioral health clinic will grow to include more than the two current counselors. Currently counselors are often overbooked and having more people available to serve the community would be good. It would be helpful to have a substance abuse specific counselor as well for clients ordered to substance abuse counseling when they get their driver's licenses revoked for driving under the influence. At the time of the interviews there was no psychiatrist at the clinic so interviewees suggested having a traveling psychiatrist come to the clinic at least once a month to prescribe medications or utilizing telemedicine to get the services of a psychiatrist would contribute to wellbeing. As of January 2019 the tribe is hiring someone to manage psychiatric medications at the clinic. As noted previously, this was identified as something that would happen in the optimistic future and the tribe's self-determining action of hiring someone who prescribes psychiatric medication is leading to an optimistic Ninilchik.

Reducing drug and alcohol use in the community will lower crime, improve safety, and increase wellbeing according to interviewees. The tribe works to educate people on drugs and alcohol to help them make healthy choices. Since the interviews in February to April 2018, the tribe has expanded their services outside of Ninilchik to cover more of their historic land base which runs from Homer to Kasilof. They now serve Homer and have a staffed Recovery Outreach office there. On Tuesdays they do case management and on Thursdays they do medication management for people with substance abuse issues.

### *Tribal Heritage*

As explained by two interviewees, the tribe is currently involved in a heritage project to document their culture, history, and values. The tribe is handing out surveys to tribal members to contribute to this project. Gathering culture is important for the sustainability of the tribe, and they are working to reinvigorate their culture. These two interviewees explained that it is vital that the culture is documented and passed down to each generation. Through this project the tribe can also formalize their cultural values.

Another interviewee described how subsistence is an important part of the tribal culture in Ninilchik and it brings people wellbeing through providing them food as well as spiritual nourishment. Living off of the land and being able to subsist allows tribal members to provide for their families and it brings them self-worth as well. Many tribal members interviewed were taught their culture was subsistence, fishing, moose hunting, clamming, gardening, and berry picking. The tribal educational fishery net was discussed as a good way for people, especially youth, to learn about fishing. An interviewee explained how they were taught the Native culture through their life:

Our culture... what I was taught and how I was brought up was what you need to do to survive in this environment. And, you know, we don't have songs necessarily or a language other than Russian. We don't have a bunch of dances, regalia, things like that that other tribes have. (personal communication, interview 9, February 27, 2018)

There currently is no Alaska Native language being passed down. The tribe is a mix of many different cultures including the Dena'ina, Russian, Aleut, and Alutiiq/Sugpiaq. Interviewees suggested that possibly one of the languages could be taught in the school as a foreign language option for high schoolers or included in the early learning and preschool programs to start children young. One person talked about teaching the Alutiiq language while two interviewees suggested the Athabascan Dena'ina language. Ninilchik Russian was the most requested language to bring back as some interviewee participants still have family members who are Russian speakers. Nine interviewees, 30%, talked about the Russian language when asked about language and culture in Ninilchik.

## ***Tribal Government***

There are 937 tribal members (personal communication with Ninilchik Village Tribe Executive Director Ivan Encelewski, August 21, 2018). Of those, 110 are registered to vote and approximately another 100 are eligible to vote if they register. Of the current 110 registered, only about 73 are eligible to serve on the board because to serve on the board, one must be a voting member living in the tribal boundaries. One tribal leader interviewed explained that in the optimistic future younger people will be stepping up to positions of leadership in the tribe. Individuals in the community will be engaged and active, volunteering and mentoring, not relying on the tribe to make everything happen in the community. This promotes the sustainability and wellbeing of the community, getting everyone involved and including younger people in positions of leadership so that the needs of all community members are expressed and met. In regards to the tribal council, the board, this would mean younger people would be running to be elected to the board. More tribal members will be attending board meetings as well to have their voices heard and be aware of what is happening in the tribe.

Interviewees had suggestions on how to make the tribe more effective. To begin with, the board members will be actively getting out into the community to build relationships between the tribe and broader community. This helps the tribe build relationships with the community at large to get their interest and involvement in programs and services. The board and tribal services can hold listening sessions with the community to educate them about the tribe and the services they offer. Building relationships with the community is vital to avoid negative perceptions about the tribe due to a lack of understanding. Currently there is some misunderstanding about ANCSA and its reckoning of Native land claims. Some non-Native community members struggle with the local village corporation, the Ninilchik Natives Association Inc., having private land and not allowing hunting for everybody on the land any more, even though for generations before 1971 and ANCSA, Ninilchik families hunted that land. An interviewee describes the conflict:

When I was little, who cared whose land it was? We all hunted together, you know. I'd hunt with my buddies that were members of the tribe and we'd go out and hunt on, we didn't know whose land we were on. We didn't care. They didn't care. I didn't care. Nobody cared. There was nobody caring. Everybody just went out got a moose, or whatever you were hunting for, spruce chicken. It's not that way anymore. You know, it's

been separation in land and, and it's pulled people apart. (personal communication, interview 8, February 27, 2018)

One tribal member suggested opening a few hunting permits to nontribal members and holding a lottery to include them in hunting on the land. However, this same interviewee explained, “This is our land, this is the last thing we've got left” (personal communication, interview 7, February 26, 2018). I suggest educating the community about ANCSA and the tribe and village corporations to help keep the community together, explaining the Native land claims, and promoting wellbeing.

Eight of the interviewees, 27%, and an additional two focus groups discussed the importance of the tribe engaging in public relations. The tribe will need to engage in some public relations and community building as there is some misunderstanding of the tribe by non-tribal community members. Some of the interviewees pointed out negative things about the tribe that they have heard in the community. The negative feedback appears to be exclusively due to lack of information and understanding of the tribe and the State and Federal law surrounding tribes. In the optimistic future, the tribe will have addressed this feedback in order to improve relationships with the community. This will likely be addressed through education, as the problem is lack of understanding. There are people in the community who have the misconception that the clinic is just for Natives as that is how it started out. This is no longer true. One interviewee explained, “I have heard a lot of Native entitlement upset because people are just like, ‘It’s Natives and they're entitled’” (personal communication, Interview 25, March 19, 2018). There is a belief that Natives get free money for education and a variety of other things. The community of Ninilchik needs to be educated on treaty rights and the history of Native people as well as understanding around what grants are and that the grants typically support the entire community, including non-Natives.

The tribe puts out information on Facebook and posts flyers around the community about events. The tribe hold forums, educates on behavioral health issues, has youth outreach programs, offers the clinic and health center to everyone, has the BUMPS transportation program, runs a laundromat in Anchor Point, and holds community potlucks. The tribe knows they have to continue to get community buy-in and work on that relationship as the community is majority non-Native and they need the whole community involved to make the programs effective. An interviewee explained:



Just let people know all the things that are available for everybody in the community. And that you may be Native or non-Native but everybody belongs...the tribe is doing a lot. But, I just don't think we're reaching enough people and I just think there's got to be a big PR campaign to say that this is open to everybody. (personal communication, Interview 26, March 19, 2018)

The tribal newsletter only goes to tribal members and the community at large needs some type of pamphlet so they can understand tribal services. One interviewee said that the tribe may need to hire someone to brand and market them, who they are and what they do, hand out pens and water bottles with flyers to build stronger community relationships.

Interviewees explained that the tribe will continue to be effective by maintaining the programs it currently offers. They offer educational courses like gun safety. They will also continue to be active through the “baby-think-it-over program” in the school where they provide mechanical babies for students to take home over the weekend to see what it would be like to have a child. They offer a scholarship to graduating seniors; Natives and non-Natives are included in this scholarship. Other tribal services include the clinic and behavioral health, health and wellness club, BUMPS bus service, additional outreach into the school, the YELP program, monetary support for tribal members that need funding for sports at school through the Johnson O’Malley assistance program, the early learning program, the teen center, Elder services, the subsistence and educational fish nets, senior housing through Tovarish manor, the community garden, the community center, and prevention and outreach.

In addition to these programs, 25 participants, 83%, said that the tribe will continue to grow through new programs and grants to offer more services and more employment in the optimistic future. One interviewee explained that the tribe will utilize their newly granted self-governance status to contract directly with the Department of Interior instead of needing to go through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This same interviewee mentioned that the tribe can work on streamlining their administration internally, and another interviewee discussed the need to have highly knowledgeable receptionists. The tribe can continue to build their relationship with NNAI as well.

The Ninilchik Village Tribe is not in a large rush to put all of their fee simple land they own into trust, according to three interviewees involved in tribal leadership. The tribe will place this land into trust when it benefits them as land in trust is difficult to sell and develop once it is

in trust. The tribe currently has an application in to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to put their resource building into trust. They are considering the possibility of a gaming trust to build a casino. Putting land into trust removes some outside regulation of the land such as the ability of the state or federal government to collect property tax, but it adds other stipulations that makes the land hard to develop and get also get back out of trust, explained one interviewee. Once land is in trust, it is in trust with the federal government and the tribe does not have as much authority over the land as they do with fee simple land they own. Putting it in trust allows them to tax people on the land and also gives them jurisdiction of policing, but the restrictions imposed on trust land have the Ninilchik Village Tribe carefully considering what options are best for the tribe (Strommer et al., 2015).

### ***Youth Engagement***

Twenty-eight interviewees, 93%, stressed the importance of engaging youth in the community to keep them healthy and away from trouble and drugs. The tribal Youth Education Leadership Program (YELP) serves youth ages 13 to 18. In 2017, YELP collectively logged 3,520 hours of community service (personal communication with Ninilchik Village Tribe Executive Director Ivan Encelewski, August 21, 2018). Through YELP, youth are involved in helping the community, learning new things, and doing fun activities. They learn about “the history of Ninilchik, family values, the importance of community, respect for self and others, substance abuse prevention, and suicide prevention” (personal communication with Ninilchik Village Tribe Executive Director Ivan Encelewski, August 21, 2018). YELP has put in a community garden, worked on the Russian Orthodox Church, and built a greenhouse for a community member. Youth in YELP also go fishing and learn to process the fish for storage. They go hiking, rafting, and go on field trips to other cities. They do subsistence activities for Elders and help the Elders in other ways as well.

YELP is organized through the tribe. Interviewees said that the tribe also runs the teen center. It is upstairs in the community center and offers a supervised place for youth to do homework, eat, and play games. One interviewee explained that the tribe also started Native Youth Olympics (NYO) activities with young people. They are learning about the different events and are able to compete at the statewide competitions. Currently NYO goes only during the school year but one interviewee suggested it could be expanded into the summer. The tribal

employee working at the teen center does Future Farmers of America (FFA) with the youth as well. This is a professional development program. The tribe is heavily invested in the youth in the community and offers many different opportunities to engage them in activities for their wellbeing.

### *Subsistence*

The interviewees talked about the problems with the current form of fish and wildlife management. Currently, management decisions are concentrated in offices away from the local populations regularly observing the resources. The people making management decisions on the federal board are the heads of large federal bureaucracies and are not locals on the ground seeing the fish and animals. In Ninilchik, the decimation of the clam population was a key example provided by participants of how management not listening to the locals leads to mismanagement. The tribe repeatedly notified the state that clam sizes and numbers were down but the state kept high limits for clams and now the beaches have been closed to all clamming to let the populations regrow.

The exclusion of local traditional use knowledge in management thus threatens the food security of the people in Ninilchik as well as their cultural tradition of subsistence. They depend on local resources for their diet and household economies. People from all across the State of Alaska came to Ninilchik to get clams, including urban residents, and now there are none left for the locals, and the beaches are closed (Harrison & Loring, 2016). Interviewees are worried about mismanagement of fish like the king salmon. Commercial and sports fishing industries heavily tax the fish populations, and now king salmon are smaller and not as abundant as in the past, according to interviewees. To maintain food sovereignty in Ninilchik it is vital that local knowledge be utilized, sustainable management practices be employed, Indigenous people be involved in co-management, and value the local production of food (Nyeleni Synthesis Report, 2007).

Sixteen interviewees, 53%, advocated for more local management of fish and wildlife. The tribe could manage the tribal and NNAI lands. The surrounding federal and state lands also need to be managed by locals or through joint management with the local people having input that is incorporated into local policy. Locals are interested in being able to harvest sustainably, as

they rely on fish and wildlife for food through subsistence. One interviewee explained the importance of tribal management:

The state and the federal government need to step out and let the tribe do what the tribe does. They've managed that resource since the beginning of time. They understand it. They understand the reproductive cycles. They understand the lifespan. They understand the climates that are going to be involved. They have history, and they can look back and they can see those cycles... The tribe recognized the problem [low counts of clams, fish, and/or animals] a long time ago, 90% of the time. They don't get surprised. They see it coming. You hear the Elders whispering about it and talking about it and nobody listening to them. You got to listen to the Elders. They're the memory in the room. (personal communication, interview 15, March 6, 2018)

A large percentage of people in the community use subsistence to supplement their food, and without it they would not get enough to eat and go hungry, or have to move away from Ninilchik. In a subsistence survey conducted in 2014, of the 44 people surveyed in the simple random sample, 30 people hunted, 36 people fished, 7 people trapped, and 30 people gathered (Ninilchik Traditional Council, 2014). Currently the management system does not take into account local knowledge or customary and traditional use knowledge. This knowledge is vital to resource management, as the people living in the areas observe the populations and how things are changing.

At present, the State of Alaska is not in compliance with the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act* (ANILCA) (1980). As stated in the Introduction, the State of Alaska challenged ANILCA in 1989, and the Alaska Supreme Court ruled in *McDowell v. State of Alaska* that the rural preference subsistence users are given through ANILCA was unconstitutional under the state constitution. The Alaska Supreme Court ruled that preference should go to subsistence users, not rural residents. ANILCA is a federal act and with the state not complying, the federal government took control of fish and wildlife management in 1990 on federal land, thus beginning the dual management regime with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game that persists to this day in Alaska (Case & Voluck, 2012).

Now fish and wildlife are managed by both the federal government and the State of Alaska, with some input by the tribes. There is a federal subsistence board that makes

subsistence decisions through input by regional boards spread throughout the state. The Ninilchik Village Tribe's President is chairman of the South-Central Regional Advisory Council. However, interviewees explain that management decisions typically happen through input by biologists and fish and wildlife specialists, not local input. Ultimately interviewees see management decisions being politically based and not science-based, resulting in decisions detrimental to fish and animal populations. Commercial and sports fishermen have a strong voice in management decisions as they are tied to Alaska's economy. Sixteen interviewees see the need for the tribe to be involved in management on a larger scale, as they and local users can provide generations of knowledge about the fish and animals.

