

A tale of two communities: Using relational place-making to examine fisheries policy in the Pribilof Island communities of St. George and St. Paul, Alaska

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[Abstract](#)

This paper describes how relational place-making, with its focus on power dynamics, networked politics, and non-market, locally-valued characteristics, provides a useful framework for managers to better design fishing community policies. Social data, while becoming more common in fisheries management analyses, are typically restricted to quantitative measures that often cannot adequately summarize dynamics within fishing communities. In contrast, detailed ethnographic research and the theoretical framework of relational place-making can provide a useful methodology through which to gather social data to understand resource-dependent communities and the effects of fisheries management policies in these places. Relational place-making describes the process through which physical spaces are transformed into socially meaningful places, and how these understandings are contested and negotiated among different groups of actors. These contested narratives of place, called place-frames, can interact with economic development efforts to help create (or fail to create) sustainable communities. To better understand the efficacy of a specific fisheries policy, the community development quota (CDQ) program, we conducted 6 months of ethnographic research in the rural, Native communities of St. George and St. Paul, Alaska. In both communities we found that local place-frames centered on local empowerment and control. In St. George, local place-frames conflicted with place-frames advanced by CDQ employees, and locals were unable to align place-making goals with local economic realities. In St. Paul, local residents and CDQ employees shared a place-frame, allowing them to accomplish numerous local development goals. However, differences in place-frames advanced by other political entities on the island often complicated development initiatives. This study supports previous research indicating that policies and development projects that increase local power and self-determination are most successful in furthering

community sustainability and well-being. This study indicates that relational place-making can illuminate local goals and desires and is therefore of great utility to the fisheries management decision-making process.

Keywords

- Development
- Relational place-making
- Place-frame
- Fishing communities
- Alaska
- Fisheries management

Introduction

In this paper, we describe how detailed ethnographic research and the theoretical framework of relational place-making can provide a useful framework with which to assess the effectiveness of fisheries management policies. A relational place-making framework considers the ways in which individuals and groups actively negotiate place (Pierce et al. [2011](#)), creating and shaping the places they live into communities via “structures of feeling that bind space, time, and memory” (Gupta [1992](#)). In short, it focuses on the cultural and political creation and understanding of local environments and therefore encapsulates important indicators of well-being such as fate control, cultural integrity, and contact with nature (AHDR [2004](#)). This kind of information is necessary to design management programs that can successfully achieve goals of social and ecological sustainability.

Despite the legal requirement that managers examine and mitigate potential effects of policies on fishing communities (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of [2006](#)), these types of data are conspicuously absent from most management discussions. While some social scientists in fisheries management acknowledge and lament these shortcomings (e.g., Sepez et al. [2006](#)), little headway has been made toward including detailed, site-specific, socio-cultural data on fishing communities in the decision-making process. On the rare occasions when managers do include non-economic social data in assessments, these data tend to come from broad, large-scale datasets (e.g., US Census), garnered from available online sources, or based on surveys or interviews administered during brief visits to fishing communities. The data collected are often limited and typically focus directly on involvement in fisheries (e.g., Himes-Cornell et al. [2013](#)). The complex relationships between fishing peoples and their resource bases, however, are difficult to capture in such broad scale data or numerical summaries (Sepez et al. [2006](#)).

When managers exclude socio-cultural data the ramifications can be serious. Exclusion of these data can paint simplified pictures of communities, with unintended consequences, such as perpetuating inequality, reducing resilience, and disturbing networks of informal institutions important for resource sustainability (Poe et al. [2014](#)). This is especially true for indigenous communities, for whom historical conditions are particularly important to understand or meaningfully assess contemporary conditions. Thus, we posit that relational place-making can provide a useful lens through which to understand the social and cultural dimensions of fisheries dependent communities for inclusion in management decision-making. Such a framework allows for integration and comparison of socio-cultural values with the economic indicators and programs currently used in management, providing a useful point of entry into management discussions. Below, we provide an example of the framework's utility, examining the successes and failures of a particular policy, the community development quota (CDQ) program, in the Pribilof Island communities of St. George and St. Paul, Alaska.

Place-making

An understanding of place is essential to understanding place-making. Place, while often considered a constant backdrop on which to study social changes, is more than a static, unchanging natural characteristic. Rather, place is a constantly changing social construct, one that is embodied in a concrete and particular location (Thornton [2008](#)). Though bounded, place does not refer to an isolated area, separate from larger global communities and networks. As Harner ([2001](#)) explains, “place is the interaction between extralocal (global) forces, local histories, cultural constructs, and individual human agency”. Succinctly put, place is the “milieu in which humans transform the earth into the home of human kind” (Sack [1999](#)). Place is also the ways in which landscape shapes individuals, communities, and cultures. In many indigenous cultures, place names are embodied with moral stories and histories (Basso [1996](#); Thornton [2008](#)). Walking the land or even thinking about these places, can therefore ground individuals in their cultural heritage.

Thus *place-making* can be seen as the process through which places are socially constructed and invested with social and cultural meaning and, in turn, shape human communities. By answering everyday questions such as, “What happened here? Who was involved? What was it like? Why should it matter?” (Basso [1996](#)), a set of shared symbolic and narrative elements become fused into a collective sense of place. The process is iterative and often contested, requiring a continual melding of geography, autobiography, and metaphor (Burton-Christie [2009](#)), based on individual sensations and experiences (Tuan [1977](#)). This melding is represented and reified through everyday life and practices like performances, artistic expression, and even advertising efforts (Brannstrom and Neuman [2009](#)). Harner ([2001](#)) argues that economic means and social meanings continually interact as “changing power relations (access to the means of existence) privilege one discourse, and the meanings in the landscape, over another”. Development initiatives, which are often initiated by distant, powerful government centers, therefore can destabilize local power dynamics and alter local place-making efforts. In such cases, place-making can be used as a tool for local resistance (Gupta and

Ferguson [1997](#); Scott [2008](#)) and for imagining and defining alternative economies (Ingold [2011](#)).

More recent work has detailed the relational nature of place-making (e.g., Foo et al. [2013](#); Pierce et al. [2011](#); Stephen [2014](#)). This literature stresses the interconnectedness of politics, culture, and economy in creating dynamic senses of place. Specifically, relational place-making posits that a particular sense of place, while based on experiences with the physical world, is socially constructed through political negotiations (Pierce et al. [2011](#)). These negotiated understandings form narratives of place called *place-frames* (Martin [2003](#)).

