

Research Summary

Diversifying Methodologies: A Haudenosaunee/Settler Approach for Measuring Indigenous-Local Intergovernmental Success

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What you need to know

The authors examine the success of intergovernmental agreements between municipal and Indigenous governments based on a case study of the port divestiture agreement between the City of Cornwall and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and they determine that, based on conventional public policy and public administration metrics, the agreement represents a partial success and a partial failure, but when evaluated using the Haudenosaunee concept of “one-mindedness,” the agreement can be understood as a success.

What is this research about?

The researchers seek to demonstrate the importance of using non-Indigenous frameworks alongside Indigenous ones to adequately measure the success of intergovernmental agreements between municipal and Indigenous governments.

What did the researchers do?

The article is based on ethnographic research conducted in Akwesasne with a specific focus on the port divestiture agreement between the City of Cornwall and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne from 2015 to 2017, during which one of the researchers engaged in numerous informal conversations with community members in Akwesasne and Cornwall to discuss the agreement. Furthermore, the researcher also interviewed 32 Mohawk Council Chiefs, representatives of Akwesasne’s Aboriginal Rights Research Office, the Seven Nations Council, the Mayor of Cornwall, current and former chief administrative officers from Cornwall, the harbourmaster, and the federal officer for Transport Canada. Both the City of Cornwall and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne also made public and private documents available to the researchers for review. Based on the aforementioned data, the researchers were able to conduct a case study of the port divestiture agreement to examine the success of this intergovernmental agreement involving a municipal government and an Indigenous government.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that the port divestiture agreement represents a partial success and a partial failure based on conventional public policy and public administration standards, while it can be understood as a success based on the Haudenosaunee principle of “one-mindedness.” Using conventional public policy and public administration standards, the evidence suggests that the port divestiture agreement was a partial success in terms of generating policy instruments and the extent to which both parties were able to benefit from the agreement, neither a success nor a

failure in terms of fulfilling the specific policy objectives of the signatories, and a partial failure in terms of how Cornwall and Akwesasane residents reacted to it. Using the concept of “one-mindedness,” the port divestiture agreement was a success in terms of the joint interest of both parties in respecting the St. Lawrence River and keeping it clean for present and future generations, the strong relationship with and appreciation of the river that was shared by Cornwall and Akwesasane residents, and the relationships that were built through the agreement, which collectively brought the participants' minds closer to the principle of “one-mindedness.” Ultimately, the different measures of policy success and the subsequent difference in findings demonstrate the need for a mixed-methods approach in evaluating the success of intergovernmental agreements between municipal and Indigenous governments, in which non-Indigenous frameworks and methods are applied alongside Indigenous ones to provide a more balanced and comprehensive assessment of these agreements. Although conventional models for analyzing policy agreements act as a useful starting point for researchers in identifying an agreement, establishing a timeline, and determining whether the agreement is consistent with a specific set of policy success measures, the process of examining agreements using Indigenous models deserves greater attention.

How can you use this research?

This article suggests that researchers should draw upon relevant western literature and Indigenous principles and knowledge particular to the groups involved when analyzing interactions and agreements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors. It is important to recognize the multiplicity of views present in both communities and to incorporate them when assessing processes and outcomes. Engaging in dialogue through ethnography is one useful starting point for developing appropriate Indigenous and non-Indigenous frameworks.

Additional Details

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