## ***Education***

### Vocational Education

At the public school there is a shop teacher who teaches one section of shop. Students learn about woodworking, cars, and small engine mechanics. Fifteen interviewees, 50%, talked about the importance of vocational education, as not all students are interested in going to college. Some of the students are interested in attending vocational schools like the Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC) in Seward. Interviewees suggested the Ninilchik Village Tribe start a vocational school as a self-determining action. It is in a good location between Homer and the Kenai/Soldotna area in the middle of the Kenai Peninsula. The vocational school would improve the sustainability in the community through education and creating employment, boosting the economy.

Starting a vocational school would be an exciting new opportunity for the tribe. They are centrally located and would be a close location for students to attend from Homer, Kenai, and Soldotna as well as Ninilchik. Students would be able to commute to school in Ninilchik instead of having to be residents at AVTEC since Seward is farther away from the surrounding communities. One focus group discussed the possibility of starting a school. The tribe could apply for a grant to build a facility. Then they could start on a small scale only offering a few classes at first to generate interest in the school. They would have to have appropriately certified instructors as well. This would be yet another way that the tribe would create jobs in the community and also bring outside students to the community to boost the local economy as people go to the coffee shop and local restaurants. It could even encourage people to move to the

community to attend school there as more classes were offered with certifications and a larger curriculum.

## Parenting

Eleven of the 30 interviewees, 37%, discussed the problems with parenting in the community. There are some parents who are using drugs and others not heavily involved in their children's lives. Two interviewees suggested parenting classes as a helpful way to teach parents about the importance of being involved with their children, and the role of parents. The tribe can offer these classes. One interviewee talked about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how parents can be taught about investing in children to raise them without ACEs to reduce problems later in the children's life, such as drug and alcohol dependence. Some ACEs include domestic violence, mental health issues in the home, losing a parent, or being from a divorced family. Parenting classes would help children grow up in safe homes with self-esteem, life skills, and fewer ACEs. Investing in children is the ultimate investment for the future of the community. One interviewee explained that if people started parenting classes and investing in children now, then in the 20-year future the community would have these children grown up as well adjusted highly functioning adults. This would greatly increase the wellbeing of the community. This interviewee describes what this future would be like:

So, in the future in our perfect optimistic future we've been investing for 20 years in those kids and they will have no problem graduating from high school and becoming engaged members of our society... When I say engaged, I mean they are doing something that they find fulfilling and contributes to the larger society because that's what we need. We need people that are, if we're going to be sustainable, we need people that are contributing and not getting unemployment, not that I'm against social services I just, those kind of things don't really equal sustainability. (personal communication, interview 21, March, 13, 2018)

The tribal outreach department showed a movie to the community about ACEs in the fall of 2018 and seeks to educate parents on raising healthy children.

As I have mentioned throughout this discussion, the tribe is heavily involved with the youth in the community. They seek to benefit parents as well, starting with the baby-think-it-over program they do in the local high school to help young people decide if they are even ready to be

parents. Offering parenting classes would benefit the families in Ninilchik. The problem I could foresee due to the small population in the community would be low levels of attendance for the classes. The tribe needs to find a way to market the classes to families so that they can see how much it benefits their children and improves their overall wellbeing. They can do this marketing through education at the clinic, teen center, and the school as well. They also reach out to parents through their Outreach Department.

### ***Economics***

In the optimistic future, interviewees described that agriculture will grow in the community. Four interviewees, 13%, see the tribe raising animals on NNAI land, either buffalo, reindeer, or elk in the optimistic future. They will raise the animals for meat, tourism, and the hides. In the optimistic future, interviewees said that more jobs will be available in the community. Many of those new jobs were described in the above sections, including: (a) farming animals, (b) the BUMPS bus system, (c) jobs at the clinic and through the assisted living, and (d) construction and maintenance of new infrastructure. The tribe will continue to grow as an employer as they offer more services and programs. One interviewee suggested the tribe work with their regional corporation and look into wind energy. The regional corporation, Cook Inlet Regional Inc. (CIRI), has a wind energy farm on Fire Island outside Anchorage. There is a lot of wind in the Caribou Hills and NNAI has land out there that could be used for a wind farm.

Five interviewees, 17%, suggested the tribe open a casino with a hotel and restaurant. The tribe would have to apply to put land in a gaming trust and would also have to work with the State of Alaska to allow gaming. One interviewee advised that to get gaming approved in Alaska the tribe may have to file a lawsuit. However, with trust land now being discussed in Alaska, through the Department of Interior removing the Alaska Exception, a casino could be a possibility (*Akiachak Native Community v. Salazar*, 2013). The casino could serve the meat from the tribal animal farm too. The tribe could negotiate with NNAI to use their land, and through agricultural grants they could get fencing. Fourteen participants, 47%, discussed the importance of the tribe engaging in economic development opportunities so that they are not only dependent on grants. An animal farm and casino would be ways for the tribe to get third party revenue.

The tribe provides many jobs in the community. One interviewee explained how vital the tribe is: “If you look at the tribe that provides fifty-some employees jobs here, they pretty much

are by far the largest employer in town. They're supplying this community basically” (personal communication, interview 12, March 1, 2018). The tribe operates many services in the community and through its programs, grants, the clinic, the health club, the early learning program, and their other areas of work, they provide jobs to residents. Through the clinic they provide skilled jobs for people who have advanced degrees. Except for the school, the tribe is the largest employer in the community. The tribe has a lot of capacity to employ people and run programs to benefit the community; they have the ability to apply for and win grants that employ community members and serve the needs of the people in the community.

The Inlet View restaurant is currently for sale. Two interviewees suggest it be torn down and rebuilt as a restaurant/hotel. These same interviewees explained there could be live music once a week at the Inlet View. There could be places for RVs to park and hookups for them. NNAI and/or the tribe could buy the Inlet View. One interviewee explains:

I think one of the biggest things that the tribe could do right now is go all in and buy that Inlet View, tear it down, and right there alone you spur growth in economy, having RV hookups, having rooms for people to stay when they come down, you know, people come down for the Clam Scramble. They come down for the fair. There are a ton of people that come for Salmon Fest... it is for the best of the whole Kenai Peninsula. (personal communication, interview 30, April 11, 2018)

It could be a specialty restaurant. One interviewee explained there could be a bar, and if there is an issue with the tribe owning the bar then a third party could own it and the money would not come to the tribe. If the tribe did not buy it, possibly community members could pool together as a co-op and buy it, suggested one interviewee. The Inlet View is a good location, so close to the Russian Orthodox Church, Old Village, and beach.

In Igiugig, AK the Village Council provides small loans to help people start businesses (Gram-Hanssen, 2018). This is something the Ninilchik Village Tribe could look into doing as well. One interviewee in this project talked about the tribe partnering with people to start small businesses as another avenue to develop businesses in the community. Whether providing small loans or partnering with community residents, the tribe has capital and could help encourage the formation of small businesses and economic development in the community.

The community is going through changes right now as they look into ways to boost the local economy. Fishing tourism has been popular in the area for the last few decades, but with



more fishing regulations there are fewer charters in the area; people are having to look to new ways to have a sustainable economy and employment. Ecotourism is one option for the community to capitalize on the beauty of the area. Interviewees talked about having tours of the Russian Orthodox Church and the beach, as well as having rafting on the local rivers. The community could also put in hiking trails to encourage ecotourism. Another idea for local tourism was to coordinate with the cruise lines coming into Homer, to be an excursion. The tribe could bus cruise tourists up to the community with the BUMPS bus system; they could tour the church, the beach, and the new museum/cultural center the tribe is considering building. The cruisers could learn about the Native and Russian history of the community and be fed a lunch of local Native and Russian foods.

Rural communities experiencing decline in their traditional industries, such as fishing for Ninilchik, with the loss of the cannery and lower fish counts affecting commercial, charter, and sports fishing, can turn to their culture and heritage for local development as a rural tourism destination (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). Cultural rural tourism creates the opportunity for jobs when other industries are in economic decline. Tourists are interested in the local culture, customs, natural landscapes, and historical attributes of rural areas. Art is another area to explore for tourism, and there are many local artists in Ninilchik who feature their work at the Peddler and the gift shop in the old village. Like the interviewees observed, it is vital locals maintain control over their tourism industry and development so that it does not harm the community. The community needs to identify the cultural resources they want to feature through tourism and capitalize on that. Ninilchik interviewees in one focus group talked about this in linking up with cruise ships and featuring their Native-Russian heritage.

Nineteen of the 30 interviewees, 63%, emphasized tourism as an important part of Ninilchik's economy. One of these interviewees explained that the state is investing more in tourism and that should help Ninilchik get more tourism too. This same interviewee suggested the community could hire someone to help them market their community to tourists world-wide to draw more people to the region for year-round tourism. This could help bolster tourism to benefit the local economy and community sustainability. The *Alaska Visitor Volume Report Summer 2017*, released in July 2018, shows increased tourism to the state of Alaska in the summer from 2016 to 2017, with a 6% increase in people taking cruise ships (McDowell Group, 2018). Cruise ships brought 57% of visitors to Alaska in the summer of 2017. Visitors to the state

rose a total of 3.7%, (68,800 visitors), from 2016 to 2017. Ninilchik interviewees make valid points about drawing tourists to their community through beautifying their community to encourage people to stop on the highway and visit, putting in trails, building lodging, holding fishing festivals, marketing their community for tourism, and working with the cruise ships to be an excursion.

### ***Implications of Tribal Self-determination***

The Ninilchik Village Tribe is a sovereign federally recognized tribe. They manage a variety of grants to serve their community and employ over 50 people in the community as well. They are in a unique position to serve Ninilchik, as Ninilchik is unincorporated and the tribe is the only governing body in the community. Currently they serve the community through their many grant programs as well as running the clinic, community center, teen center, and wellness club. Both tribal and nontribal community members identified the tribe as a key actor in promoting sustainability and wellbeing in the community. The self-determining actions they have taken as a sovereign tribe and the actions proposed through the interviews enables them to create a sustainable community with wellbeing. Self-determination allows tribes to “engage in genuine self-governance, to turn sovereignty as a legal matter into ‘defacto’ sovereignty: sovereignty in fact and practice (Cornell & Kalt, 2003b, p. 1). As explained below, this statement is supported by research on nation building conducted by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development and the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management, and Policy at the University of Arizona.

According to Cornell, Jorgensen, Kalt, and Spilde (2007), the ““nation building”” approach holds the keys to self-determined social, political, and economic development for indigenous communities” (abstract). It focuses on self-determination and building the capacity to exercise that determination through developing an environment for sustainable community development. Sustainable economic development and community wellbeing is achieved through: (a) self-rule, (b) capable self-governing institutions, (c) governing institutions that culturally match the people governed, and (d) strategic orientation with long-term thinking (Cornell et al., 2007). The key to implementing nation building is recognizing the need to take action. This nation building approach, stemming from research with tribes in the continental U.S. extends to Alaska tribes as well. “The evidence strongly suggests that self-government—practical self-

rule—is a necessary condition for significant, long-term improvement in the welfare of rural Alaska Natives” (Cornell & Kalt, 2003a, p. ii). The important factor in self-government is the accountability the governments have to their people. This is something the Ninilchik Village Tribe is employing and it enables them to exercise their self-determination for the wellbeing and sustainability of Ninilchik.

Local service delivery by tribes is shown to be a self-governing act that can promote sustainability and wellbeing of communities (Cornell & Kalt, 2003a). As explained in the Literature Review, local control of health care improved Native health care (Shelton et al., 1998). The Ninilchik Village Tribe (NVT) operates their own clinic and behavioral health center for the benefit of the community with local control to meet the needs of the residents. Additionally, the NVT is one of the largest employers in Ninilchik and they reduce unemployment and provide jobs for skilled professionals through their clinic and tribal grant administration. Local control of social services leads to more effective administration of the programs (Cornell & Kalt, 2003a). Through the services the NVT provides and the employment opportunities they serve both the Native and non-Native economy in the community. The actions NVT takes as a sovereign entity meets the needs of the community members and builds sustainability and wellbeing in the community.

Taking self-determining actions to improve community sustainability and wellbeing is empowering for communities. By being active in controlling their own lives they are empowered, and fate control is a key factor in wellbeing (Kimmel, 2014; Larsen et al., 2014). Utilizing self-determination as a freedom to choose may even be “directly conducive to well-being” (Sen, 1993, p. 39). The Ninilchik Village Tribe, through self-determining actions, is able to take control of their own fate, govern themselves, and improve their wellbeing.

The tribe is the main actor in Ninilchik organizing, applying for grants, doing outreach, running the health clinic, and helping the community. The local village cooperation established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the Ninilchik Native Association Inc., is not very active in the local community. The Native Association is a large land holder though, and can work with the tribe around different economic projects. One example is an animal farm, the tribe will need to either be gifted land or lease land from the Native Association. Currently the tribal president is also president of the Native Association and he is trying to help the two

organizations work together. In the community, though, it is the tribe that is involved primarily in outreach and activities to benefit the residents.

Through this research project interviewees identified many ways the tribe can be involved in self-determining actions for the benefit of the community. An animal farm is one action. There is also building a casino, assisted living facility, recreation center on the fairgrounds, drug rehabilitation center, vocational school, and park. These are some of the many ideas identified by interviewees. The tribe can now consider these suggestions carefully and decide where they are able to act. This includes what they are able to get funding for and how they can negotiate with the federal and state governments as well as what is feasible within their budget and operating capacity. A casino would be a more difficult goal for the tribe to achieve as currently there are no casinos allowed in Alaska. However, the Ninilchik tribe has been involved in lawsuits before for fishing rights and if they want a casino they may have to bring another lawsuit. An assisted living facility has been explored in the past and one interviewee explained that it is difficult to run as there are many laws and requirements for the facility. Regardless, it is up to the tribe to decide what self-determining actions they want to implement in Ninilchik. This project provides the tribe with a disseminating document (see Appendix F). This document lists all the ideas identified in the interviews that the tribe can pursue if they desire.

As interviewees described the optimistic future and how to reach a sustainable Ninilchik with wellbeing, they listed self-determining actions that will be taken by individuals, the community, and the tribe. The sections above describe how these actions will affect new and existing infrastructure, the way that people in the community help one another, and healthcare. Interviewees explained the role of tribal heritage and government as well. They detailed events that can be put on community-wide and events specifically to benefit the youth. Additionally, they explained how subsistence management needs to have a local component. Interviewees explained the actions that need to be taken in education, including the public school, vocational education, and parenting. Lastly, they described how actions can be taken to better the economic condition of the community and support a diverse local population. Now I compare these actions to the Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan 2018 Update. This plan details borough goals and actions for the future of a flourishing Kenai Peninsula.