In our analysis we draw upon the framework of relational place-making to describe the way management policies are used by diverse groups of people to serve multiple ends. Use of relational place-making as an analytical framework moves analysis beyond examinations of physical limitations on capital or material circumstances that are already well captured in fisheries management. In contrast, place-frames emphasize the inherent fluidity and subjective nature of place, and the way these understandings are influenced via political struggles between local residents and outside interests (Pierce et al. [2011](#)). While these processes occur across multiple, networked scales (Amin [2004](#)), our discussion focuses on the unit of analysis most important in fisheries management: the community. Such a framing allows us to highlight the sometimes subtle and overlapping differences among perspectives surrounding resource use in fisheries management decision-making.

Pribilof island history

Place-making is an active, continuous process; as such, it can be best understood through an historical perspective. St. Paul and St. George are small (around 485 and 100 residents, respectively), mainly Aleut (Unangan)¹ villages, with an unusual history. The islands are roughly 40 miles apart and located in the Bering Sea, more than 200 miles from the western coast of Alaska. While known to the Aleut people, the islands were not home to permanent settlements at the time of Russian contact in the 18th century (Black [2004](#); Torrey [1978](#)). Instead, Russian fur seal traders, upon discovering that the islands hosted fur seal breeding grounds, began to seasonally relocate Aleut hunters from their villages in the Aleutian Islands, bringing them to the Pribilof Islands and forcing them to harvest fur seals (Torrey [1978](#)). The US government eventually took control of the islands in the mid-1800s with the purchase of Alaska from Russia (Corbett and Swibold [2000](#)).

Initially, Pribilof Island residents were wage earners in the American fur sealing industry, but this changed during the early 1900s. Declines in fur seal abundance substantially reduced income from sealing operations and, as a result, the federal government sought to cut costs associated with these harvesting operations. This was done by replacing wages with food and supplies issued in exchange for work (Jones [1980](#)). This shift from wage work to government charity was supported

ideologically by the 1887 Indian Allotment Act, which classified Native peoples as wards of the government (Jones 1980).

As fur seal populations declined, conditions slowly worsened for island residents. Government agents implemented strict policies including: obligatory labor, federal control over local politics, a ban on sugar (which was frequently used to make alcohol), exile as a punishment, and, finally, a policy of isolation and secrecy (Jones 1980). These policies gave government agents a great deal of control over local people, control that the government was loathe to give up. In 1924, the Indian Citizenship Act declared all Natives in the country to be citizens of the United States; government agents in the Pribilof Islands ignored the implications of this act, maintaining that Pribilof Aleuts were wards of the state (Jones 1980).

World War II finally changed the relationship between Pribilof residents and the United States government. Fearing Japanese attack on the islands, the government decided to evacuate residents to an abandoned cannery in southeast Alaska (Torrey 1978). Conditions in the camp were dismal, but the remote location allowed federal agents to maintain control over the population and prevent Natives from discovering what life was like in other Alaskan towns, where residents had citizenship rights and earned wages for their work (Jones 1980). Eventually, some Pribilof Island residents did make it to the city of Juneau, Alaska, where they worked in a variety of jobs and capacities (Torrey 1978). These experiences fueled a desire to fight for political rights and economic sovereignty.

After the war, residents returned to the islands and initiated a series of campaigns to fight for their rights. The late 1940s saw the initiation of litigation against the federal government, and several work strikes (Torrey 1978). In 1950, the federal government finally applied the 1938 Indian Reorganization Act to the Pribilof Islands, allowing residents to organize tribal councils (Torrey 1978). The political environment then changed significantly toward the end of the decade, when Alaska gained statehood. Statehood granted Alaska the right to 70 % of the earnings from Pribilof Island sealing operations, making oversight of the islands financially draining to the federal government (Jones 1980). This, combined with the successful local campaign to gain economic parity with other federal employees (Torrey 1978), inspired the federal government to even greater cost cutting measures, such as unsuccessful attempt to consolidate the two communities by moving St. George residents to St. Paul.

As the fur seal population continued to decline, federal revenues decreased and in the early 1970s the federal government announced its intention to withdraw from the islands. The federal government officially withdrew from the islands in 1985 and commercial fur seal harvesting was prohibited shortly thereafter. Left with no economic base, Pribilof Island residents responded by demanding government support to transition their local economy from fur sealing to fisheries. The outcome of this political struggle was two-fold: the federal government promised to provide \$20 million dollars to fund the development of fisheries-related infrastructure on both islands and in 1992

also allocated fishing rights to St. Paul and St. George through the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program (Ginter [1995](#); State of Alaska [2011](#)).

As a result of these actions, both communities were able to work toward establishing fisheries-based economies. Harbors were built on both islands and residents began participating in a local small-scale halibut fishery. In addition, the islands became service hubs for larger-scale vessels participating in the Bering Sea crab fisheries. Floating and land-based processors brought landing tax revenue to the communities, supplemented by the sale of food, supplies, and pot storage space to crab fishermen. Resource volatility and changes in resource management, however, have greatly affected the stability of both communities.

Community stability has also been affected by interactions among a suite of local and regional political entities that structure these communities today. Important political entities in the Pribilof Islands include the tribal governments, city governments, the regional Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporation (Aleut Corporation), village ANCSA corporations (Tanaq in St. George and Tanadgusix, or TDX, in St. Paul), and CDQ corporations (the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association or APICDA in St. George and the Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association or CBSFA in St. Paul). ANCSA and CDQ corporations own local resource rights, with surface resources allocated to the village corporations, subsurface resource rights to the regional corporation, and certain fish resource rights to the CDQ corporations (Case and Voluck [2002](#)). The city government is responsible for maintaining infrastructure and amenities such as roads, electricity, and garbage management. The tribal government receives grant money to conduct social welfare programs and small-scale development projects, and has the right to enter into government-to-government consultations on policy and development initiatives. The competing needs of these organizations can, therefore, make day-to-day management of village life difficult.

Methods

To examine the efficacy of the CDQ program in the Pribilof Islands, a member of our research team (C. Lyons) spent 6 months in the communities of St. George (June–September 2012) and St. Paul (September–December 2012), engaging in participant observation and conducting semi-structured interviews (26 in St. George and 24 in St. Paul). We selected participants via snowball sampling (Bernard [2006](#)), focusing on long-term residents who had vested interests in the community and encompassing a diversity of perspectives: men, women, elders, youths, fishermen, government officials, and people not directly involved in fisheries or fishery support services. While our primary goal was to understand local perspectives, we also conducted interviews with several non-residents, including CDQ employees, whose understandings shed light on fisheries management and development activities in these communities. Interviews were audio recorded and lasted from 30 min to 2 h. For analysis, interviews were verbatim transcribed and inductively coded in Atlas.ti using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin [1997](#)). This approach involves a researcher developing

and sorting codes together into themes, which serve as the foundation for the development of theory (Strauss and Corbin 1997). Research results were then presented to the communities for feedback to ensure that the findings aligned with the understandings of community members.

