

Information and Material-Resource Flow among the Urban Inuit: Research from
Montreal, Canada

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1. Montreal Research

In 1996 I undertook anthropological research about life of the Inuit in Montreal. In 1997, I interviewed 54 Inuit and since then, I have continued doing research even for short periods whenever I visit Montreal (Kishigami 1999a, b; 2002 a, b, c; 2004).

As far as my research is concerned, I have concluded that there are a variety of lifestyles and economic situations among the Montreal Inuit. Also, beginning in the 1980s, Inuit moved to Montreal more often than before. I find that a complex combination of pull factors to Montreal and push factors from arctic villages explain the Inuit's mobility to urban centers. In this respect, there is no big difference between Inuit and other First Nations people.

In August, 2004, I carried out follow up research with 52 Inuit in Montreal. More than 80% of those interviewed are different from those interviewed 7 years ago. In the last 7 years, there occurred two major changes relating the Inuit in Montreal. First, Baffin house (a patient transit house for the Inuit from Baffin Island) was closed down in 1998 by the Government of Northwest Territories, and Inuit patients from the Baffin region began to be sent not hospitals in Montreal, but those in Ottawa. Second, in 2002 Inuit with 2 IDs came to be allowed to receive welfare money in Province of Quebec, even though they did not have any fixed addresses. In this research, I was able to contact and interviewed 12 homeless Inuit. Among them as well as among other unemployed Inuit, alcoholism and drug abuse are a serious problem, which I did not identify in my 1997 research.

In this presentation, I outline the contemporary situation of the Montreal Inuit and then report on how information and material resources flow among them. Finally, I will make several recommendations to improve their life.

It should be noted that I did not select my informants at random. My cases consist of all the Inuit I could contact while I was in Montreal. Also, I interviewed only 3 students in this research. In this way, my samples are not perfectly representative of the universe of the Inuit in Montreal.

2. Life of the Montreal Inuit in 2004

I would like to show several statistical tendencies of population ratio between male and female, ages, native places, residing length, residential districts, income of the Inuit in Montreal.

2.1. Ages and Sexual Ratio of Inuit in Montreal

There are 17 men and 35 women in my research. The number of Inuit women is far larger than that of Inuit men in Montreal. This tendency is very similar to that in 1997.

	Male	Female
0 to 20 years old	1	3
21 to 30 years old	6	4
31 to 40 years old	3	15
41 to 50 years old	6	11
51 to 60 years	0	1
61 to 70	1	1
71 or older than 71	0	0
Total (52)	17	35

Table 1. Age and Gender of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

As the Table 1 shows, a majority of the Inuit in Montreal are those between 21 and 50 years old. Also, there is no one who is 70 years or above.

2.2 Employed Inuit, Students and Unemployed Inuit

If I classify the interviewed Inuit into three categories : employed Inuit, students and unemployed Inuit, there are 20 employed Inuit, 3 students and 29 unemployed Inuit.

	Male	Female	Total
Employed Inuit	6	14	20
Students	0	3	3
Unemployed Inuit	11	18	29
	17	35	52

Table 2. Jobs and Gender of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

Unemployed Inuit are more numerous than employed ones. The former are 56% of the all Inuit. 12 of the 29 unemployed Inuit are homeless persons. These people are about 23% of the total. There are 7 homeless males and 5 homeless females. The rate of male homeless persons is much higher than that of female ones.

2.3 Income of Employed Inuit, Students and Unemployed Inuit

Most of the unemployed Inuit depend on welfare money from the Province of Quebec and get about \$550 per month on average. The main income sources of students are from Student Loans and part-time work. On the other hand, most of the Inuit with jobs earn about \$2,000 or more per month. So, there is a clear difference of income between employed and unemployed Inuit.

Monthly Income	\$0 to \$500	\$501 to \$1000	\$1001 to \$1500	\$1501 to \$2000	\$2000 or more
Employed Inuit	0	1	6	1	12
Students	1	2	0	0	0
Unemployed Inuit	5	20	2	1	1
Total	6	23	8	2	13

Table 3. Income of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

2.4 Residential Districts

While the unemployed and student Inuit in Montreal tend to live in downtown Montreal, the employed Inuit tend to live not only in the central Montreal but also in its suburbs. Specially, the homeless Inuit have a preeminent tendency to stay in downtown of Montreal. On the other hand, the employed Inuit with families tend to live in the suburbs of Montreal.

areas	Employed Inuit	Unemployed Inuit	Student	Total
Western Montreal	5	4	1	10
Downtown Montreal	3	15	1	19

Eastern Montreal	3	5	1	9
Lachine	5	2	0	7
Dorval	1	0	0	1
West Island	5	0	0	0
South Shore	0	1	0	1