## **Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan**

In their Comprehensive Plan, the borough outlined the self-determining actions they plan to take to achieve their goals and objectives (Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan, 2017). These self-determining actions were in line with several of those identified by the Ninilchik interviewees in this project. There are some differences, noted throughout. The borough described many actions and I am going to emphasize those aligned with Ninilchik's, highlighting the differences the interviewees identified.

To achieve the first goal of growing the economy the borough will: (a) increase agricultural production through new jobs and businesses, (b) focus on the education of borough residents, (c) grow the seafood industry, (d) support the oil and gas industry through building housing and educating people for the workforce, (e) create four-season recreation opportunities for tourism to increase year-round visitation, (f) maintain the natural beauty, (g) build trails and pathways, (h) take action to minimize the negative effects of tourism, and (i) expand sport fishing opportunities. The borough proposes to expand agriculture through high tunnels being supported by the local demand for agricultural products. The opportunity to export is also expanding through peony farms and shellfish, and it is also now legal in Alaska to grow cannabis on a commercial scale.

The borough has many strategies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan to achieve their goals; some of these are listed here. The borough plans to prioritize land for agricultural use and establish ordinances to protect it. In order to grow businesses, the borough will support entities providing training on new businesses and farming. In regards to education, the borough plans to pass policies and develop programs on teaching students about food and farming. To support the seafood industry the borough will work with the Alaska Workforce Investment Board and other entities to develop training programs for seafood workers. They will also work to balance commercial and sport fishing needs, encouraging the state to support both sectors. For oil and gas development they will fund an oil and gas adviser position in the borough administration, and work with the state and legislature to maintain the oil and gas tax credits. The borough will coordinate with the Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC) to help fill job positions. To meet the borough's goals for recreation and tourism they plan to improve access to trailheads and improve the trail networks as well as beautify communities with amenities like sidewalks and parks. Finally, they will market the borough better as a destination.

While a lot of the goals in the Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan are shared by the interviewees of Ninilchik, the Plan does not address fish and wildlife management, something the interviewees are very worried about. The Plan talks about commercial fishing, tourism, and sports fishing, to grow these industries for the benefit of the economy. However, with low fish counts and smaller fish discussed in the interviews, growth of this industry may be at odds with the sustainability of the fish population. If populations are down, then limits need to be reduced to allow the populations to grow back. The plan does not talk about how to grow the fishing economy if there are fewer fish. Sixteen interviewees emphasized the need to include local observations in fish and wildlife management, and that is a paramount concern. Commercial fishing and sports fishing may not be able to grow if there needs to be restrictions on fishing to let fish populations flourish.

Additionally, not all interviewees in Ninilchik are supportive of the oil and gas industry. Four people see that development as negative, taking the natural resources of the land when other forms of renewable energy should be used. Three of these four interviewees see the wells and pads as eyesores that are encroaching on the community. This opinion is not shared by all interviewees. Three interviewees used to work on the North Slope in oil and gas and are very supportive of development in the area. However, all interviewees who discussed oil and gas talked about the need to control development so that the oil and gas companies do not take over the natural environment. The borough plan has an objective to continue to support the oil and gas industry. They talk about building up the oil and gas sector and employment.

The borough plan discusses working with AVTEC to get training for people to fill positions in the job sector. Ninilchik interviewees discussed starting a vocational school like AVTEC. With a school in Ninilchik there would be local training available for people in Homer, Ninilchik, Kenai, Soldotna, and Nikiski to get the training they need to fill needed positions. Starting a school like AVTEC in Ninilchik would be useful for the surrounding communities as the commute would be short and people could still live at home and not have to move to Seward to attend AVTEC.

For the second goal of managing economic development while maintaining the natural features of the area, the borough plans to: (a) focus on outdoor recreation activities, (b) develop jobs through land policies to expand commercial services, (c) develop policies that minimize land conflicts, (d) be more involved in decisions on federal and state land, and (e) build roads,

services, and facilities needed. Some ways the borough plans to do this, further outlined in their plan, is to have a stronger voice in federal and state land decisions. They also plan to identify needs for boat launches and harbors for economic benefit and safety. They will support economic development through making authorizations for temporary use of land owned by the borough. The borough will work with communities on plans providing staff to help develop local capacity.

The Ninilchik interviewees identified many of these same goals as outlined in this chapter on self-determining actions such as the need to have a harbor in Ninilchik for safety and economic growth that is in line with the Comprehensive Plan. The plan has an objective to work with the unincorporated communities, like Ninilchik, in defining community goals and developing local plans. This could be helpful for the development of capacity in Ninilchik to accomplish the many self-determining actions they outlined in the previous chapter.

For the third goal of improving the quality of life of residents through more facilities, programs, activities, and services, the borough plans to: (a) extend utilities and infrastructure, (b) increase policing, (c) engage in more efforts to reduce crime, (d) build more housing—especially for seniors and homeless people, (e) document to preserve culture, and (f) support and enhance the healthcare industry. Some of the ways they will do this is through lobbying the state legislature for more State Trooper funding and supporting programs to reduce drug use. Three Ninilchik interviewees discussed developing a rehabilitation clinic in the area. The borough plan does not specify how the borough will deal with reducing drug use but this idea of a rehabilitation clinic located centrally on the Kenai Peninsula in Ninilchik may be one way to address drug use. The borough will increase housing through conducting a needs assessment and encourage senior-friendly housing developments. This is something the Ninilchik Village Tribe is active in as well. They recently built Tovarish manor, a senior income-based housing area.

The borough will preserve culture through a Cultural Resource Plan, protecting historic properties and taking a cultural inventory of the Kenai Peninsula, including the tribes as a resource. In Ninilchik the tribe is also working on their Heritage Project to preserve culture. The Heritage Project involves the tribe handing out surveys to community residents that ask about traditions, culture, and heritage of the people of Ninilchik. The borough will support healthcare through coordination with the local hospitals and advocating for health fairs. While the plan does not talk about parenting classes, like the Ninilchik interviewees mention, it does talk about

addressing ACEs so that children grow up in healthy environments. The suggestion by three interviewees to do parenting classes is one way to address ACEs.

In the fourth goal of improving connectivity, the borough will: (a) connect communities by trails, (b) expand docks and public transport, and (c) build new roads in alignment with growth. They will establish a Borough Trails Commission to work on trails between communities. For their final goal of engaging residents in a more effective borough government they plan to: (a) provide quality education, (b) expand educational opportunities in the areas of growing industries, and (c) develop a sustainable fiscal plan to rely less on state funding. To improve education the borough will work with internet providers to expand service and continue to provide buses to get students to school. They will work with the legislature on education funding and continue to support the Kenai Peninsula College. The borough is seeking ways to decrease the costs of the services they provide. In the Comprehensive Plan they show an example of an implementation matrix they will use to track their progress.

The community of Ninilchik shares these goals of connectivity with the borough. Like the borough, interviewees explained that the tribe is also working to rely less on outside funding and earn income through third-party billing so that they are less dependent on grants. Borough-wide, including Ninilchik, the focus is on growth in the health sector, vocational education, and jobs through agriculture and tourism. The borough recognizes the importance of expanding internet connection which is vital in increasing access to education in the Ninilchik area. Additionally, the borough sees the need to focus on trade education to meet needs in the workforce. Ninilchik interviewees proposed starting a vocational school in the community. They are centrally located on the Kenai Peninsula and this could be something the borough could be involved in.

While the borough plan lists the local tribes in the area when describing the demographics of the region, I found that the plan fails to take into account the governing aspects of the tribes and their involvement in self-determination. The plan deals primarily with the borough municipalities and unincorporated cities. There is the occasional note made by an interviewee cited in the plan that talks about something one of the tribes is doing. However, the plan does not look to the tribes to partner with them or involve them in the development of the borough. The tribes play a large role in their communities. The Ninilchik Village Tribe is active in many of the borough goals and while the community of Ninilchik is unincorporated, the tribe



provides the majority of the services for the community. It would be fitting for the borough to recognize the work of the tribes and include them in comprehensive planning about the future of the borough.

## **Summary**

This chapter set out to address the second question in this dissertation, how Ninilchik community members utilize self-determination to achieve sustainability and wellbeing. Self-determining actions are divided into individual, community, and tribal actions. As far as individuals are concerned, some are engaged and active in creating change in their community while others are not engaged but still recognize the importance of engagement to reach the optimistic future. These people not engaged tend to have low education or to be older members of the community who are tired of spending their lives volunteering. They have reached volunteer burnout and are seeking others to step up to the task. Community and tribal engagement is extensive and detailed in multiple sections ranging from infrastructure to serving population needs. All of the self-determining actions, individual, community, and tribal are actions that lead to the wellbeing and sustainability of the community. Following through with these actions is the next step to take after this project and can be done on an individual, community, and tribal scale. The last part of the section on self-determining actions looks at nation building and how the Ninilchik Village Tribe, as a sovereign federally recognized tribe, meets the needs of the community through promoting sustainability and wellbeing. All acts cannot be left up to the tribe. It is strategic for individuals, the community, and the tribe to all act in the areas that they are able to impact.

In comparing the Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan to the self-determining actions identified by the interviews in Ninilchik, many aspects are aligned, however, Ninilchik interviewees had specific suggestions on how to achieve their goals which the borough plan has currently left more open-ended. Additionally, the plan fails to account for sustainable management of fish and wildlife and the agency of the local tribes. This is a problematic aspect of the plan, as the tribes are heavily involved in the borough communities and the future of the area.

This information from the interviewees is valuable to the Ninilchik Village Tribe as it provides them with many different options of things to work on and also initial ideas on how to

achieve their goals. From the data, the community can come together to decide if they want to do a project to make their community more like the optimistic future scenario they identified. My hope is that this dissertation provides the Ninilchik Village Tribe with a wealth of information on what their community members want in order to have a sustainable community with wellbeing.



## **Chapter VI: Theoretical Comparisons**

### **Introduction**

This project utilized grounded theory to analyze the data collected in interviews and focus groups. The theory developed from the data is comparable to existing theories discussed in the Methods, Chapter III, (the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, social science development theories, and the Elements of Development Model) (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999). Looking at the narrative in Chapter V on self-determining actions, the results of the project show direct links between self-determining actions and resulting sustainability and wellbeing. These actions relate directly to the theories discussed in Chapter III and demonstrate the applicability of these theories to a project like this.

### **Capabilities Approach**

The notion of practicing self-determination to improve wellbeing through the Capabilities Approach was discussed by the economist Amartya Sen (1999). The theory explains how people utilize their freedom to act on what they value to improve their wellbeing. In Ninilchik, having self-determination is the freedom, and the self-determining acts described in Chapter V are the actions being taken on values. Interviewees identified individual, community, and tribal acts. Twenty-four of the 30 interviewees, 80%, identified the tribe as a key facilitator in the optimistic future of Ninilchik. In alignment with Murphy (2014), the interviewees see the collective capability of the tribe to engage in self-determining acts for the wellbeing of the community as paramount to community sustainability and wellbeing. This wellbeing is not only psychological for individuals, but economic, and for the whole community as well, as found by Cornell & Kalt, (2007) and Murphy (2014).

For example, four interviewees suggested the tribe start an animal farm. This economic development would help with the sustainability and wellbeing of the community local food production, provide an export, and create a space for tourists to come see the animals. Another suggestion was for the tribe to build a casino. This would create jobs, bring in tourism, and create a space to serve the tribal animals at a restaurant in the casino. The Ninilchik interviewees valued having a sustainable community with wellbeing, and they identified many diverse actions listed in Chapter V to explain how to reach that community in their future. The Capabilities Approach

was demonstrated through this research as a theory relevant to research on self-determination, sustainability, and wellbeing.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

The autonomous self-determining actions identified by the interviewees combined with their emphasis on social connection and the competence to attain these desired outcomes in the optimistic future demonstrate Self-Determination Theory and how autonomy, relatedness, and competence lead to wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There were many autonomous self-determining actions identified and outlined in Chapter V. One such action was for community members to start gardening more to have more local food and food security. When considering social connection, interviewees in one focus group talked about having a message board so everyone in the community could know what events were going on and could also reach out for help if they needed someone to do a job for them or had work they could offer. In describing competence, interviewees mentioned the strength of the tribe and how it serves as a backbone for the community. Whether it is individuals involved in actions, or the community, or the tribe as a unit, the actions interviewees identified in Chapter V demonstrate the three aspects of Self-Determination Theory—autonomy, relatedness, and competence—lead to “social development and personal well-being” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). In this project, personal wellbeing would be expanded to community wellbeing as the community or tribe is also seen as an autonomous unit, not just individual people. This theory on self-determination was shown through the data and is useful to employ in research on self-determination as it shows how it is not just the self-determining actions, but the relatedness and competence that together lead to wellbeing.

### **Social Science Theories**

The community of Ninilchik is largely a low-income community of fewer than 900 people. It is a rural community and interviewees stressed the development of Ninilchik as important but also recognized the need to maintain the local culture and way of life. Dependency and World Systems Theories explain that Indigenous communities struggle due to over-involvement in modernized capitalist economies (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). The interviewees do not want large modernization efforts to transform their community into a modern city. They value the rural aspect of their area and work toward economic development in a way that allows

them to maintain sustainability and wellbeing in their community. Interviewees want to maintain their culture and way of life, recognizing that Ninilchik is a part of the global economy that will succeed through local self-determining efforts that allow the community to participate in the wider economy (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). One example of this in the Ninilchik area is controlled oil and gas development. With oil and gas being found in the area, it is vital the community is involved in self-determining actions to control the development so that they maintain the type of community they want to live in.

### **Elements of Development Model**

The self-determination actions identified in Chapter V fit into the Elements of Development Model, (see Table 3) (Black, 1994). First, the interviewees identified self-determining acts happening at the individual, community, and tribal levels. Second, all 16 aspects in the Elements of Development Model can be found in the interview data and through Chapter V: (1) control of assets, (2) environmental balance, (3) hope/future orientation, (4) choices/vision, (5) spirituality, (6) cultural integrity, (7) social respect, (8) political and civil participation, (9) kinship, (10) health and safety, (11) responsibility and consequences, (12) vibrant initiative, (13) personal efficacy, (14) productivity skills, (15) income, and (16) trade and exchange. Black (1994) suggests using indicators to monitor community success of the 16 elements and the research thus far has begun this process through developing the initial indicators in Table 2. The model espouses an economic philosophy: people developing through household income, economic partnerships between the tribe and others, reducing federal funding dependency, diversifying the local economy, and encouraging leadership. These were all points identified in interviews that the interviewees see the community doing well on in the optimistic future.