For our analysis we had two goals: (1) to learn how understandings of place affect the efficacy of the CDQ program in the Pribilof Islands, and (2) to present these data in a way that supports their integration into the fisheries management decision-making process. To achieve the first goal, we drew upon the framework of relational place-making (Pierce et al. 2011) to structure our analysis. To achieve the second goal, we made specific narrative choices in the presentation of our results. Much fertile discussion has centered on how best to write ethnography, and of crucial concern in this literature is the topic of audience (Cheng 2008). An “awareness of narrative” is imperative in both public ethnography and in ethnography that is to be of use to resource managers (Holley and Colyar 2009). Thus, ethnographers benefit from explicitly examining choices surrounding voice and audience (ibid).

Therefore, though our research was based on detailed observations from extended time spent in the communities, we decided to eschew the “thick description” (Geertz 1973) common in ethnographical writing, as this type of exposition is often impenetrable to managers and decision-makers. Instead, we chose to present our analysis in more familiar language, drawing upon lists and tables to highlight key points of political contention. It is our hope that the resultant analysis will be more accessible to policy and lay audiences. In a separate paper we build upon the topic of integrating ethnography into fisheries management, describing in greater detail how ethnographic data might be more explicitly integrated into the fisheries management process (Lyons et al. 2016).

Fishing policy and conflict: an examination of CDQ in the Pribilof island communities

While the Pribilof Island communities of St. George and St. Paul have been profoundly impacted by a number of fisheries policies over the past century and a half, we limit our analysis to the narratives of place surrounding a specific fisheries-related development project in these communities: the CDQ program. However, because the CDQ program was modeled after and interacts with another development program, ANCSA, we broaden our discussion to include an examination of the place-frames surrounding ANCSA where appropriate. Both the ANCSA and CDQ programs center on property rights and the creation of corporations to manage these rights: land rights in the case of ANCSA and fishing rights in the case of CDQ.

ANCSA, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, was passed in 1971 and outlined which lands remained in Native hands, and which became the property of the state and federal government (Mitchell 2001). The corporate structure of the program, however, was explicitly part of a development and assimilation paradigm (e.g., Escobar 1997, 2001; Autumn 1996; Hearth 2009), with land rights assigned to

corporations instead of tribes and these corporations then, theoretically, providing economic opportunity through increased development opportunities in rural Alaska. Negative side effects of the program included decreased tribal sovereignty (Case and Voluck [2002](#)), and particularly a decrease of control over subsistence, the lifeblood of rural Alaska Native communities (Anders and Langdon [1989](#); Conn and Langdon [1988](#); Landgdon [1986](#)), as well as the creation a system in which land rights could be slowly lost over time as payment for debts (Berger [1985](#)). Two separate ANCSA corporations represent the Pribilof Island communities: Tanaq in St. George and TDX in St. Paul. Subsurface mineral rights in both communities were granted to a regional corporation (the Aleut Corporation).

CDQ was a similarly structured development program, creating and distributing resource rights among newly established corporate entities representing Native villages in western Alaska (NRC [1999](#)). Established in 1992, the CDQ program allocated rights to corporate entities for a percentage of the annual Bering Sea pollock harvest (Ginter [1995](#); NRC [1999](#)). Due to a lack of resources, these fledgling corporations were initially forced to rent their quota to private fishing corporations, so that profits might be invested back into fisheries development projects (NRC [1999](#); Mansfield [2007](#)). Over time, allocations were made for additional fisheries, and the CDQ proportion of the total allowable catch increased to 10 % (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of [2006](#)).

While initially planning to form a single CDQ group, the Pribilof Island communities of St. Paul and St. George eventually formed different CDQ groups. Discussions around the formation of a single CDQ group tapped into animosity between the communities, and residents could not come to an agreeable distribution of fishing quota or of seats on the board between islands. St. Paul residents advocated that these be based on population, while St. George preferred an even split. Unable to fashion a satisfactory compromise, St. George split from St. Paul and instead joined with five communities in the Aleutian chain to form the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (APICDA). St. Paul formed the Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (CBSFA). CBSFA is unique among the CDQ groups being the only CDQ corporation to serve just one community. Also unusual, it is headquartered in a constituent village (CBSFA [2013](#)).

As a result of their membership in different CDQ corporations, the communities of St. George and St. Paul have different experiences with and understandings of the CDQ program. Our analysis therefore addresses each community individually. Below we describe the perception of the development and use of CDQ fish resources through a description of contrasting place-frames, and the bundled understandings of place that support these frames, held by different stakeholders. We then explain how such understandings can support the fisheries management process.

Vignette: struggle in St. George

Far enough east from the bulk of Alaska to warrant being in a different time zone, the sun sets late in St. George. Walking down the street during one of their late summer

sunsets you might think that the entire island has been abandoned to the birds and foxes. Flocks of least auklets (or *chuuchii* in Unangan) swirl across the sky on the way back to their hillside nests and houses are still dark. In a few minutes lights will blink on in every third or fourth house, indicators that some people, at least, are still living here. But, as the numerous empty, abandoned houses reflect, life here isn't easy, hasn't ever been easy. The empty homes serve as reminders of a series of hardships: an attempt by the federal government to shut down the community and move residents to St. Paul in the 1960s, the 10-year period of economic stagnation that resulted when some residents refused to move off island and the government shut down fur sealing operations to save money, and the failed promise of a fisheries-based economy to replace fur sealing as an economic base.

Away from the village, on the far side of the island, the harbor stands nearly empty. One floating dock houses fewer than 10 fishing boats, all but one under 30 ft. Most of these boats are locally owned, but the largest, a 36 ft tender boat, is owned by the CDQ corporation. Filled with ice, the tender waits to shuttle fish to the processing plant 40 miles away in St. Paul. In a few weeks these boats will be hauled out and the harbor will be quiet again, save for the fall fuel barge, until next summer.

In the early 1990s, though, things were different. The lucrative Bering Sea crab fisheries were derby-style fisheries and participants raced to haul up as many crab as possible before the season was shut down, often in a matter of days. The St. George harbor, narrow, shallow, rocky, and windswept, offered a place for crab processors to set up shop. Crabbers crowded into the dangerous port, happy to shave hours off the transit time required to transport crab to the processors in Dutch Harbor. Then came the crab crash of 2000. In part to help rebuild the drastically reduced crab stocks (particularly Bering Sea snow crab), managers “rationalized,” or privatized access rights to the Bering Sea crab fisheries in 2006. Guaranteed a set percentage of the allowed catch in each season, crabbers were no longer in such a terrible rush to drop off their harvest, preferring instead to take their catch to the safer harbors afforded by St. Paul or Dutch Harbor²; as a result the community lost considerable income from landing taxes³. A St. George fisherman explained the effects of crab rationalization on his community, saying, “When we had the crab processors up here I know that brought a lot of money, that brought business up here... but ever since crab rationalization it was like everything was just taken away from us. That was a big part of the city’s income ... [the economy] was just mainly crab.” Participation in CDQ fisheries has not filled this economic gap.