Table 4. Residential and Staying Areas of the Montreal Inuit, 2004

2.5 Sexual Differences of Residential Length

The staying length of male Inuit is shorter than that of female ones in Montreal. There is not one Inuit man who has been continuously there more than 10 years. On the other hand, there are 16 Inuit women who have resided more than 15 years in Montreal.

	male	Female	Total
Less than 1 year	3	6	9
1 to 5 years	7	6	13
6 to 10 years	7	4	11
11 to 15 years	0	3	3
16 to 20 years	0	9	9
21 years or more	0	7	7

Table 5. Length of Montreal Inuit male and female

2.6. Native Places of Montreal Inuit

The Inuit in Montreal come primarily from the eastern arctic, especially Nunavik (arctic Quebec) and southern Baffin Island. There are 35 Inuit (about 67%) from Nunavik, 14 (about 27%) from the Nunavut and 3 (about 6%) from other regions.

Village Names	Male	Female	Total
(Nunavik)			
Salluit	1	2	3
Akulivik	1	1	2
Puvirniqtuq	0	2	2
Inukjuak	2	4	6
Umiujaq	0	1	1

Kuujuarapik	2	5	7
Chisasibi	1	3	4
Kuujuuaq	0	6	6
Quartaq	1	2	3
Kangiqsujuaq	1	0	1
(Nunavut)			
Iqaluit	2	6	8
Cape Dorset	0	2	2
Pond Inlet	1	0	1
Sanikiluaq	0	1	1
Gjoa Haven	1	0	1
Barthust Inlet	1	0	1
(Labrador)			
Northwest River	1	0	1
(Others)			
Quebec Province	1	0	1
BC Province	1	0	1

Table 6. Native Places of the Montreal Inuit Male and Female

3. Information and Material Resource Flow and Exchanges among the Montreal Inuit in 2004

3.1 Kind of Media and Material for Flow and Exchange in Montreal

As I thought that information and material flows were important to the urban Inuit life, in my 2004 Montreal research, I asked the Montreal Inuit about a number of media such as telephone, mobile phone, fax, internet, radio, television, video, newspapers, magazines and books, and material resources flowed and exchanged such as food, cash, liquor and gifts.

Concerning flows of information, face to face communication is very important. However, as they are dispersed all over the Montreal region, telephones and mobile phones are socio-economically important communication tools for them. The majority have their own or shared phones. Even homeless Inuit can use phones at the Native Friendship Center of Montreal or at their friends' houses or use public phones. Surprisingly, a few homeless Inuit even have their own mobile phones with them.

The Inuit in Montreal do not often use fax machines except at work. On the other hand, 4 – 5 years ago several Inuit in Montreal began to use the internet as a communication means. Especially, Inuit working at the Makivik Corporation, the

Avataq Cultural Institute, and the Kativik School Board use the internet not only to gather information but also to communicate their family members, kinsmen or friends working at village municipal offices or the Co-ops in the north.

Also, there are a few computers connected to the internet at the Native Friendship Center of Montreal. Many unemployed Inuit, including homeless persons, use the internet for the e-mail communication, playing the games and listening to music there.

There are several interesting tendencies concerning use of television, radio and video among the Inuit in Montreal. They use these media fewer hours a day than the Inuit in the arctic regions. Also, the Montreal Inuit can be classified into two groups: those who like watching television programs and those who like listening to radio programs. Concerning the television programs, they like programs on nature, world travels, documentary and indigenous peoples. The radio programs they like to listen to are various kinds of music. Several employed Inuit prefer watching movies on video to other things. Also, the unemployed Inuit including homeless persons can have access to television, radio and video at the Native Friendship Center of Montreal.

Although most of the Inuit in Montreal do not read newspapers, magazines and books, several employed Inuit read the *Montreal Gazette* and *The Globe and Mails* everyday. Although unemployed Inuit read newspapers, they tend to read the garage sale and horoscope sections.

Obviously, the employed and student Inuit are far more accessible to various kinds of media for communication in Montreal than those who are unemployed. On the other hand, face to face communication is the most important one for the unemployed Inuit including the homeless.

Country food is very important to the Montreal Inuit. Arctic char, caribou meat and *maktaq* (beluga skin parts) are sent to Montreal from the north and distributed among them. These country foods are eaten at the Makivik, Avataq, Kativik School Board offices, sometimes at the Native Friendship Center of Montreal for lunch, at the Association of Montreal Inuit monthly supper, or at individual homes in Montreal. When the Inuit eat country food, they mostly share and eat it with other Inuit. Also, I observed that cash, food and liquor are shared among the homeless Inuit. It is interesting to note that the homeless Inuit share food, cash, cigarette, and liquor with any other homeless persons around them. To them, sharing networks surpass the ethnic boundaries.

3.2 Information and Material Resource Flow and Exchanges between Montreal Inuit

and their kin and friends in the Arctic

There are a lot of material and information exchanges between the Inuit in Montreal and those in the arctic.