The four main elements of the model as explained in the literature review are control of assets, spirituality, kinship, and personal efficacy. Ninilchik is working towards control of assets by becoming less dependent on federal money through their own economic ventures and third-party billing in the clinic. Putting land in trust is another asset for the tribe as is the housing they are building and the programs they are running. The second main element is kinship. The community is active in kinship through donations, fundraising, and volunteering. These are very positive activities happening in the community now and the interviewees see growth in

volunteering and mentoring in the optimistic future. Personal efficacy is people having confidence in their abilities. This is the third main element. The tribe is working on building community confidence and individual self-esteem through their programs, the teen center, putting people in housing they can afford, and developing job training programs and possibly a vocational school. The fourth main element is spirituality. Ninilchik is a community of many churches and people attend churches in Ninilchik, and all the way to those in Anchor Point and Soldotna. In this model, spirituality means more than just church: it is having a vision to see choices to act on what the community values. This project, engaging in thinking about the optimistic future, is the community utilizing this spirituality of having a vision and then acting on the self-determining actions they identified. Additionally, the future research section details additional ways in which to grow the community through respecting one another, revitalizing language, and preserving culture through asset mapping and building capabilities. The fact that the interview data can fit into this model, Table 3, demonstrates the strength and comprehensiveness of the model. It provides refined categories that the community of Ninilchik can work within when conducting future research with this data.

Table 3. Elements of Development Model and Ninilchik Self-Determination

<b>Elements of Development Model</b>	<b>Interview Data</b>
Control of assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less reliance on federal funding</li> <li>• Third-party billing</li> <li>• Land into trust</li> <li>• Building housing</li> <li>• Tribe running programs</li> </ul>
Environmental balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable fish and wildlife and land management</li> <li>• Managing the dump</li> <li>• Preserve community beauty and beautify</li> </ul>
Hope/Future orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking at this project results and optimistic future</li> </ul>
Choices/Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission and goals articulated through this project, see Chapter V for self-determining actions</li> <li>• Future research on asset mapping and building capacity</li> </ul>
Spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches working together</li> <li>• Maintain and grow the Russian Orthodox church</li> <li>• Engaging to achieve the optimistic future</li> <li>• Future research</li> </ul>

Table 3 continued

Elements of Development Model	Interview Data
Cultural integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing the tribal Heritage Project</li> <li>• Language and cultural preservation and maintenance</li> </ul>
Social respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-governance, the tribe works with Department of Interior directly</li> <li>• Tribe PR and education to community</li> </ul>
Political and civic participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More interest and involvement in leadership and local government/tribal government</li> <li>• Community and tribe involved in the school</li> <li>• Involvement in subsistence management</li> </ul>
Kinship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraising and donations</li> <li>• Volunteering and mentoring</li> <li>• Food pantry</li> </ul>
Health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospital and growing health care sector with dental, vision, and behavioral health</li> <li>• Local sheriff or trooper</li> </ul>
Responsibility and consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability to the community</li> </ul>
Vibrant initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting small businesses</li> <li>• Starting new programs</li> <li>• Museum/cultural center</li> <li>• Increased local food production</li> <li>• Tribal animal farm</li> </ul>
Personal efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tribal programs</li> <li>• Teen center</li> <li>• Affordable housing</li> <li>• Job training programs and vocational school</li> <li>• Rehabilitation clinic</li> </ul>
Productivity skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsistence activities</li> <li>• Job training programs</li> </ul>
Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More jobs and employment available through casino, oil and gas, small businesses, faster internet for working from home, etc.</li> </ul>
Trade and exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing for Elders</li> <li>• Locally meeting needs</li> </ul>

### Theoretical Summary

Each of the theories discussed in the literature review was found to be relevant to this project. These theories are useful to engage in future research on Indigenous self-determination, as they provide explanations verified by this research as relevant to Indigenous people. The



Capabilities Approach and Self-Determination Theory explain how self-determination is linked to wellbeing. The interviewees described how specifically that is done in Ninilchik in Chapter V on self-determining actions. Conducting individual, community, and tribal self-determining actions in areas from infrastructure development to education leads to sustainability and wellbeing in the community. It is the engagement that is emphasized as so important to achieving the optimistic future. World Systems and Dependency Theories explain how Indigenous communities need to work through local self-determining efforts to grow their economies, something the interviewees of Ninilchik identified as important. The interviewees do not mention an outside force coming in and fixing their community or economy. All of their ideas are locally developed and range from the tribe starting an animal farm to people starting more small businesses. Finally, the Elements of Development Model provides an outline for the research and a jumping off point for future research using indicators to address self-determination (Black, 1994). Table 3 demonstrates how self-determining actions identified by the interviewees fit into the Elements of Development Model indicators.

### **Limitations**

The primary issue with internal validity in the project is interviewee selection. The interviewees were not selected through a simple random sample. Additionally, the entire community was not interviewed. These two limitations could cause a lack in data and additional perspectives. The reason I used a purposive sample selection criteria was due to working with the wishes of the tribe and wanting the project to be as beneficial to them as possible. The tribal leadership wanted to choose who to interview so they could include people they considered who could best answer the project questions. They decided to include 30 people in the interview process. Additionally, this type of sample could be biased by including people who worked with the tribe in some way or were especially in support of the tribe. Again, these people were considered those who could best inform the research questions and help the tribe. Looking at the sample described above, the people interviewed were from many areas within the community, tribal and nontribal. There were different backgrounds in ethnicity and education as well. Although we were not able to interview everyone in the community, the diversity of interviewees was extensive and brought many different perspectives to the project.

The ability to generalize the results or the external validity of the study is potentially limited by working with a community that has tribal and nontribal members. The study did not include only tribal members. This could limit the applicability to other tribes. However, many tribal communities, including families, are mixed with tribal and nontribal members, and in looking at self-determination and sustainability it is important to get the insider and outsider perspectives of the tribe to see how they can most benefit the community as a whole. Having community-wide data was more helpful to the tribe in order for them to be able to apply for grants. The goals of the project were to meet the needs of the tribe and the researcher, so the inclusion of nontribal members was necessary to the project and overall did add insight in other areas.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The next steps of this research would be to do asset mapping and then utilize the identified indicators and the asset map in a capacity building project. Asset mapping identifies the assets or resources the community has to improve the sustainability and wellbeing of the community (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, n.d.). It identifies the capabilities of the community and the community members, infrastructure the community has such as schools, churches, and businesses, associations like the various boards and chamber of commerce, and nonprofits in the community. All of these are assets to the community and can be mapped to identify how the community can capitalize on their assets, or to determine what they may be lacking that they need to institute. Asset mapping can help a community start new programs, make decisions about development, and mobilize community members and organizations. It is important for the community to first, identify their boundaries; second, involve people and organizations in the community interested in the project; third, determine what assets the community wants to include; fourth, list the assets of the various organizations such as their location and the services they offer; fifth, list the assets individuals in the community possess; and sixth, organize the assets in a map format. This allows the community to identify and build on their assets, visually depict community assets, collect data to help inform decisions, and generate unity in the community around a project.

Additionally, asset-based community development (ABCD) starts with looking at the assets the community has in order to address issues they want to resolve, instead of starting with

deficiencies. Framing the community in terms of the assets it has is a positive approach to development (Mathie, Cameron, & Gibson, 2017). In addition to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research asset mapping resource, the Asset-Based Community Development Institute produced a Community Building Workbook on *A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents* (Kretzmann, McKnight, Sheehan, Green, & Punttenney, 1997). In addition to defining the assets the community has, Kretzmann et al. (1997) argue it is necessary to outline the skills local residents have as well before beginning a project. Then, when conducting the project, the team knows what skills they are able to call upon from the community. This guide provides a step-by-step process of identifying individual assets.

Starting with an asset map is a comprehensive way to assess what the community already possesses and what they may be lacking. From there, the next step is capacity building. The *Community Capacity Building Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities* provides a method in which to go through the next steps (Cavaye, 2011). This tool is one of many tools available to help guide a community through the capacity building process. This toolkit is specific to rural areas and comes from communities in the outback of Australia. Beckley et al. (2008) explore community capacity building through assets (including capital and resources), catalysts, and how to mobilize the assets and catalysts through the market, bureaucratic, communal, and associative social relations in rural Canada. Both models are valuable guides when starting to work around capacity building. Capacity building takes the community from the issue they want to address to employing their assets and having a community with increased capacity. Like asset mapping, capacity building involves anyone in the community who is interested and revives the community spirit and unity in purpose that the interviewees identified as important to the community.

The interview data from this project provides a start to the asset mapping process. Assets should be explored in relation to the indicators in Table 2 and the self-determining actions in Chapter V. The sustainability indicators identified by the interviewees in Chapter IV and presented in Table 2 provide a tool for sustainable development policy in the community (Pires & Fidélis, 2014). The indicators can be used when doing capacity projects as goals to work towards. It may be helpful to use the Elements of Development Model and identify assets within each of those categories (Black, 1994). Although this project was done in partnership with the Niniichik Village Tribe, the asset mapping and capacity building projects could be community-

driven instead of tribally driven, whichever the community feels will be most beneficial. The tribe is a highly organized group and may be able to facilitate these projects if they are interested in further exploration of the data.

Interviewees identified the many steps needed to achieve the optimistic future. The dissemination document provided to the tribe and interviewees (see Appendix F) outlines all their suggestions of what self-determining actions can be done in the community by individuals, community members, and the tribe. Asset mapping and capacity building projects are one suggestion on how to act on these self-determining actions. Each action identified by the interviewees is a capacity building project in itself. For example, one suggestion in the dissemination document is to build an assisted living facility. This is a large project. The community could begin with an asset map to assess what strengths they have in individuals and organizations as well as infrastructure is available in the community. After coming up with an asset map they can start a capacity building project to build what capacity they still need in order to achieve the assisted living facility.

The different capacity building models described above provide examples on how to approach this type of project. These models help guide a community through a project from emphasizing the steps of the project such as clearly defining the goals and methods to be achieved to designing a project working from the assets the community has available (Kretzmann et al., 1997). Leadership helps set forth the vision of the project and involving community members maintains project momentum (Cavaye, 2011). The community can go about achieving their goals in other ways they deem appropriate as well, asset mapping and capacity building projects are just suggestions that may help them on their path to the optimistic future of their community.

One interviewee suggested paying attention the stages of change model when applying any change process to the community (Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 2013). This is very important to consider when getting ready to engage in capacity building. The asset map and capacity building may instigate an exciting busy process, but the actual rate of change may need to occur slowly. The stages of change model emphasizes the importance of educating people, (something the tribe is trying to do), and getting people to see the need to change for themselves. The interviewee who mentioned the model said that it is important to move with the

community's "readiness to change...[as that would be] sustainable" (personal communication, interview 21, March 13, 2018).

The first stage of the stages of change model is pre-contemplation. In this stage, people are not just being told what to do but are instead receiving information so they can begin to think about issues and make informed decisions (Prochaska et al., 2013). In this first stage, people do not feel the need to make any changes. The next stage is contemplation where people start thinking about the information they have been given, maybe thinking of something they want to change, being aware of a problem, but they are not decided yet if they want to make the change. This second stage can take a long time for some people to work through. It is helpful to give people the pros and cons of change and information to help support their decision to move to change. The third stage is preparation. Individuals in this stage have decided to make a change but have not started yet. Here people need encouragement, support, and assistance. The fourth stage is action where the person actually modifies their behavior. They continue to need encouragement, support, and assistance. The next stage is maintenance. In maintenance the person is working to prevent relapse into old behaviors and making their new behavior a routine. Change is not linear and many times people relapse and end up going through the cycle of change again. If the tribe decides to go forward with asset mapping and capacity building it will be necessary for them to assess the community's readiness for change so that building capacity can be successful with maintenance of change in new behaviors of people in the community for sustainability and wellbeing.

## **Summary**

This chapter reconnected with Chapter III through comparing the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, social science development theories, and the Elements of Development Model with the theory derived from answering the research questions on sustainability, wellbeing, and self-determination (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999). All of the theories were found to be relevant to the project and useful in exploring Indigenous self-determination in future work. This chapter also addressed the project limitations and recommendations for future research. The Elements of Development Model is useful to guide future research through using its different sections as areas to explore assets

within the community. Additionally, it is important to pay attention to the change model so that change in the community can be lasting and sustainable.



## Chapter VII: Conclusion

This dissertation set out to explore how community members in Ninilchik defined sustainability and wellbeing, and how they see themselves utilizing self-determination to achieve that sustainability and wellbeing. The project employed ethnographic futures research as the method to explore these questions through discussing the pessimistic, most likely, and optimistic futures. The interviewees described self-determining actions in the optimistic future that were not present in the pessimistic and most likely futures. This demonstrated the need for self-determining actions to achieve the sustainability and wellbeing they seek for their community. These self-determining actions allow the Ninilchik Village Tribe to combat problems in the community and take control of their fate and future.

Chapter I, the Introduction, explained the issues Native communities in Alaska face due to historical trauma, development, and a lack of fate control. These issues have led to a lack of wellbeing that resulted in high drug and alcohol use and suicide. The community of Ninilchik struggles with these problems, which are linked to colonization. The Ninilchik Village Tribe is working through self-determining efforts to take control of their own fate to address the problems of historical trauma and unchecked development through a variety of programs and outreach. This is further explained in Chapters IV and V when I talk about self-determining actions.

The Introduction also explained colonization in Alaska from contact with Russians through the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA) (1971) and to the present. Additionally, this chapter outlined the significance of the study and how there is little research on Indigenous self-determination as a way to address social and economic issues in Indigenous communities. This study directly addressed this lack of research to provide the tribe with recommendations from their own community members on what can be done for the sustainability and wellbeing of the Ninilchik. Self-determination is the vehicle to achieving a community with sustainability and wellbeing in the community.

Chapter II, the Literature Review, addressed the historical aspect of colonization, looking at the work of Memmi (1967), Friere (1993), and Fanon (1968). The chapter explains how Alaska Natives live in a colonized state, and that people may internalize this mindset, hindering their development as a community. The next part of the chapter details law and court cases related to Alaska Native sovereignty, federally, internationally, and specific to the State of



Alaska. The final part of this chapter is devoted to the gap in the literature where there is a lack of research on the connections between self-determination, sustainability, and wellbeing.