Stakeholders, place-frames, and place bundles in St. George

In St. George, two place-frames compete in the struggle over the development and use of CDQ fish resources (Table 1). We call the first of these the *local empowerment* place-frame. This place-frame sees the central purpose of the CDQ program as fulfilling the government’s promise to provide an alternative economy for residents after the closure of fur sealing in the 1980s. According to this place-frame the main goal of the CDQ program is, therefore, to help the community transition to a fisheries-based economy that will support the long-term sustainability of the community. There are two main

actors in this place-frame: the residents of St. George and an international conservation group, Greenpeace. The residents of St. George work to gain access to both CDQ fish resources and development projects funded by the harvest of CDQ fish resources. They also seek to protect fish resources around their island from outsiders, specifically trawl fishermen, who residents see as threatening the sustainability of local fish resources. Greenpeace’s goals in the region are somewhat different, though aligning. They seek to protect nearby deep-sea canyons as areas of high biodiversity. As such, they support local efforts to prohibit trawling in the waters near St. George.

Table 1

Place-frames, actors, and areas of conflict in St. George and St. Paul, Alaska

Community	Place-frame	Actors	Conflicts
St. George	Local empowerment	Local residents Greenpeace	Degree of local control, Nature of local fisheries,
	Philanthropic business	APICDA Alaska fisheries managers	Role of trawlers in area
St. Paul	Local control	Local residents CBSFA	Priority of local development projects versus projects that will lead to large shareholder dividends
	Shareholder dividend	TDX	

We call the second place-frame the *philanthropic business* place-frame. This place-frame focuses on the corporate responsibilities inherent in the CDQ program. As such, this place-frame emphasizes the necessity of ensuring the long-term viability of the CDQ corporation first and foremost. Political relationships among other fishing companies, processors, and policy-makers must also be developed and taken into consideration before business decisions are made. Furthermore, according to this place-frame, economic development projects must be distributed among constituent communities such that losses are minimized and, to the extent possible, returns maximized. There are two main actors in this place-frame: the staff of APICDA (the St. George CDQ corporation) and the fisheries management community in Alaska. APICDA is a non-profit corporation, but has investments in several profit making corporations. This means the organization has fiduciary responsibilities. The staff and board of APICDA, thus, are very concerned with ensuring the long-term economic and political viability of their company, which then provides a foundation for the important development work they conduct in their constituent communities. The fisheries management community of Alaska, broadly speaking, includes members, advisors, and staff of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, NOAA Fisheries, staff of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, members of the Alaska Board of Fisheries and diverse stakeholder groups. While individual opinions vary, in general, these organizations hold the view that

fisheries are an economic activity first and foremost and should be regulated as such. These groups, therefore, interact with APICDA to support its business goals to a much greater extent than they interact with residents of St. George to support community development goals.

While the two place-frames share a number of similarities, namely the desire to establish profitable, sustainable Bering Sea fisheries and the desire to see economic development in constituent communities, there are substantial differences between the two place-frames. These differences foster a substantial degree of conflict. Below we describe three major conflicts in greater detail, (1) local control, (2) day fishing as a place-making activity, and (3) the role of trawl fisheries in Pribilof waters.

Place-frame conflicts in St. George: local control

The first conflict centers on the fundamental nature of the CDQ program. In interviews, St. George residents stated that because CDQ resources were distributed to CDQ groups on behalf of Native communities, these resources belong to the Native peoples and, importantly, should be controlled by them. As one elder put it, “In some ways I don’t think it’s community development, it’s whatever APICDA decides they want to do”. This quote reflects the fundamental conflict between the local empowerment and philanthropic business place frames; should control be based in the CDQ group or the local community? A St. George politician expands on this concern in more detail.

We’ve had our own thoughts and ideas with regard to development in St. George. And the people here have not seen any results for all the years trying to make positive things occur in St. George. This is a place that has a lot of needs. This is a place that’s got a lot of social needs. This is a place that is facing a shutdown of its school. This is a place that has an unemployment rate... nearing 80 %. And when you’ve got problems like that and you’re faced with those issues daily, it’s tough not to get frustrated or, at the very least, it’s tough not to become angry. And people have every right to become angry. There are funds being spent in different areas that are not, in our opinion, totally appropriate to the mission of the CDQ program. All of us have our opinions I suppose, with regard to what we think the program was created for, what the mission of that program was. Now has it accomplished all of those? Not all of them, but some of them, they have, and you can’t say that APICDA has not been a good partner to work with, but it’s sometimes been a very *difficult* partner to work with... we’re being promised that there are going to be some things that are occurring at St. George once the harbor is complete. But, you know, we’ve seen it happen before. It’s fits and starts...I mean, these are things that are promised, but we’ve dealt with a lot of those for many years here at St. George and none of those promises have ever been fulfilled to us. So it’s difficult to sit and try to be cheerful or try to be optimistic that these things will occur.

This quote captures a variety of local concerns: an urgent desire for significant development in the community, frustration when agencies fail to deliver promised projects, and anger that local input and comments are ignored. Underlying all these concerns is the desire for autonomy and self-determination—the ability to realize the

changes they wish to see in their communities, on their own timeline and on their own terms.

This local empowerment place-frame also draws upon an historical perspective to justify the need for local control. Actors in this place-frame seek reparations for misdeeds perpetrated against them by the government. In general, when people in St. George talk about “the government” they are referring to the federal government and the connotations are not positive; the phrase that closest captures local meaning is that of “slave masters.” Elders remember being evacuated by the federal government and held in camps during World War II. They remember how government agents tried to close the community in the 1960s and the numerous other ways in which residents were treated like second-class citizens. Children and grandchildren have been brought up on these stories of shame and anger and an awareness of this history permeates the community.

Thus, when discussions about development in St. George include comparisons to the government, it speaks to strong feelings of powerlessness and frustration. As an example, when asked his opinion on APICDA’s role in the community, an elder described his concerns: “You gotta have some local control. I don’t like the idea of them dictating everything... creating CDQ was like the reincarnation of government control. And I think we need more local control in the community.” Self-determination is a core dimension of human development and well-being in indigenous and rural fishing communities (AHDR [2004](#); Coulthard et al. [2011](#)). On an individual level, a lack of fate control can lead to anger, violence, and disengagement, while those who feel they have control over their destiny are more likely to be engaged and active in community life (AHDR [2004](#)). Thus, the local empowerment place-frame represents residents’ hopes for the CDQ program to provide resources supporting local empowerment and allowing for a better way of life.