I explain in this chapter the many barriers tribes face as they work through self-determination for sustainability and wellbeing. These barriers include blood quantum and federal and state laws and acts. Land claims are another one of these barriers. The fact that ANCSA gave the land to regional and village corporations instead of the tribes left the tribes with no land—other than the land they had purchased and held through fee simple title. The Ninilchik Village Tribe owns some land they have bought but the majority of the land in the Ninilchik area is owned by the village corporation, NNAI. This is why it is so important for the tribe to work closely with NNAI and build good relationships so that they can access the land. The tribe will need to access NNAI land if they plan to do an animal farm as they will need many more acres of land than the tribe currently owns. When I conducted the interviews in 2018, the President of the tribe was also the President of NNAI so that the two organizations could build a closer working relationship for mutual benefit.

Alaska Natives live in a colonized state as we live under a federal government dominated by descendants of colonizers. This is another barrier to tribes. There are a number of acts and laws in the U.S. that limit tribal sovereignty in a practical sense. Working through self-determination by taking control of their own fates moves tribes to achieve wellbeing and sustainability. Self-determination provides the avenue to achieve sustainability and wellbeing even under colonization. Tribes, like the Ninilchik Village Tribe, utilize their self-government, earn revenue, and work through federal grants and programs to support their communities.

Chapter III explained the methods, where I detailed the research method used, ethnographic futures research (Textor, 1980). The project used scenarios of the pessimistic, most likely, and optimistic futures to explore the links between self-determination, sustainability, and wellbeing. I interviewed 30 people and held four focus groups to discuss the results of the interviews. I conducted data collection in the tribal community of Ninilchik, Alaska. The interviews were coded through NVivo analysis software using grounded theory. In this chapter, I also explain the importance of using Indigenous methodologies and detail my ethical considerations and how I am respecting cultural knowledge. Following this, I looked at the theoretical perspectives that informed the work, the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, social science development theories, and the Elements of Development Model, as well

as looking at Arctic wellbeing indicators (Black, 1994; Einarsson et al., 2004; Larsen & Fondahl, 2014; Larsen et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2014; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999).

Ethnographic futures research is an innovative way to explore an optimistic future with sustainability and wellbeing in Indigenous communities. It is a method that promotes wellbeing of the interviewees, allows for storytelling, and enables people to talk about the future as if it was a history instead of making projections. This method is a useful way to engage community residents in strategic planning in their communities in culturally appropriate ways in accordance with Indigenous Methodologies. The method begins with an in-depth exploration into the optimistic future. From there, the interviewees briefly describe the pessimistic future they want to avoid. Identifying aspects of a pessimistic future helps demonstrate what is so important in the optimistic future and what pitfalls need to be avoided so that the community does not fall into the pessimistic future. The third part of the interview is the most likely future if things keep going on the way they are with nothing very pessimistic or optimistic. This future helps identify what sets the optimistic future apart from the most likely future. Finally, the interviewee identifies what steps have to be taken to reach the optimistic future and what they personally are going to do to help the community achieve that optimistic future. This brings a sense of agency into the interview room and gives the interviewee power, realizing that they play a part in achieving all the goals they set out for their community.

This method also provides a way to talk about sustainability and wellbeing. Instead of just asking someone what sustainability and wellbeing mean, having them go into in-depth stories about the future paints a picture of what a sustainable community with wellbeing looks like. This method should be utilized in future work on sustainability and wellbeing as it helps people talk about the definitions in practical life applications. These words are also difficult to define and by allowing someone to tell a story about their community in the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely futures, people end up giving a full definition of sustainability in the community. I asked each interviewee first to define sustainability and then wellbeing. The definitions were typically short and not very comprehensive; yet, when that person started describing the future scenarios they then identified the different aspects of sustainability and wellbeing in their community. Ethnographic futures research is a method that needs to be employed in future work around sustainability and wellbeing.

Chapter IV was the discussion on Sustainability and Wellbeing. In this chapter, I addressed the first research questions of the project. First, I defined sustainability and wellbeing through the interviews. The definition of sustainability included longevity, value of place, and self-sufficiency as well as economic, social, and ecological components. The interviewees included the definition of sustainability in wellbeing and added a factor of health, physical, mental, and spiritual health. From the definitions I made a table of sustainability and wellbeing indicators (see Table 2). This table of indicators shows what Ninilchik looks like when it is a community with sustainability and wellbeing. I also discuss the implications of the definitions.

As mentioned above, the method of ethnographic futures research allowed me to get a full definition of what sustainability and wellbeing meant to the interviewees in the project. The depth of their definitions came from the scenarios, not just asking them straight out to define the words. Through the scenarios the interviewees identified different indicators of sustainability and wellbeing. Some indicators were identified through the optimistic future, when describing what they want to see in the community. Other indicators came out of the pessimistic future, when interviewees explained what they wanted to avoid. Using ethnographic futures research was an inventive way to talk about sustainability and wellbeing. When I set out to conduct the project I was originally going to answer the first question of my dissertation about the definitions of sustainability and wellbeing just by asking the interviewees to describe them. However, once completing the scenario interviews I realized the depths of their definitions were found in the scenarios. This made me realize how important ethnographic futures research is to people conducting research on sustainability and wellbeing. It is a tool that helps people capture the indicators that matter to their community.

Chapter V discussed the self-determining actions for a future with sustainability and wellbeing. I explained how self-determining actions taken by individuals, the community, and the tribe lead to wellbeing and sustainability in Ninilchik. I also explained how some people feel they play an important part being engaged in the community and others feel they have contributed enough and want to now enjoy their retirement. I also look at the nation building approach and how through self-government and service delivery the Ninilchik Village Tribe can promote the sustainability and wellbeing of the community through meeting the needs of the people. Lastly, I compare the Ninilchik interview results to the Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan 2018 Update.

In Chapter V I identified three different types of self-determination: individual, community, and tribal. Self-determination was defined in Chapter I as the ability for an individual, community, or tribe to make their own decision and control their own fate (Einarsson et al., 2004; Jorgensen, 2007). For the tribe this definition expands to include “substantial decision-making control over the nation’s lands, resources, affairs, and future” (Jorgensen, 2007, p. 57). In the Literature Review, Chapter II, I detail tribal self-determination. Self-determination is further described in Chapter III, the methods, through the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, World Systems Theory, Dependency Theory, and the Elements of Development Model (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999).

It is notable that I am working in an Indigenous community but addressing more than just tribal self-determination. The interviews and focus groups brought forth the importance of individual and community self-determination as well—and these cannot be ignored or minimized. All three types of self-determination need to be considered when discussing how to move a community toward their optimistic future. Individuals bear responsibility to act and be engaged in their communities. The tribal government alone cannot get a community to its optimistic future without individual involvement, investment, and personal responsibility of individuals in the community.

Community self-determination is another aspect. As a community, not a tribal government, the people of Ninilchik are able to act for their sustainability and wellbeing. Community endeavors such as starting a mentorship program or a foodbank are ways that the community members can come together for the benefits of the whole community. Community members are active citizens in the community and the tribal government is not able to respond to all their concerns, they too play an active role in reaching the optimistic future. If a community has a municipal government then acting through that government would be community self-determination.

There is no municipal government in Ninilchik. The Ninilchik Village Tribe is the only form of government in the area. Tribal self-determination is closely tied to the powers of self-government that tribes have. The Ninilchik Village Tribe has a lot of capacity and is able to apply for grants as a self-governing entity, run a health center, and bring lawsuits to the state and federal government when their rights are being threatened. They have the decision-making power over their lands, affairs, and resources as a self-governing entity. Tribal self-determination

involves working as a government to meet the needs of their community. This type of self-determination is detailed in Chapter II, the Literature Review. Tribal self-determining actions identified by interviewees include running programs, growing the health center, and expanding tribal infrastructure.

Twenty-four interviewees, 80%, emphasized that the tribe plays a key role in the sustainability and wellbeing in the community through their interviews. Many interviewees with ideas about the optimistic future such as an assisted living facility, rehab center, and recreation center, saw the tribe making these things possible. Interviewees that talked about transportation needs in the community repeatedly referenced the tribe's BUMPS bus system. The tribe is seen as having a lot of capacity and 80% of the interviewees turn to the tribe for big projects that need to be done in the community. The tribe has shown they are capable through their health center, BUMPS bus system, and health club as well as through the grants and programs they run for youth and outreach. The tribal government is a vehicle to achieve sustainability and wellbeing in the community.

Right now the tribe is majority funded through federal grants. They do have some third-party revenue through their health clinic, laundromat in Anchor Point, and the health and wellness club, (the majority of income coming from the health clinic). If there are changes to federal funding this could limit the tribe in achieving their sustainability and wellbeing goals. If there is a reduction in federal funding, or less grants available, this would severely limit the tribe as they are dependent on federal funding. The tribe is aware of this and the changing political climate and is working towards more third-party revenue as discussed in this project.

For the community of Ninilchik to reach the optimistic future, a place with sustainability and wellbeing, all three types of self-determination, individual, community, and tribal are necessary according to the interviewees. Additionally, the theories I explored also leave space for individual, community, and tribal self-determination to achieve wellbeing. I want to emphasize that tribal self-determination is not the only type of self-determination. It is one type of self-determination that is important to community wellbeing. Individual and community engagement are vital to meet all the needs that community members have.

Chapter VI describes the theoretical comparisons, and I explained how the Capabilities Approach, Self-Determination Theory, World Systems Theory, Dependency Theory, and the Elements of Development Model are important to research on Indigenous self-determination and

how these theories relate to the work (Black, 1994; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sen, 1999). The community of Ninilchik is directly involved in living out these theories in a practical sense. In alignment with the Capabilities Approach, individuals, the community, and the tribe have the freedom to conduct self-determining actions to improve wellbeing. As described in Chapters IV and V, they are doing just that. People are also working through Self-Determination Theory by conducting autonomous self-determining actions, fostering relatedness in the community through social connections and community spirit, and engaging in competence through the capacity of the tribe.

The interviewees explained it is important that the community be involved in its own development, without an outsider coming in and developing the community for them. The interviewees value self-sufficiency and work toward economic development on a local level. Like Dependency and World Systems Theories explain, it is local autonomous self-determining actions that lead to economic development and involvement on the world stage. Finally, as Table 3 explains, the Elements of Development Model was found throughout the interview data. This model provides a roadmap of areas to address development in the community through individual, community, and tribal levels.

Chapter VI also explains the project's limitations and directions of future research. To begin with, giving back is far more than just sending the community a copy of my dissertation. The biggest way I can give back is with my results. The results show what the community interviewees identified as self-determining actions to reach their most desired future. It is these future visions of the community that can guide the sustainability and wellbeing of the community. Here the community needs to translate these interview results into effort. As Brayboy et al. (2011) said, "the self-determination and inherent sovereignty of indigenous peoples is rooted in relationships and is driven explicitly by community interests" (p. 424). I am unsure at this stage if I will have a role in these processes of development. I would like the community take charge of these efforts, as taking control of one's fate increases wellbeing (Einarsson et al., 2004). If I am asked to help, I will gladly lend assistance.

I took the results of this project back to the community in the form of a booklet and presentation in January 2019 (see Appendix F). I did a presentation to the tribal board and a community-wide presentation as well. I wrote up the results in an easy-to-read booklet format that I handed out at both meetings. I wanted the project results to be easily accessible to the

community and tribe. From this, the community and tribe can decide where to take the results and what self-determining actions they want to be involved in to reach their optimistic view of the future.

The next steps for this project are asset mapping and capacity building. This is further explained in Chapter VI when I discuss Recommendations for Future Research. Asset mapping allows the community to identify their strengths and also what they are lacking. After doing an asset map, the community can then look at a capacity building project, knowing where their strengths and weaknesses lie and identify which actions they want to take. Looking at Chapters IV and V the community of Ninilchik can see what indicators they identified in their optimistic future and what self-determining actions they need to conduct to get to that future. They can choose what they want to follow through with and what they think is the most achievable for Ninilchik. The Elements of Development Model may be a useful way to categorize assets and outline a capacity building project if the community finds that model helpful (Black, 1994).

This research project did not outline actual projects for the community to partake in to reach their optimistic future. However, the storytelling method I utilized is also used in planning and the booklet produced could be the basis of a community plan of development. The next steps from here are to take these project results and make use of them, developing projects around the self-determining actions and sustainability and wellbeing indicators identified. The tribe and community will likely need to write grants and apply for funding to follow through with self-determining actions to reach the optimistic future identified for Ninilchik. For example, the community would like to see a new harbor. This is in line with the Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan of further developing harbors on the Peninsula. A harbor is a very expensive project, and the community will need to work with the borough and state to secure funding. Community members will need to speak at community and borough meetings to advocate for the harbor if that is a part of the future they want to follow through with. There will need to be a lot of organizing around this goal if this is something the community identifies that they desire for their future.

Another project community members identified was beautification of the community. This will involve many community volunteers and also securing some money from fundraising, the state, and the borough. Community members will need to form a committee to advocate for their goals and develop a plan on how they want to go about achieving beautification. Each self-

determining action identified for the optimistic future is practically a separate project that will need a committee and organizing around it to reach fruition. A capacity building project could outline the goals the community has based around all the project results and the steps that need to take place to achieve those separate goals. Committees could be formed around each goal or they could decide to work with one goal at a time. There is a lot of future work needed to reach the optimistic future identified for Ninilchik by the interviewees. This project provided the community with a booklet outlining the direction the interviewees explained they would like the community to go (see Appendix F).

This project provides a model for other communities to follow on assessing the self-determining actions they can take for their sustainability and wellbeing. Ethnographic futures research provides a valuable method to understand sustainability and wellbeing from the perspective of the interviewees. By explaining each of the three futures, the interviewees demonstrate what the optimistic future has that the pessimistic and most likely futures lack, and from this can be generated a definition of sustainability and wellbeing, and a list of self-determining actions to achieve that sustainability and wellbeing. Defining the self-determining actions to take is the first step in following through with the actions that make the community what the interviewees identified as sustainable and a place with wellbeing.

The research is relevant beyond the Ninilchik Village Tribe to other Indigenous and marginalized minority communities who can exercise self-determining acts for the wellbeing and sustainability of their communities. This project provides an example and format that other people can use if they so wish. I am contributing to the field of Indigenous Studies and the social sciences through researching self-determination and the results people see from it; it is an understudied area of research. My work informs the social sciences more broadly, demonstrating how to work as a researcher with Indigenous people while being culturally respectful and partnering on the project with the community. Additionally, work on self-determination with Indigenous people informs social scientists who work with other minorities or oppressed people about the benefits of self-determination. Finally, by recognizing research is not objective, I inform other researchers of the value of having a perspective and creating relationships with the community. I built a relationship with the Ninilchik Village Tribe and worked with them on the project so that I could understand and meet their needs. I also produced a disseminating



document for them so that the results are in a readable format for the participants and community (see Appendix F).

This project can be replicated in other communities using my method and approach. I documented my methods used in this dissertation and explained how ethnographic futures research provides a way to talk about the future in culturally appropriate ways with Indigenous people. The method actually promotes wellbeing through engaging people in an optimistic perspective of their lives (Carver et al., 2010; Conversano et al., 2010). I also provide my Interview and Focus Group Guides in Appendices C and D. Using these materials and Textor's (1980) *A Handbook on Ethnographic Futures Research* the project can be done in other communities to help them strategically plan for their future. My dissemination document (see Appendix F) provides an example of an output of the project that is useful to the community as well. This document can be used to write a strategic plan for the community. This project is useful for communities to demonstrate to them what their potential is. The community of Ninilchik and the Ninilchik Village Tribe was inspired by the project results and invited me back in 20 years to see how they have reached their optimistic future they laid out in the interview process and that I formalized in Appendix F. I look forward to seeing this project replicated in other communities for the benefit of those communities. Following my method and procedures gives a guideline for how to conduct the project and produce useful results for the communities involved.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Consent Form (Interview)

#### **Informed Consent Form (interview)**

Self-Determination, Sustainability, and Wellbeing in an Alaska Native Community

IRB 1090657

Date Approved:

Interviewee De-identification Number:

#### **Description of the Study:**

You are being asked to take part in a research study about how Ninilchik Village Tribal members and Ninilchik community members see their possible futures. We will talk about sustainability and wellbeing of the Ninilchik tribal community. The goal of this study is to learn what people think can improve the community. I am asking you to take part in this study because you can share knowledge about Ninilchik. Please read this form carefully. You can ask any questions you have now or at any time.

The purpose of this interview is to talk about the sustainability and wellbeing of the Ninilchik tribal community. We are going to do that through a series of scenarios. The things you tell me today will help the guide the Ninilchik tribe in making the community a more well and sustainable place to live. I will be meeting with you again, if you are able, to talk with a group of people I interviewed so that we can broaden our ideas through a group discussion. I am doing this project for my dissertation, which I will be publishing. I also brought you a copy of the interview questions so that you can have them for future reference.

If you do an interview in this project, you will be talking about the future and how to get to the future you would like to have. The interview will last one hour to two hours. The length of the interview depends on how much you have to say.

Audio recordings will be made of your interview so that I can write out what you said. I will return the full write out of your interview to you within a month after the interview so that you can see if you want to make changes, add, delete, or explain anything further. Only the researchers involved with this project will have access to your interview data. Those people are me and my dissertation committee of Sean Topkok, Mike Koskey, Diane Hirshberg, and Pat Sekaquaptewa. The interviews will be de-identified by giving you a number instead of using your name. The recordings will be kept for five years after the publication of the research so that the research can be reviewed if necessary.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The risks to you if you take part in this study may be discomfort in talking about certain topics. You may feel uncomfortable making projections about the future. We will try to make you comfortable by talking about the future as if it is the present. The interview may bring up topics and memories for you that you do not like. If during the interview you want to change topics, take a break, or end the interview that is fine. We have a list of resources if you want to talk with a trained counselor about any issues that come up.

In this study you will benefit through giving your ideas on how your community can create the future you most want to see it have. Your ideas on how to get to that future are valuable to community projects.

**Compensation:** Each interviewee will receive \$30 for being in an interview. You will need to provide your social security number and signature to me so that I can give you the money. Your personal information is password protected in my computer and is secure.

**Confidentiality:**

- Any information from you will be kept confidential.
- Any information with your name attached will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.
- We will code your information with a number so no one can trace your answers to your name.
- We will destroy paperwork and securely store all research records.
- Your name will not be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision to take part in the study is up to you. You are free to choose to take part in the study. If you decide to take part in the study, you can stop at any time. You can stop the tape recorder or ask to be removed from the study. If you complete the interview or not you will be paid for participating. If you do an interview in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If that is ok, you can initial at the bottom of the page.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions now please ask me. If you have questions later, you may contact:

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Michael Koskey (phone: 907-474-1902; email: mskoskey@alaska.edu)

**Student Researcher:** Heather Gordon (phone: 907-299-1029; email: gordon.heather.j@gmail.com)

Heather is an advisee of Drs. Koskey and Sean Topkok at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This project is her dissertation research which is being supervised by Drs. Koskey and Topkok.

If you have questions or worries about your rights, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area) or uaf-irb@alaska.edu.

**Statement of Consent:**

I understand the actions described above. My questions have been answered. I agree to be a part of this study. I am 18 years old or older. I have been provided a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant & Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial if you agree to be quoted directly.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Date

Appendix B: Consent Form (Focus group)

**Informed Consent Form (focus group)**

Self-Determination, Sustainability, and Wellbeing in an Alaska Native Community

IRB 1090657

Date Approved:

Interviewee Deidentification Number:

Focus Group Number:

**Description of the Study:**

You are being asked to take part in a research study about how Ninilchik Village Tribal members and Ninilchik community members see their possible futures. We will talk about sustainability and wellbeing of the Ninilchik tribal community. The goal of this study is to learn what people think can improve the community. The purpose of this focus group is to talk about the sustainability and wellbeing of the Ninilchik tribal community. The things you tell me today will help guide the Ninilchik tribe in making the community a more well and sustainable place to live. I am asking you to take part in this study because you can share knowledge about Ninilchik. Please read this form carefully. You can ask any questions you have now or at any time.

If you do an interview in this project, you will be talking about the future and how to get to the future you would like to have. The interview will last one hour to two hours. The length of the interview depends on how much you have to say.

Audio recordings will be made of the focus group so that I can write out what you said. I will return the full write out of the focus group to you within a month of the focus group so that you can see if you want to make changes, add, delete, or explain anything further. Only the researchers involved with this project will have access to the focus group data. Those people are me and my dissertation committee of Sean Topkok, Mike Koskey, Diane Hirshberg, and Pat Sekaquaptewa. The focus groups will be deidentified by giving the group and each participant a number instead of using your name. The recordings will be kept for five years after the publication of the research so that the research can be reviewed if necessary.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The risks to you if you take part in this study may be discomfort in talking about certain topics. You may feel uncomfortable making projections about the future. We will try to make you comfortable by talking about the future as if it is the present. The interview may bring up topics and memories for you that you do not like. If during the interview you want to change topics, take a break, or end the interview that is fine. We have a list of resources if you want to talk with a trained counselor about any issues that come up.

In this study you will benefit through giving your ideas on how your community can create the future you most want to see it have. Your ideas on how to get to that future are valuable to community projects.



**Compensation:** Each interviewee will receive \$30 for being in a focus group. You will need to provide your social security number and signature to me so that I can give you the money. Your personal information is password protected in my computer and is secure.

**Confidentiality:**

- Any information from you will be kept confidential.
- Any information with your name attached will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.
- We will code your information with a number so no one can trace your answers to your name.
- We will destroy paperwork and securely store all research records.
- Your name will not be used in reports, presentations, and publications.
- Discussions in the focus groups are confidential and everything that is said remains in the room, not to be talked about outside the focus group meeting.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision to take part in the study is up to you. You are free to choose to take part in the study. If you decide to take part in the study, you can stop at any time. You can stop the tape recorder or ask to be removed from the study. If you complete the interview or not you will be paid for participating. If you do an interview in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If that is ok, you can initial at the bottom of the page.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions now please ask me. If you have questions later, you may contact:

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Michael Koskey (phone: 907-474-1902;  
email: mskoskey@alaska.edu)

**Student Researcher:** Heather Gordon (phone: 907-299-1029;  
email: gordon.heather.j@gmail.com)

Heather is an advisee of Drs. Koskey and Sean Topkok at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This project is her dissertation research which is being supervised by Drs. Koskey and Topkok.

If you have questions or worries about your rights, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area) or uaf-irb@alaska.edu.

**Statement of Consent:**

I understand the actions described above. My questions have been answered. I agree to be a part of this study. I am 18 years old or older. I have been provided a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant & Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial if you agree to be quoted directly.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Date

Appendix C: Interview Guide  
(Textor 1980)

- Welcome and thank the research participant for coming
- Begin with offering pie, tea, and coffee. Then sit down and introduce myself and explain more of the project and answer any questions they may have.

*“Hi, my name is Heather Sauyaq Jean Gordon. I am from Homer, just down the road. I am now a doctoral graduate student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in their Indigenous Studies PhD program. My Inupiaq family is from the Seward Peninsula and the rest of my family is from Western Europe, primarily Germany. I grew up in Homer on a reindeer ranch before I left for college. College took me to California, Egypt, Wisconsin, Washington DC, and now finally back to my home in Alaska. I am pleased to meet you and look forward to talking with you about your community. Before I get into the project details, do you have any questions about me? Please feel comfortable to ask.”*

- Objective of the meeting

*“The purpose of this interview is to talk about the sustainability and wellbeing of the Niniilchik tribal community. We are going to do that through a series of scenarios. The things you tell me today will help the guide the Niniilchik tribe in making the community a more well and sustainable place to live. I will be meeting with you again, if you are able, to talk with a group of people I interviewed so that we can broaden our ideas through a group discussion. I am doing this project for my dissertation, which I will be publishing. I also brought you a copy of the interview questions so that you can have them for future reference.”*
- Project Description

*“To conduct the interview I will be using the method known as Ethnographic Futures Research. I am going to begin by explaining the seven key concepts of this method which is the basis of this interview.*

  - *The first is a scenario. You will describe the Niniilchik tribal community through three different scenarios.*
  - *The first scenario is the optimistic scenario. This scenario is as if everything went well in the Niniilchik tribal community and the community was sustainable and people felt they had wellbeing.*
  - *The second scenario is the pessimistic scenario. In this scenario you will talk about the community as if everything that could go badly, did go badly.*
  - *The third scenario is the most probable. It is what the community would be like if things keep going as they are.*
  - *It is important to remember that we are not making forecasts about the future. We are going to backcast, talking as if the present tense is 2037 and you are looking back on what happened.*

- *The sixth concept is time. When we talk about the present we are in 2037, not 2017. The future is from 2037 onwards. The past is before 2037, specifically 2017 to 2037 in this interview.*
- *The last concept is whether something is factual or imagined. We are treating 2037 as the present so you will not be imagining up what happened but instead describing the facts.*

*Do you have any questions about those ideas? If you do not and are willing to participate in this project, we will go on to the confidentiality form.”*

- **Confidentiality**  
*“Everything we talk about today is confidential and will not be discussed outside of this room other than in a summarized manner. Your name will not appear on the written summary that I will prepare from the information you provide. We will be talking for approximately two hours. If there is any part of the discussion that you do not wish to participate in, you do not have to. If there is anything you say that you would prefer not be used in the written summary, please let me know and I will make sure to exclude that information. This is a consent form. Please read through it and let me know if you have any questions. If you do not have questions, please sign the form. If you consent for me to quote you in a publication, please initial at the bottom of the form.”*
- **Tape recorder**  
*“Your thoughts, concerns, and ideas are very important to me and to this project. I will be taking notes; however, it will not be possible to write down everything that is said. Therefore, I have brought a tape recorder so that we won’t miss any part of the conversation. Is it alright with you all if I use the tape recorder?”*
- *“We are going to start with just a few things about you and then we will get into the scenarios.”*
  - Sex of interviewee.
  - Where reared - location, rural or urban, etc.
  - Where educated and in what.
  - Occupation.
  - Ethnicity of parents, language spoken in the home, etc.
  - Approximate age.
  - Marital and family status.
- *“Now we are ready to start the first scenario. This is the optimistic scenario where the Niniichik tribal community would describe themselves as having a great wellbeing and community sustainability. As you recall, you are backcasting. We are in the present in the year 2037.*
  - *Can you please describe the Niniichik tribal community to me today in 2037?*

- *What has gone well since 2017?”*

Additional probes if necessary, see Probes section.

- *“Now we will start the second scenario. This is the pessimistic scenario where nearly everything that could go badly for the Niniichik tribal community did go badly.*
  - *Can you please describe the Niniichik tribal community to me today in 2037?*
  - *What has gone so badly since 2017?”*

Additional probes if necessary, see Probes section

- *“Now we will talk about the final scenario, the most probable or likely. We are back in 2017. Now you are not talking about what you define as a well or bad community. You are describing what the community will look like if things stay going the same.*
  - *Can you please describe the Niniichik tribal community to me if nothing changes and things stay going the way they are?*

Additional probes if necessary, see Probes section.

- *“Looking at what you just described in the most likely scenario, what steps does the community have to take to get to the optimistic scenario?”*
  - *Are there any policy or law changes that would need to happen?*
  - *How would you like to see these project results used to benefit the community? Do you think the project can help?*

- *“Do you have any additional comments or feelings before we conclude the interview?”*

- *“Ok, so the next step is for me to go over the tape and my notes and compile a transcript of what you have said. I will send that to you for your review and comments, so that I make sure to understand your ideas in context. Once I complete all the interviews I will bring groups of interviewees together to conduct focus groups. We will talk about the scenarios and how to arrive at the optimistic scenario. I can send you a transcript of that discussion as well. I welcome any additional comments you have. Thank you so much for your time and willingness to share your thoughts about the tribal community. You are welcome to more food and drink as well.”*

## Probes

- Demography:
  - Who is living in the community now? Women, men, children?
  - What is the population?
- Energy:
  - How are you homes heated?
  - How do you attain fuel?
  - What is the cost of fuel?
- Politics:
  - How is your tribal government meeting the needs of the people?
  - Is there something else you think the tribal government could be doing?
  - What would make the tribal government more effective?
- Economics:
  - What is the average income for a family? For an individual?
  - What is the unemployment rate?
  - What professions do people work in?
  - Who are the main employers?
  - What type of economy is it? Subsistence? Mixed?
  - How is the wealth distributed?
- Social Equity:
  - Does everybody have an equal opportunity to succeed?
  - Does everyone have a similar quality of life?
- Basic Equality:
  - Does everyone have their basic needs met? Housing? Food security? Clothing? Heating? Transportation?
  - Is there a gap between people living in Ninilchik and people more rural?
- Minority Aims:
  - Are there any language revitalization efforts?
  - How is the Ninilchik Traditional Council involved in a government to government relationship with the US and the State of Alaska?