Place-frame conflicts in St. George: fishing as a place-making activity

Not all of the conflict between these two place-frames, however, is predicated on local control. Another aspect of conflict relates to differences in place bundles that different actors draw upon. In the case of St. George residents, their local empowerment place-frame is predicated on bundle of place meanings and experiences that center on a particular style of fishing, that of a halibut day fishery. A day fishery is one in which crews come home every night to eat with their family and sleep in their own beds, then head out to sea again early the next morning.

Spending time in their community is one of the main place-making activities in which St. George residents engage. Pribilof Island residents have a cultural history of being fur seal harvesters in a cash economy. For over 200 years they inhabited their islands, harvesting fur seals in the summers. Each morning, men would head down to the rookeries and return home in the evening, while women cared for children. This is the rhythm of life important to Pribilof Island residents and it is one they believe fishing should be able to provide.

Achieving this lifestyle through fishing, however, has proven difficult. Fish density around the island is low, and the prime fishing areas are 70 or more miles offshore. In order to reach those waters and preserve the day-fishery nature of their fishery, residents want APICDA to help them acquire larger (30–40 ft), faster boats. In contrast and in keeping with their place-frame of philanthropic business, APICDA would prefer to make investments more likely to see an economic return: loaning out vessels they own (about 50 ft) that can make multi-day trips and travel to different areas, to allow residents to catch quota owned by APICDA in various parts of the Bering Sea.

The few St. George residents who consider themselves professional fishermen, who have traveled across the state, leaving home for months at a time in pursuit of fishing opportunities, agree that participating in the local fishery is a different experience. As one APICDA employee explained, “A lot of these guys, they go out, come back in... and they go back out... they don’t want to go to Atka [for instance]. Atka’s way out there [in the Aleutian Chain] and it’s pretty brutal out there... you gotta stay out there a couple days, you gotta live on the boat and a lot of guys don’t want to make that jump”. Another fisherman agreed, “I don’t think anybody’s willing to go out from here and fish halibut overnight and be on that water overnight... everybody here’s pretty much fished those small boats in day fisheries. They just don’t go out overnight or travel any great distance from here to fish.” Indeed, previous research supports that the relationship Pribilof residents have with fishing is unique. Aleuts living in the islands of the Aleutian Chain have a much more flexible understanding of place, drawing upon centuries of tradition, moving to follow resources throughout the region (Reedy-Maschner 2010). Residents from this region identify as commercial fishermen above all else and willingly travel to follow the fish for weeks or months at a time when possible (Reedy-Maschner 2010).

Thus the conflict over the nature of fishing in St. George centers on two community concerns. Residents expressed their perceptions that (A) while APICDA does provide some opportunities to fish, these opportunities do not allow locals to fish in the manner they would like to fish and (B) APICDA would rather lease out local quota to non-local harvesters than help residents catch it. The following quotes illuminate these concerns by exploring local observations and critiques of APICDA’s efforts to develop local fisheries.

Concern A: Fishing opportunities don’t allow locals to fish in the way they desire to fish

[We are] trying to get APICDA to get us the bigger boats we want, things that we want to make us more comfortable fishing on our boats... but they want us to fish the way they want to fish. So they’re trying to control us. We don’t want that... We don’t have the government anymore. They’re trying to act like the government.

The board members from APICDA, they told us that they wanted us to get more boats that are slow. No more than like 8–10 knots. They say fuel [efficiency is the reason why]... [But we] found boats that we wanted and they’re not high speed, they can cruise up to 22–23 knots. Which is good because if we fish farther, between 10 and 70 or 100 miles [offshore], we have got to have the power and the speed to come back... If

they gave us what we wanted, it's no hassle to them because they'll get their money back and we'll be able to catch the quota and we'd probably ask for more quota.

Concern B: APICDA would rather lease out quota than help locals catch it

They gave up this year. 50–60,000 lbs [of our quota], they gave it away. They've been working with that partner boat for a while... they're more into getting the fishing off to someone else. The other thing is, when they do that they profit from it. And when they profit, who really loses? We do.

The conflict surrounding the nature of fishing in the Pribilof Islands is emotionally fraught and leads to a great deal of tension between community members and APICDA staff. Both groups share the same goal of building productive fisheries that supply residents with employment opportunities. Fundamental disagreements over *how* residents ought to fish, however, make achieving these goals very difficult. Each side advances reasonable suggestions to support their point of view and is then surprised when the other side declares these suggestions untenable. The third aspect of conflict, which centers around the role of trawl fishing in Pribilof waters, exacerbates these difficulties.

Place-frame conflicts in St. George: the role of trawl fishing in Pribilof waters

Residents of St. George agree that fishing isn't as good as it used to be. Fish are harder to catch, further offshore, and smaller than in the past. One fisherman describes the changes he's witnessed: "It's gotten way worse over the years, a lot, lot, lot worse. As a kid, we'd go out and fill the boat up in the harbor in a half hour with a hand line, just right out here, right in front of town, toward east side of the village. We never even needed to come out here. This harbor wasn't here. We didn't really need to come around this side. We just launched in front of town there, catch all our fish, and going to that end of the island or this end of the island was like a big thing. It was a long trip, it was far away." A younger community member agrees. "When we were growing up and [we were] having 15+ boats and not 15+ people fishing, my dad would be like, 'I got 100 fish today' instead of, 'I got two because we had to throw one back, it was too small'."

Local halibut fishing pressure consists of a handful of fishermen using 20–30 ft skiffs and residents rarely catch the quota of halibut allotted to their community in any given year; as such, they believe local declines are not caused by the local fleet, but rather are a result of intensive trawling in the area. Residents agree that several miles due east of St. George is an area that fishermen in the trawl fleet consider a "sweet spot". Trawl vessels fish intensively in that area; halibut are a prohibited species for trawl vessels, so any incidental catch, or "bycatch," of halibut must be discarded at sea, often killing the halibut locals depend on. Current estimates of halibut bycatch in the Bering Sea indicate that two out of three halibut caught in the region are thrown overboard as bycatch (Stewart et al. 2015). "I think there's trawlers operating too close to St. George. They come within three miles of that side of the island. They say they're a clean fishery. They're clean because they wipe out everything so they don't have to save anything. I mean, they don't have to mess with fish that they can't keep because they've wiped them out," one fisherman explained.

To a community with no other economic resources, the protection of halibut is a serious concern. Residents state that both the city and tribal governments have tried to establish buffers to protect these waters, working with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the state and federal governments, with no success to report at the time of this writing. APICDA has the political clout to participate in the management process and can speak on behalf of residents. However, much of APICDA's income comes from trawl fisheries throughout the Bering Sea. As a result, APICDA's role in fisheries management is much different from that of St. George community representatives.

This conflict again stems from the different place-frames each group acts within. APICDA, operating in the philanthropic business place-frame, seeks to negotiate a balance among different user groups from which it benefits and to whom it is beholden. Island residents, in contrast, have little concern for the well-being of APICDA's business partners, focused as they are on the immediate survival of their community and the importance of halibut fishing to their way of life. The corporate structure of the CDQ program, thus contributes to local strife, with the dual goals of economic profit and business relationships at odds with local goals of conservation and community well-being. One St. George resident shared a story that summarized local understandings of APICDA's interactions with trawlers, "[An APICDA employee] was on a committee, the sea lion committee for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and he was, he pushed for allowing the trawlers to come within three miles of St. George. I asked him a question one time, 'Who do you represent? Do you represent the communities or the large fishing fleet?' He said he represented the large fishing fleet". Whether or not this story is true, it reflects a common local perception of APICDA's relationship with managers and trawlers and, furthermore, it underlines the confusion caused by the CDQ program's dual nature of profit maximization and philanthropy.

While these frustrations extend beyond APICDA, the interactions with APICDA are especially problematic, as evidenced by the power APICDA wields in fisheries management. Recent legislation has mandated government consultation with ANCSA corporations, a move which could be extended to CDQ groups and might diminish the power of tribal governments to negotiate on their own behalf (Granitz 2012). If this becomes the norm, local efforts for change may become more difficult. In response to these fears locals are partnering with large nonprofits and agencies like Greenpeace, who have more political clout to advance local conservation messages to both regional managers and conservationists across the nation.

Vignette: the contrast of St. Paul

In late September, halibut fishing is starting to wind down in St. Paul. The skies are gray more often than not and the wind is constant, blowing dust and grit around the streets and whipping the ocean up into frothy waves that are dangerous for small boats. The 30 ft aluminum skiffs preferred by local fishermen are tied up in the small boat harbor, though, waiting for a break in the weather. At home, eager fishermen are thawing bait and calling up middle schoolers to thread the bait over hundreds of hooks, ensuring everything is ready to go should the weather change. Across the harbor a 58 ft vessel,

the *St. Peter*, sits in front of the processing plant, offloading halibut. Owned by the local CDQ group, CBSFA, the *St. Peter* has been fishing farther offshore, crewed by men who have already caught their allotted portion of the CDQ harvest and are now collecting their personal (individual fish quota; IFQ) harvest shares. The processing plant hums, as halibut are filleted, vacuum-packed, flash frozen, and placed in boxes marked with the CBSFA logo. In a few hours, trucks also bearing the CBSFA logo will load up stacks of these boxes for distribution to elders.

Stakeholders, place-frames, and place bundles in St. Paul

In St. Paul, like in St. George, two place-frames compete in the struggle over the shape of CDQ sponsored development (Table 1). The first of these we call the *local control* place-frame. Similar to the local empowerment place-frame in St. George, the local control place-frame views CDQ as a tool to improve community life. When fur seal harvest was prohibited, St. Paul residents advocated for fishing rights to transition their community to a fisheries-based economy. The actors in this place-frame see the CDQ program as a response to their political efforts. The main actors in this place-frame are the St. Paul tribal government and CBSFA, the local CDQ group. The tribal government of St. Paul is a powerful organization, run on the island and by mainly local residents, that works to improve local quality of life. CBSFA is also located on the island and represents only the community of St. Paul. As a result, CBSFA works very closely with local residents and organizations to develop projects that serve the needs of community members.

A contrasting place-frame in St. Paul is the *shareholder dividend* place-frame. This place-frame sees the role of government-created corporations as primarily fiduciary. Beholden to Aleut shareholders living both in urban and rural areas, these corporations must invest their money in projects that will return the highest yield. Returns on these investments can then be used to help constituents through the issuing of shareholder dividends. The primary actor in this place-frame is the TDX, the ANCSA village corporation representing St. Paul. As described previously, ANCSA allocated indigenous land rights to for-profit corporations. At the program's inception, village residents applied for shares in their local village corporation (Case and Voluck 2002). Over time, however, many shareholders moved from their villages to cities like Seattle, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. Thus, the current shareholder bases of some ANCSA corporations—and the boards that represent them—are largely urban and divorced from the villages these corporations were originally created to represent. Beholden to a shareholder group that spans Alaska and several other states, TDX, therefore, is legally obligated to make financial decisions based on economic factors first, and the needs of local residents second.

Both of these place-frames share common goals, such as increasing development in and the long-term sustainability of St. Paul. The strong local partnership between the tribal government and CBSFA provides residents with a great deal of control over their resources and development. This local control fosters residents with a sense of well-being that derives from their ability to solve community problems. Local residents

perceive that these efforts are frequently stymied, however, by interference from TDX, whose economic interests are much broader and sometimes conflicting. Below we will discuss the ways in which the local control place-frame supports community place-making efforts in St. Paul, despite conflict with TDX.

Local control place-frame supporting place-making activities in St. Paul

The vignette above captures just a few of the ways in which CBSFA has made an impact on the community of St. Paul. Residents are enthusiastic in their praise for the program and can list numerous ways in which the organization supports the community. The following quotes are representative of local sentiments toward CBSFA.

They're great. They rock. This is what I think of Central Bering Sea [CBSFA], they just rock. They help out this community so, so much. Very happy with them. I can't think of one person that could say one bad thing about Central Bering Sea. I can't see it... I work for the local tribe and we rock because we do so much for the community, right, but they surpass us. They're the only entity on the island that could surpass us, but give credit where credit is due. That's my opinion and I hope that every person you interview has that same opinion.

I like them, they help the school, they help the city, they help people. They help old folks, like me.

I think they're a good organization. They work good in the community. They do a lot of different things. Without their help we wouldn't have a fire station. Without their help the small boat harbor wouldn't be there. They help the elders with fuel and they also give out king crab, opilio crab, and halibut and a couple of salmons throughout the year [to the elders]. They're a good island entity and work well with all the other entities.

A CBSFA employee explains the organization's philosophy thusly:

We help in many different areas, whether it's contributing to the elders or the school, the Montessori [program]... we do an elder's program for fuel and electricity. We try to contribute to them, but they can't actually go down to the dock and fish, so that was one way we could help them. We are trying to be joint partners with the tribe... we did a joint venture with the city on [a building] where we store our crane... the rescue boat you see down in the harbor, we helped with that. We actually completed the small boat harbor... the city needed a new fuel truck, we helped them get that... yeah, we try to see what new projects are out there that could help with the community, especially the fisheries area.

These quotes indicate that the development efforts of CBSFA align with local place-making efforts to establish a local, fisheries-based economy. The program, however, did not work like this from initiation. Though based on a local fishermen's group, CBSFA like the other CDQ groups, was originally headquartered off-island in the business hub of Anchorage. Furthermore, it was staffed by outsiders, familiar with business, but unfamiliar with island needs and politics. Community members, therefore, had to fight to achieve local control. "In the early days, [we had] different management and they had their offices out in Anchorage and stuff. They didn't know what was going on and local

people said, no that's not going to be happening. We're gonna bring the Anchorage office here," one elder explained.