- Relations between the sexes:
  - Has there been any changes in how men and women treat each other?
  - How is the division of labor in the home? Is that the same?
- Education:
  - Has there been any changes in the education system?
  - Where are the resources coming from to fund education?
  - Is it a state or tribal school?
  - Who is served by the education system?
  - Who determines the curricula?
  - Is there any vocational education?
  - Is education grounded in Native culture? How?
  - What is emphasized in education?
- Religion: Have there been any changes in religion or spiritual belief of the tribal community?
- Arts: Have there been any changes in the type of art people are doing?
- Manners and morals:
  - Have there been any changes in values people have? Goals?
  - Has peoples' behavior changed?
  - Is any of this change due to education?
- Environment:
  - Who manages the environment? EPA? Fish and Animals? State of AK? Tribe?
  - What changes have occurred in the environment?
  - How is the tribe handling climate change?
- Subsistence:
  - Who is managing subsistence?
  - Has there been changes in the animals harvested?
  - What do people harvest?
  - Is subsistence still a part of the community lifestyle?
- Justice:
  - Has there been any changes to the policing? Court system?

- Who is in control of justice? Is the tribe?
- Youth:
  - How are the youth doing?
  - What are their interests?
- Health:
  - How is health care provided?
  - How is community mental health? Physical health?
  - Are there issues with drugs or alcohol abuse?
  - Are there suicides? If so, by who?
- Land:
  - Has land ownership changed?
  - Did the tribe put land in trust? If so, has that changed the government or other ways the tribe functions?
- Infrastructure:
  - Has there been any changes in physical infrastructure? Such as roads or buildings?
  - Has there been any changes in social infrastructure such as schools, universities, hospitals, prisons and community housing?

## Appendix D: Focus Group Guide

### Introduction

- Welcome and thank the research participants
- Introduction of interviewer (Heather)
- Objective of the meeting  
*“The purpose of this meeting is to review the project results that I compiled and talk about what those results mean for the Ninilchik tribe. You will be helping me understand the results and provide more information if it is needed. The things you tell me today will help the guide the Ninilchik tribe in making the community a more well and sustainable place to live.”*
- Confidentiality  
*“Everything we talk about today is confidential and will not be discussed outside of this room other than in a summarized manner. No one’s name will appear on the written summary that I will prepare from the information you provide. We will be talking for approximately one hour. If there is any part of the discussion that you do not wish to participate in, you do not have to. If there is anything you say that you would prefer not be used in the written summary, please let me know, and I will make sure to exclude that information. You have been given the same consent form as before. Please read through it and let me know if you have any questions. If you do not have questions, please sign the form. If you consent for me to quote you in a publication, please initial at the bottom of the form.”*
- Tape recorder  
*“Your thoughts, concerns, and ideas are very important to us and to this project. I will be taking notes; however, it will not be possible to write down everything that is said. Therefore, I have brought a tape recorder so that we won’t miss any part of the conversation. Is it alright with you all if I use the tape recorder?”*



## Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter



(907) 474-7800  
(907) 474-5444 fax  
uaf-irb@alaska.edu  
www.uaf.edu/irb

### Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

August 28, 2017

To: Michael Koskey, PhD  
Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [1090657-1] Self-Determination, Sustainability, and Wellbeing in an Alaska Native Community

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Self-Determination, Sustainability, and Wellbeing in an Alaska Native Community
Received:	August 9, 2017
Expedited Category:	7
Action:	MODIFICATIONS REQUIRED
Effective Date:	August 28, 2017
Expiration Date:	

#### Required Information:

The terms "sustainability" and "wellbeing" are fine to use in the protocol, but these terms come up in both the informed consent for the focus groups and interview forms. They are also used in the interview guide. Please define them so that participants understand what the study is about, and how it makes sense to themselves and their role in the community of Ninilchik.

*Please highlight all new changes in yellow made to documents and upload the modifications as a new package (not new protocol) in IRBNet. Documents that have not been modified do not need to be submitted in subsequent packages. Past modifications that have been approved should be "accepted" and should not appear as highlights in this new modification. There are instructions for uploading documents in IRBNet under Designer Step 1. If you have questions please contact the administrator.*

This action is included on the September 6, 2017 IRB Agenda.

*No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.*

**SELF-DETERMINATION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND  
WELLBEING IN THE ALASKA NATIVE  
COMMUNITY OF NINILCHIK**

**Interview Results**



Heather Sauyaq Jean Gordon  
University of Alaska Fairbanks  
Email: [gordon.heather.j@gmail.com](mailto:gordon.heather.j@gmail.com)

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## **Project**

The project was a coordination between the Ninilchik Village Tribe and Heather Gordon, a student working on her dissertation in the Indigenous Studies program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Ms. Gordon interviewed 30 community members in Ninilchik and held four focus groups. The interviews went over three possible futures of Ninilchik: the optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely futures. The project identified self-determining actions that lead to a community with wellbeing and sustainability. This document first describes what a sustainable community with wellbeing looks like in Ninilchik in the views of interviewees, providing indicators. Second, the document lists the self-determining actions identified by interviewees that individuals, the community, and the tribe can take for Ninilchik to be a sustainable place with wellbeing. All of the data in this report is provided by the interviewees. Excerpts from the interviews are included in each area of community and tribal self-determination.

## **Participants**

The interviewee and focus group participants either worked for or were involved with the Ninilchik Village Tribe, the senior center, the chamber of commerce, the American Legion, local businesses including business owners, charters and commercial fishermen, the library, the Ninilchik Natives Association Inc., Ninilchik Emergency Services, the clinic, the teen center, and the school. Table 1 gives the demographic information of the participants.

**Table 1. Demographics of Participants**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Age (interviewees were 26 to 79 years old)</b>	
20-29	1
30-39	9
40-49	5
50-59	7
60-69	5
70-79	3
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	11
Female	19
<b>Tribal Affiliation</b>	
Tribal Member	21
Non-Tribal	9
<b>Employment</b>	
Work for the Tribe	17
Work Elsewhere	9
Retired	4
<b>Where Raised</b>	
Ninilchik	16
Alaska-not Ninilchik	7
Continental U.S.	7
<b>Education</b>	
Some High School	1
GED	2
High School Diploma	4
Certified Nursing Assistant	2
Trade School	3
Some College	7
Associate's Degree	2
Bachelor's Degree	5
Master's Degree	4
<b>Ethnicity (self-identified)</b>	
Russian-Alaska Native-European/white (Alaska Native included Dena'ina Athabaskan, Aleut, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq)	12
Russian-Alaska Native (Alaska Native included Dena'ina and Aleut)	4
Alaska Native (Alaska Native included Athabaskan and Alaska Native in general)	2
European/white	7
European/white-Native American (tribes from the continental U.S.)	4
European/white-other	1

## **Sustainability and Wellbeing in Ninilchik**

The majority of the interviewees, 20 of the 30 interviewed, identified slow population growth for the optimistic future of Ninilchik. To achieve this, the community needs to make the town attractive for people to move to and for people to stay. There needs to be a focus on drawing youth and young families back to the community to keep the school population. A town with a broad population including elders, retirees, youth, and families was seen as sustainable to the interviewees. This way the economy is stronger through young people working jobs and the economic support of the retirees needing services. A strong retirement community needs medical facilities and this also includes the benefit of providing jobs.

Sustainability was thoroughly described in the future scenarios as a long-term existence. For the community to exist in perpetuity, as multiple interviewees stressed, and be sustainable, it is important to maintain access to resources and the tools needed to sustain people. This does not just mean environmental resources but the tools people need to exist like jobs, the health clinic, the school, and roads, as well as the fish and environmental abundance. A sustainable community is able to support a population with employment and provides for families to live there without feeling they have to move elsewhere to have their needs met. Beyond longevity, sustainability was described through three main areas: the economic, social, and ecological dimensions.

Economic sustainability included employment and tourism as well as agricultural development. Interviewees explain in this document how to achieve economic sustainability through the economics and infrastructure sections. Social sustainability is explained through education, public school, population, community-wide events, elders, youth engagement, tribal heritage, and tribal government. Ecological sustainability revolves around subsistence culture and Tribal Area 7 of this document addresses interviewee perspectives of subsistence management.

Interviewees defined sustainability before defining wellbeing. They often included sustainability in the definition of wellbeing, demonstrating that for many interviewees it is important to have sustainability in order to have wellbeing. Wellbeing added health, Tribal Area 3, to the project. This was not just physical health, but emotional, mental, and spiritual health as well. Wellbeing also brought forth the idea of helping each other, Community Area 2 in this document. The definitions of sustainability and wellbeing also involved feeling safe and comfortable in one's surroundings in the community. Table 2 provides what interviewees see as necessary in Ninilchik for there to be sustainability and wellbeing. These are indicators of sustainability and wellbeing.

**Table 2. Identified Indicators of Sustainability and Wellbeing**

<b>Economic</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Ecological</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs/employment</li> <li>• Oil and gas development</li> <li>• Growth in small businesses</li> <li>• Inlet View redeveloped</li> <li>• Reduced rent for vacant buildings</li> <li>• Return of strong charter, commercial, and guides due to fisheries</li> <li>• Growth in tourism/ecotourism</li> <li>• Less economic disparity</li> <li>• Tribe less dependent on grants and more revenue</li> <li>• New cannery opens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of the dump</li> <li>• Increased affordable housing</li> <li>• Controlled growth of population</li> <li>• Growing transportation (BUMPS service)</li> <li>• Parks and trails</li> <li>• Neighbors getting to know each other</li> <li>• Community Spirit</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Early childhood investment</li> <li>• Quality education system with day-care, preschools, and school</li> <li>• Vocational education</li> <li>• Teaching youth life skills</li> <li>• Volunteerism</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Tribal members turning out to vote and attend board meetings</li> <li>• Access to quality healthcare, including EMS/fire and behavioral health</li> <li>• Health promoting behaviors, (e.g., health fair and weight loss program)</li> <li>• Thriving retirement and Elder populations</li> <li>• Youth returning to the community to live</li> <li>• Wider availability of natural gas</li> <li>• Cultural and language development and preservation with museum/cultural center</li> <li>• Churches working together, including Russian Orthodox church</li> <li>• Community Activities</li> <li>• Youth engagement</li> <li>• Strong tribal leadership</li> <li>• Less drug and alcohol use</li> <li>• Maintain subsistence culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased counts of fish, especially kings and halibut, clams, crab, abalone, shrimp, moose, and caribou</li> <li>• More berries</li> <li>• Using renewable energy</li> <li>• Ocean not polluted</li> <li>• Healthier soil</li> <li>• Sustainable management</li> <li>• More people raising animals like goats/chickens and gardening</li> <li>• Local production of food to eliminate hunger (start a food bank)</li> </ul>

### **Individuals Utilizing Self-determination**

Interviewees explained how as individuals they are involved in the community. They had the following 8 ideas on what people can do in Ninilchik.

- Volunteer as a firefighter and EMT
- Garden, farm, and recycle
- Donate and go to fundraisers
- Work with youth
- Get more active with the tribe
- Attend community forums
- Write borough and state representatives
- Get involved through local churches

### **Community Self-determination**

There were 6 areas identified where the community can come together to do action to improve the sustainability and wellbeing of Ninilchik. These areas are explained in depth in the following pages, they include:

- Community Area 1: Infrastructure
- Community Area 2: Helping Each Other
- Community Area 3: Community-Wide Events
- Community Area 4: Public School
- Community Area 5: Economics
- Community Area 6: Population

### **Tribal Self-determination**

There were 9 areas identified where the tribe can engage in self-determining actions to improve the sustainability and wellbeing of Ninilchik. These areas are explained in depth in the following pages, they include:

- Tribal Area 1: Elders
- Tribal Area 2: Infrastructure
- Tribal Area 3: Health
- Tribal Area 4: Tribal Heritage
- Tribal Area 5: Tribal Government
- Tribal Area 6: Youth Engagement
- Tribal Area 7: Subsistence
- Tribal Area 8: Education
- Tribal Area 9: Economics



## Community Area 1: Infrastructure

Interviewees had suggestions on how to use existing infrastructure and what new infrastructure could be developed. The underlying goals were to boost the economy, create jobs, promote tourism, and bring the community together.

Economically I fear that tourism is about all we have to really focus our economy on locally right now, and if we're going to improve our tourism the only thing that we can really do is make it look prettier and slow people down and let them see what a neat town it is. (personal communication, focus group 4, participant 2, April 25, 2018)

- Art shop: Develop an existing building into an art space where people can teach art, do art, and sell their art out of. Have items like kilns, sewing machines, and looms where people could rent a space to work if they do not have these things already. Some community members are able to donate equipment.
- Beautify: Maintain the natural beauty of the community and continue to enhance it through planting flowers, placing benches, painting buildings, and working on curb appeal to attract people as they are driving by.
- Caribou Hills: Continue to develop the Caribou Hills through houses and businesses.
- Cemetery: Find a place for a new cemetery as the others are full.
- Earth-based infrastructure: Build root cellars to store produce year-round.
- Fairgrounds: Utilize the old roller rink either as a roller rink, yoga studio, Zumba studio, or karate class area. See if the land across from the fairgrounds could be developed into overflow parking or a campground. Have local restaurants have booths at the fair, rodeo, and Salmon fest at a discounted rate.
- Harbor/dock: Advocate for a new harbor/dock.
- Heating homes: Continue to install natural gas to more areas. Utilize renewable energy like wind and solar to make it more affordable and sustainable for people to heat their homes.
- K-12 school: Build a bigger gym and update the science lab and home economics room. Build a skate park on the paved outdoor area.
- Library: Build a new library on a bigger piece of land. Allow the library to serve as a local visitor center to help direct tourists and inform people about the town.
- Russian Orthodox Church: Preserve the church. Get a priest and start church classes to help bring back younger members and interest them in the church.
- Shop/garage: Build a shop/garage so people can work on their cars locally.
- Technology: Advocate for faster internet in the Ninilchik area so that people can work remotely on their computers at home.
- Trails: Develop trails along the rivers, Oil Well Road, and through town.