Though CDQ has done much to develop a local economy in St. Paul, it is important to note that while the local halibut fishery provides money and employment opportunities for residents, it does not cover the cost of operating and maintaining city infrastructure. Rather, the community development efforts of CBSFA are buttressed by taxes collected on crab processed at the local plant (currently operated by Trident Seafoods). As one community member put it, "Basically, crab here is like the life blood of the economy. The city depends on the crab tax and all that." In this light, CDQ alone has not saved the community from collapse, rather it has contributed to local well-being by allowing development efforts to support local place-making efforts, notably the development of a halibut day fishery and the establishment of local control over resources.

Place-frame conflict in St. Paul

The conflicts between the local control and shareholder dividend place-frames shape and often restrict development efforts in St. Paul as political battles among these local entities can create divisions in the community. Important local political entities include: the city government, the tribal government, the ANCSA Native corporation (TDX), and the local CDQ corporation, and CBSFA. While board membership of these different entities often overlap, each organization has its own agenda, often leading to conflict. Furthermore, these conflicts often spill over into the social realm, as family loyalty is split among the different entities. Most notable of these conflicts is a lawsuit recently settled between the city and TDX. As one resident described the suit:

The city of St. Paul and TDX, the local corporation, have been in lawsuits for the last 15 years. And I think that plays a major role in how it divided the community. And that's what I don't like, is how we're not as close-knit a community as we should be, as we used to be. When the government ran the community everybody was on the same page. Nobody really liked the way the government was controlling things, so everybody was working together to find a way to break free from that. And now that we have our own entities and our own organizations, I think personalities clashing may be dividing the community.

While some of the political battles fought on the island in the past 30 years can likely be laid at the feet of personalities, family politics, and the general bickering present in all small towns, much of it results from the shareholder dividend place-frame resulting from the corporate structure of ANCSA. As a local politician explained, "The [ANCSA] corporation's a profit-making corporation and they have to answer to the shareholders, so if it looks like it's going to make money then they'll do it... I've had it said to me, hey I don't only have to answer to you guys, I have other shareholders that may not live here that we've got to answer to, too. And they're all about making money for the shareholders." This focus on profits and increasing shareholder dividends has slowed projects vital to community well-being, like the effort to build a small boat harbor.

ANCSA, therefore, provides an example of how development projects can hinder place-making efforts of even well-organized and politically motivated communities. The

program's corporate structure effectively divorced land rights from the community. Therefore, community members interested in developing local land must gain the approval of urban shareholders who often know little about local needs and desires. In addition, the mandate, and in fact legal responsibility, of any corporation is to maximize profit for shareholders. Local projects are often smaller scale with longer return on investment periods, making them less attractive to boards intent on maximizing shareholder dividends. This creates conflict and hinders development.

One woman summarized these interactions eloquently:

There's this division line between people that are from here, but don't live here any more and people that live here... that's been a stickler in this political spear-throwing where some people say, why are they telling us what to do, they don't live here! Well they still feel like they can because they're from here and that's what the land corporations have sort of done without realizing it, that's happened. So I tell my sons, well don't try to be involved in managing or saying what should happen here if you're not going to live here.

In summary, both Pribilof Island communities share similar, though distinct, understandings of place based on participation in a halibut day fishery, and local control over resource use and development. Conflicts between place-frames in each community have affected the ability of residents to align place-making efforts with economic realities. In general, due to their relative success in transitioning to a fisheries-based economy, residents in St. Paul expressed attitudes of political empowerment and autonomy and were pleased with local development efforts. In contrast, residents in St. George articulated their feelings of disenfranchisement and ambivalence toward development projects. While strongly desiring more local infrastructure and local fisheries opportunities in their community, residents of St. George expressed that outsiders design these projects poorly, often ignoring or misconstruing local input. These community case studies suggest that the structure of fisheries management policies can play an important role in community sustainability, by supporting or conflicting with local place-making efforts.

Lessons for fisheries: articulation of place-making and development

Numerous studies have detailed the potential utility of *place* in resource management. Much of this literature focuses on sense of place (e.g., Williams and Stewart [1998](#); Stedman [2003](#)) and in fisheries management seeks to integrate sense of place into management as a description of cultural services for ecosystem based assessments (Urquhart and Acott [2014](#); Acott and Urquhart [2014](#)) or to advocate for place-based management (Macinko [2007](#)). We see this as a beneficial, but limiting approach. Recent research indicates that fisheries managers are hampered not only by a lack of knowledge surrounding social science, but also a lack of tools to help them integrate such data into the decision-making process (Heck et al. [2015](#)). Managers cannot, for instance, gauge the relative importance of a way of life compared to the value of an endangered species. This incommensurability has led many social scientists within fisheries management to quantify social data. While this allows the data to be integrated into the management

process, it strips away the important historical and political context that would be beneficial to decision-makers.

To address this difficulty, we promote the use of relational place-making as one framework that would improve community assessments in fisheries management. The benefits of using a relational place-making framework include an emphasis on the active, fluid, and constantly evolving nature of place that preserves the “holistic, emotive, social, and contextual quality” of sense of place (Williams and Stewart [1998](#)) lost in attempts to quantify social data. Furthermore, such a framework, by explicitly addressing the politics and power-dynamics associated with different place-frames, adds necessary complexity to portrayals of the human system in resource management decision-making processes. Finally, only by conceptualizing place in terms of contested understandings and goals do we provide managers with enough information to develop conflict solutions based on common ground (Yung et al. [2003](#)).

Highlighting the subjective, political nature of resource management policies is important in the effort to establish sustainable communities and fisheries. It is of particular importance in two management contexts: (1) policy decisions that affect indigenous peoples and (2) policy decisions that create private resource rights of public goods. We highlight the contribution relational place-making can bring to each of these scenarios below.

In fisheries management, communities, particularly indigenous or poor communities, are often characterized with apolitical, materialist frameworks. According to these frameworks, communities are either at the whim of their environments, limited by local geology and climate (e.g., Diamond [2005](#)), or constrained by the ability of stakeholders to cooperate and organize (e.g., Ostrom [1990](#)). Framed this way, the drastic difference between Pribilof Island communities discussed above becomes dismissible as a result of St. George’s inferior harbor and the unwillingness of its residents to cooperate with St. Paul in the formation of a joint CDQ group. From this perspective, the decline of St. George is an unfortunate and unavoidable result.

In contrast, relational place-making shows the ways in which residents struggled with the legacy of colonialism to protect a cherished way of life. Far from being an apolitical inevitability, the poverty of St. George is created through a political economic system, a common plight shared by numerous indigenous communities struggling to achieve stability in a post-colonial era. Like many indigenous communities in the U.S., St. George remains economically dependent on federal aid, mainly in the form of grants to the tribal government. Economic dependency is an expected result in these cases, as local land and resource rights are too limited to support residents (Bee and Gingerich [1977](#)). Instead, the federal government sustains these regions with a “policy of appeasement,” providing enough money to ameliorate, but not solve issues of local poverty (Bee and Gingerich [1977](#)). Such a culture of dependency becomes entrenched, as attempts to increase local autonomy are rarely successful, representing major shifts in political power. Furthermore, in an era of reduced government spending, the resulting political backlash of failed initiatives might jeopardize the continuance of federal

funding that communities have come to rely upon. Even when such initiatives are successful, without access to capital, tribal governments are able to do little more than “rubber-stamp” currently established, often exploitative, development projects (Bee and Gingerich 1977). Such cash-strapped organizations are unable to fund long-term developments that would benefit residents, concerned instead with simply making payroll. Finally, a large government bureaucracy has evolved to oversee the transfer of money to Native reservations and villages, and this infrastructure is self-sustaining, furthering a “reciprocal dependence” between communities and agencies (Bee and Gingerich 1977). In this context, the achievements of St. Paul community members are impressive. Local control of CDQ resources has provided them with the necessary autonomy and capital required to implement long-term development projects designed to benefit their community.

The findings of this study therefore align with those of Bebbington (2000), who found that contrary to common poststructural critiques (e.g., Escobar 1997), government intervention in the form of development projects can improve quality of life in rural communities. While the history of development is one of colonial control, subaltern status, and local resistance (Escobar 1997), the future of development need not be limited in such ways. Projects that increase local control over political and economic institutions can improve local quality of life (Bebbington 2000; this study). The communities of St. Paul and St. George illuminate the importance of this distinction. Management plans seeking to foster sustainable fishing communities would, therefore, greatly benefit from including such insight as can be provided by relational place-making.

The second arena of fisheries management in which a specifically political framework is required is that of fisheries privatization. When fisheries managers create programs that delegate resource rights to private citizens or corporations, they are making specific assumptions about the relationships people have with fishing. These programs explicitly prioritize economic relationships over social and cultural ones. A large body of research, however, indicates that the relationships fishermen and community residents have with fish resources are much broader and more complex than can be encompassed in strictly economic terms (Poe et al. 2014; Acott and Urquhart 2014). Thus policies that privatize fishing rights, though often presented as apolitical, “rational” policies, actually serve to advance the political motivations of specific stakeholders, at the expense of others (e.g., Carothers 2008; Palsson and Helgason 1995). We believe that the integration of relational place-making into fisheries management can help make explicit the political assumptions underlying privatization and development policies, thus leading to the development of more socially just policies.

Such a task sounds daunting in the face of a management structure traditionally consisting of top-down, centrally controlled regulations. These types of programs were born out of a desire to command and control resources, increasing legibility of users for governing control (Scott 1998). The idea of devolving control to communities and stakeholders is, therefore, highly destabilizing. While the destabilizing nature of devolving control to local stakeholders has hindered the development of co-

management regimes, they are currently gaining momentum in fisheries management (Armitage et al. [2007](#)). This shift therefore provides evidence that, as Scott ([1998](#)) put it, “the state may in some instances be the defender of local difference and variety” in the face of globalization and neoliberalism. The process is slow, requiring a re-centering of power, based on the creation of relationships and trust with residents and stakeholders, as well as a respect of local ideas (Campbell and Hunt [2012](#)). Such a re-centering furthermore requires focusing on local “place-based models of nature, culture, and politics” (Escobar [2001](#)). In summary, place—its history, politics and character, its means and meanings—is important in designing both development initiatives and fisheries policies that support the well-being and sustainability of fishing communities.

Conclusion: the importance of place

Many fishing communities are struggling today. Through policies of access privatization and declines in resources, residents are losing access to their resource bases. Despite this, and in the face of economic collapse, people are choosing to stay in these communities. These socially created places are therefore important. They represent shared history, a sense of community and family, as well as a way-of-life quite different than those found in urban spaces. In indigenous communities, place furthermore represents a connection to sovereignty, cultural heritage, and sense of stewardship toward land and resources. Only by understanding all these factors, and the importance with which residents view them, can policy-makers fulfill their obligations to achieve community sustainability and minimize adverse impacts on communities (e.g., Gehan and Hallowell [2012](#); Executive Order 12898 of February 11 [1994](#)).

Fishery policies for indigenous and rural fishing communities cannot, therefore, be successful if the authors of these plans do not understand local goals and needs. While gaining this understanding is a difficult task, it is a worthwhile one. As Campbell and Hunt ([2012](#)) explain, conflicts between indigenous and government goals do not reflect different priorities—both groups desire to see increased income and opportunities for struggling communities; rather the disagreement centers around who sets the development agenda and how success is defined. Thus policy makers should be clear in stating goals and how these goals articulate with local understandings and desires.

As a tool to aid in this endeavor, we propose the use of relational place-making as an analytical framework to provide complex social science data to inform and help structure discussions around community-based fisheries policy. While economic markers are commonly used as indicators for measuring the success of policies, and development programs in particular, they have many limitations. Economic markers cannot predict, describe, or explain conflicts between insider and outsider ideas about development and goals for the future. They cannot adequately demonstrate whether local well-being has actually increased or decreased as the result of an intervention. And, finally, they cannot capture the loss of non-market, locally valued, place characteristics. Relational place-making, in contrast, can do all of these things.

Footnotes

1

Aleut is currently the most common ethnonym of the Pribilof Island residents, but it is a term whose popularity and widespread results from European use of the term during the 18th century. Unangan is an older term that is becoming more popular, particularly among community groups work to revitalize connections with their cultural heritage (Black [1998](#)).

2

The crab rationalization program created two processing districts (Northern and Southern) and crabbers were required to process a percentage of their crab quota in each district based on their historical landings. The Northern district consists of two harbors: St. Paul and St. George. St. George never had a land-based processing plant, only floating processors that would set up either in the harbor or in nearby waters. After rationalization one of the St. George processors went bankrupt and the other discontinued operations in the area after a storm further damaged the St. George harbor.

3

Landing taxes received by St. George were collected from floating processors operating either in the harbor or in waters just offshore of the island. These taxes are based on the unprocessed value of the resource, calculated as weight multiplied by a statewide average price set by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Landing tax [2007](#)).

Declarations

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' contributions

CL conducted ethnographic fieldwork, transcribed interviews, completed data analysis, and was the lead writer for this article. CC provided guidance and oversight for the project. KR contributed expert advice and guidance. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.