## Community Area 2: Helping Each Other

Interviewees had many ways that people in the community can help one another. This helps to meet the needs of the community, benefit the community, and keep it safe.

Everybody has to work their own little corner and do what you can. Because really it's overwhelming. The need is overwhelming and you can't do it all. But if you can do your part in doing as much as you can as often as you can and you know we try to get more people on board with that like you know get a movement going. Get everybody involved. (personal communication, focus group 4, participant 3, April 25, 2018)

- Donating: Allow people to drop off clothes and blankets at the subsistence building for those in need.
- Food Shortage: Start a food bank from Feed Ninilchik's Hungry. Create a drop-off center for non-perishable donations. Educate people on the moose roadkill program and teach people to butcher or get people to butcher for others so people can sign up. The tribe could lead an educational moose hunt. Increase local food production and gardening.
- Fundraising: Continue to fundraise for those in need.
- Mentor: Start a mentoring program like Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Girl/Boy Scouts. Enable adults to mentor youth so they can go to the gym and health club without parents. Older youth can also mentor younger youth.
- Neighbors: Make an effort to become acquainted with your neighbors.
- Troopers: The community can come together to advocate for a local trooper with fish and wildlife capabilities.
- Volunteer: Have a hotline so people can call in with what they need help with and then people can volunteer to help. Organize volunteer efforts through committees.

### **Community Area 3: Community-Wide Events**

Events help bring the community together (tribal and non-tribal members).

Increase engagement to increase sustainability to ensure wellness. (personal communication, interview 21, March 13, 2018)

Community-wide activities:

- Fishing derbies/festivals
- Spring and winter carnivals
- Putting on a play/talent show
- Running group and sports leagues
- Music nights/karaoke at the community center
- Weekend concerts at the fairgrounds
- Potlucks
- Arts and crafts
- Cross-country skiing/snowshoeing
- Ice skating, flood the basketball court
- Movie night at the school on the big screen

### **Community Area 4: Public School**

Education plays a key role in the sustainability and wellbeing of the community. The kindergarten through twelfth grade public school is a central location drawing the community together around youth education and team sports.

So I think that community wellbeing is for us all to make sure people don't get bullied because those are the kind of people that later on in life will have problems. (personal communication, interview 14, March 5, 2018)

- K-12 School: The school needs to keep its enrollment levels up. This could be done through bringing back some of the homeschool students and the students that have started to attend school in Soldotna by eliminating bullying from the school, adding back some electives like band and choir, and adding more school sports. The tribe and community can get more involved in the school through artist-in-residence, M-class teaching certifications, storytelling, and reading to students. Another suggestion was to turn the school into a charter or tribal school so that the children are getting their needs met and having a funded education. A final suggestion was to change the school to a K through 6 school and busing junior high and high school students to Homer, Soldotna, or Anchor Point to make sure that children are getting a quality education.
- Life skills: Young people are not learning life skills at home or at school. The school needs to offer home economics so that students can learn life skills. Work-release for high school students is another way for youth to get on-the-job training education.

### **Community Area 5: Economics**

A strong economy with jobs was important to the interviewees when discussing the sustainability and wellbeing of the community. Small businesses were one way to build jobs and the economy.

I'd like to see a lot more owner type...family owner businesses...mom and pop's stores. I'd like to see more of that...people starting their own businesses. (personal communication, interview 2, February 21, 2018)

- Agriculture: Get locals more involved in gardening, using the community garden, and raising animals like chickens, goats, and pigs.
- Jobs: Jobs in the community will grow as more infrastructure is built and people are hired by these businesses. If a new cannery opened there would be many more jobs as well.
- Small Businesses: If rent is lowered in vacant buildings people can start small businesses along the highway. The most often suggested businesses by interviewees were for an auto shop, small engine shop, laundromat, and hair salon.

### **Community Area 6: Population**

Twenty interviewees identified slow population growth for the optimistic future of Ninilchik.

The population, I believe, would grow with the youth and of course the Elders if there were services here that homes or assisted-living here that they could stay here in the community. So, I think, across the board there'd be population growth with all sectors [in the optimistic future]. (personal communication, interview 9, February 27, 2018)

- Attract people: Make the town attractive for people to move to through infrastructure and economic development.
- Draw youth back: Focus on drawing youth back to the community and attracting young families.

### **Tribal Area 1: Elders**

Taking care of the Elders in the community promotes their wellbeing.

Wellbeing is the senior... [luncheon] that they do every Monday here. I don't know if you're aware that they do it. We've been doing that for quite a number of years. It's not only seniors but that's how it started. You know, any member can bring a friend, come to the luncheon, every Monday we have a luncheon up here and we've been doing it for a long, long time and we eat traditional foods like puroq and all the different ways of fixing fish and so forth. And it serves two purposes I think, is that you get to sit and meet with people that you haven't seen in a long time... and you laugh and you talk about old times. You get a good meal and there's always a lot of food left over you can take home. It's a good thing; people leave there laughing and happy. (personal communication, interview 10, February 28, 2018)

- Continue the Monday Elders' luncheon.
- Continue the position of Elder Outreach Program Coordinator.
- Continue to involve the youth with the elders through the youth education leadership program (YELP).
- Start a program to bring caretakers into Elders' homes like the senior center does.

## Tribal Area 2: Infrastructure

Interviewees provided recommendations on how to improve existing infrastructure and what new infrastructure the tribe should build.

I think one of the biggest things that the tribe could do right now is go all in and buy that Inlet View, tear it down, and right there alone you spur growth in economy, having RV hookups, having rooms for people to stay when they come down, you know, people come down for the Clam Scramble. They come down for the fair. There are a ton of people that come for Salmon Fest... it is for the best of the whole Kenai Peninsula. (personal communication, interview 30, April 11, 2018)

- Administration building: Build a new administration building that is larger than the current one and able to hold a larger early learning program and house more services.
- Apartments: Build more rent-controlled apartments, senior specific and general.
- Assisted living facility: Build an assisted living facility so Elders can stay in the area.
- Caribou Hills: Put in a snow machine jumps course on NNAI land in the Hills for recreation.
- Casino: Build a casino with a restaurant and hotel, possibly across the bay.
- Community Center: Utilize the community center for potlucks and weekly musical gatherings with dances. Hold arts and crafts at the community center.
- Dorms: Build dorms for surrounding communities to attend the school to increase numbers at the school.
- Health and wellness club: Expand the health and wellness club.
- Homes: Continue to build and renovate homes through the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) program.
- Inlet View: Buy the Inlet View and rebuild it as a restaurant, hotel, and RV hookups.
- Message board: Put up a message board at the community center outside so people can know about activities and notify others if they request help for something.
- Recreation center: Build a recreation center at the fairgrounds, possibly like the SPARC building in Homer.
- Rehabilitation facility: Build a rehabilitation/treatment center for drug addiction treatment to be located centrally on the peninsula.
- Renewable Energy: The Tribe could work with CIRI to develop a wind farm on NNAI land in the Caribou Hills.
- Tribal campus: Develop a tribal campus with a park and paths in-between the tribal buildings.
- Transportation: Continue to grow the BUMPS system to expand services. BUMPS could be used as a way to commute to work in Soldotna or bring youth home after the teen center.

### **Tribal Area 3: Health**

Providing healthcare locally helps build local businesses and makes it so people do not have to travel for care. The more care that is offered locally, the more professional jobs there are available in the community.

Well the clinic is... invaluable here. It's a really massive massive [sic] service to everybody around here. And there's, you know, some really great doctors, like Dr. Spencer, this really incredible woman. She's super, super really good at what she does and really open-minded to about alternative modes of health. (personal communication, interview 17, March 7, 2018)

- Behavioral health: Grow the clinic with more counselors. Employ a traveling psychiatrist to prescribe medications. Hire a substance abuse specific counselor.
- Clinic: Keep holding the health fair and advising preventative medicine. Integrate the clinic to better serve people. Possibly have vision and dental at the clinic with traveling doctors. Hire a physical therapist. Grow the clinic possibly into a small hospital.
- Dental: Interviewees suggest the tribe works with the local dentist to make it so tribal members can be seen there and be covered.
- Drugs and Alcohol: Keep educating people on drugs and alcohol to hopefully reduce its use in the community.
- Fire Department/EMS: Encourage people to volunteer. Find a way to pay firefighters and EMS.

### **Tribal Area 4: Tribal Heritage**

Documenting and maintaining culture and heritage is important for the sustainability of the tribe.

Our culture... what I was taught and how I was brought up was what you need to do to survive in this environment. (personal communication, interview 9, February 27, 2018)

- Heritage Project: Complete the tribal Heritage Project to gather tribal history and culture for the sustainability of the tribe.
- Culture and Language: Maintain subsistence culture and pass it down through the generations along with other cultural aspects. Revitalize languages in the schools, starting in the early learning program.

### **Tribal Area 5: Tribal Government**

Maintaining an effective tribal government is important to the sustainability and wellbeing of the community as the tribe offers many services to meet the needs of residents. Building relationships between the Native and non-Native community members is also important for the health of the community as it brings people together.

The tribe has been very promoting as far as making things happen and getting things going... I'm very proud of them and the people that work with it for their intuition and they're not afraid to jump in and try. So, I think that's, that's a good thing. So, I don't foresee it slowing down. I really don't. (personal communication, interview 5, February 23, 2018)

- **Effectiveness:** Train receptionists so they are more knowledgeable and able to answer questions or direct the caller to the right person. Continue to encourage tribal members to attend board meetings and get more involved with the tribe. Streamline internal administration especially through the new self-governance with the Department of the Interior. Continue to strengthen relations with NNAI. Continue the tribally offered programs growing through new grants and innovative people to run them. Emphasize all programs as equally important to meeting the needs of the community. Seek buy-in from the community and get board members out into the community to meet with people and demonstrate their leadership through involvement.
- **Land:** The tribe will put land into trust when it is beneficial to them. Work with NNAI to see if any of their land should be gifted to the tribe and put into trust. NNAI could allow some permits for non-Natives to hunt on their land during hunting season to build Native/non-Native relationship.
- **Leadership:** Encourage younger people to get involved in the tribe and step up to positions of leadership in the programs and board.
- **PR/Educating community:** The tribe can educate the community about the tribe and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the services available to everyone to avoid negative perceptions based on lack of understanding. Utilize Facebook, fliers, forums, potlucks, etc.
- **Tribal police and court:** Interviewees suggested the tribe enforce environmental policy on Native land, such as hunting regulations. The tribe could start a restorative justice program.



### **Tribal Area 6: Youth Engagement**

Engaging the youth keeps them away from drugs and alcohol.

Showing interest in the youth...is the most important thing to them, I think. When you see that their opinion has value, it matters so much to them. And that's the most important thing. (personal communication, focus group 3, participant 1, April 24, 2018)

- YELP-youth education leadership program
- Elder-youth activities
- Summer camps
- Native Youth Olympics, continue these into the summer
- Open gym
- Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, Brownies
- Future Farmers of America (FFA) with the teen center
- Outreach and activities with the tribe

### **Tribal Area 7: Subsistence**

It is important for the sustainability and wellbeing of the people in the community that fish and wildlife is managed appropriately to be around for generations to come.

The state and the federal government need to step out and let the tribe do what the tribe does. They've managed that resource since the beginning of time. They understand it. They understand the reproductive cycles. They understand the lifespan. They understand the climates that are going to be involved. They have history, and they can look back and they can see those cycles... The tribe recognized the problem [low counts of fish and/or animals] a long time ago, 90% of the time. They don't get surprised. They see it coming. (personal communication, interview 15, March 6, 2018)

- The tribe needs to be more involved in management decisions.
- Local and traditional knowledge need to be taken into account in management decisions.

### **Tribal Area 8: Education**

Interviewees identify education as a key part of the sustainability and wellbeing of Ninilchik. This includes education of youth as well as vocational education and parental education.

So, in the future... we've been investing for 20 years in those kids and they will have no problem graduating from high school and becoming engaged members of our society... When I say engaged, I mean they are doing something that they find fulfilling and contributes to the larger society because that's what we need. We need people that are, if we're going to be sustainable, we need people that are contributing. (personal communication, interview 21, March, 13, 2018)

- College: BUMPS could bus high school students to the Jumpstart program at the Kenai Peninsula College.
- Daycare: There is concern that there is not enough daycare available in the community, this is important for young parents to be able to live and work in Ninilchik.
- Parenting: Parenting classes help parents and the tribe could offer these classes. Parents need to be taught about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and early childhood investment so that they can most benefit their children.
- Vocational: The tribe could start a vocational school like the Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC) in the community using BUMPS to transport commuters.

### **Tribal Area 9: Economics**

The tribe can create jobs through building infrastructure and applying for more grants to start additional programs.

Definitely sustainability involves economic opportunities for not only tribal members but non-tribal members, for the community, and everyone so that they can come back [the youth] and feel like they can raise a family here, you know, have money and economic opportunities too. (personal communication, interview 7, February 26, 2018)

- Agriculture: The tribe can start an animal farm on NNAI land of buffalo, reindeer, or elk for meat, tourism, and hides.
- Jobs: Jobs in the community will grow as people are needed to build new infrastructure and operate new businesses. The tribe will continue to grow their programs and be a strong employer by applying for grants and starting businesses.
- Marketing: Someone could be brought in to help the community market itself better for tourism.
- Tourism: With lower fish counts and more regulations in effect, interviewees see a growth in ecotourism for the future of the community. This includes building more lodging for guests, and people visiting the community to hike, see the nature, and tour the Old Village, Russian Orthodox Church, and the beach. The community can coordinate with the cruise lines to be an excursion and bus people to Ninilchik using the BUMPS buses.

## Appendix G: Cited Court Cases

*Akiachak Native Community v. Salazar*, 935 F. Supp. 2d 195, 2010-11 (D.D.C. 2013).

*Alaska Pacific Fisheries Co. v. United States*, 248 U.S. 78, 89 (1918).

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*Brackeen v. Zinke*, 4:17-cv-00868 (N.D. Texas 2018).

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*In the Matter of: C.R.H.*, 29 P.3d 849 (Alaska 2001).

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*Native Village of Venetie I.R.A. Council v. State of Alaska*, 944 F.2d 548 (9th Cir. 1991).

*Ninilchik Traditional Council v. Towarak et al.*, No. 3:15-cv-00205, 2016 U.S. Dist. (D. Alaska Apr. 17, 2016)

*State of Alaska v. Native Village of Tanana*, 249 P.3d 734 (Alaska 2011).

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