The Montreal Inuit, except several homeless persons, communicate with their family members, kinsmen, or friends by phone. Several employed and student Inuit make phone calls to their family and friends in the arctic villages almost everyday. Also, even unemployed Inuit, especially homeless persons, can use free phones at the Native Friendship Center or at the homes of their friends' or public phones with pre-paid calling cards to call their family, kinsmen and friends. Also, they make collect calls to the north. Through phone communication, various kinds of information are going and coming between Inuit in Montreal and those in the arctic.

Many Montreal Inuit make phone calls to their family members or kinsmen and ask them to send frozen Caribou meat and arctic char to Montreal. Also, Inuit lacking in money often ask their relatives to send them some cash through the co-op or the Bay store (the former Hudson's Bay Company store) by phone.

Several employed Inuit send some tools, machine parts difficult to obtain in the arctic, birthday gifts or/and Christmas gifts to their family members and kinsmen in the arctic. On the other hand, most of the unemployed Inuit do not send anything to the arctic.

In sum, phones are the most important tools for many Inuit in Montreal to maintain their social relationships with Inuit in the arctic villages and to get country food from the arctic.

4. Places of Information and Material Exchange among the Inuit in Montreal

There are several spots or places for food and information exchange among the Inuit in Montreal including several working places, the Native Friendship Center, Association of Montreal Inuit, parks, shopping centers, bars, Nunavik House, schools and hospitals

4.1 Working Places (Makivik, KSB, Avataq, Air Inuit)

There are several working places of the Inuit such as the Makivik Corporation, Kativik School Board, Avataq Cultural Institute, Air Inuit etc. in the Montreal region. These places are the spots to exchange food and information among the Inuit workers. At lunch time, they often share and eat country food from the arctic. Many unemployed Inuit often visit these places to get information from the arctic and eat country food.

4.2 Native friendship Centre of Montreal

Breakfast and lunch are provided to native visitors from Monday to Friday at the Native Friendship Center. The customers of the center are unemployed and homeless natives in downtown area. Many Inuit have breakfast and lunch there. Also, this center is a place for information exchange among them. They can leave their messages for their friends at the center and even can use free phone and internet to communicate with other Inuit in and outside Montreal.

Currently, two projects, the Street Project and the Food-Van Project, operate for the benefit of unemployed natives, especially the homeless. The center sends three workers (2 Inuit and 1 First Nations person) to downtown and other streets to look for homeless natives from morning to evening everyday except weekends. If they see native persons in trouble, they will help them.

Also, from late afternoon to late night everyday except weekends the center sends a food van with 3 workers (2 First Nations persons and 1 Inuk) downtown and elsewhere to provide food and drink to homeless natives.

The unemployed Inuit, especially homeless Inuit, benefit from these projects.

4.3. The Association of Montreal Inuit

The Association of Montreal Inuit was officially established in 2000. It has a drop-in-center and an art shop in Dorval city in the suburbs of Montreal. This association holds a monthly supper on every last Saturday of each month at the drop-in-center in summer time and at the Anglican Church in Lachine in other seasons. The monthly supper provides country food to the participants and a place for information exchange among them.

However, as this monthly supper is held far from downtown Montreal, unemployed and homeless Inuit staying there hardly participated in it.

4.4. Parks, Shopping Centers, Bars, Nunavik House, Schools and Hospitals

There are several spots such as Atwater Park, Peace Park, several bars, shopping centers, the Nunavik House (a patient transit house) and hospitals for the Inuit to see other Inuit. They can often exchange information and share food there. Also, there are always several Inuit drinking alcohol in several parks.

5. Discussion and Summary

The flows of information and food were originally based on a face to face interaction between Inuit who shared location or labor. However, modern technology such as the phone has changed the flows. By phone, the Inuit in the south can get

information and country food from the arctic and maintain their social relationships with their family, kinsmen and friends without seeing them.

Concerning the flows of information and country foods, there are internal differences among the urban Inuit in Montreal. While the unemployed Inuit exchange information and material resources (such as food, cash, liquor) on a face-to-face basis, or through friends by word of mouth, those with jobs communicate by telephone, fax, and /or e-mail. Furthermore, while the employed urban Inuit communicate with their families or kinsmen in arctic home villages to obtain "country food" such as caribou or arctic char, the unemployed seldom do so. These examples suggest that economic stratification (differential accessibility to cash) rather than distance or proximity leads to differing accessibility to information and material resources among the urban Inuit. These circumstances are not prevalent among most Inuit in the North, whose accessibility to information and material resources is based on kinship and/or proximity.

As far as my research is concerned, the Inuit population will continue to increase in Montreal. There are several pull and push factors. But the critical problems for the exodus exist in the arctic regions. Unless economic and social conditions improve there, more Inuit people will continue to move to southern cities such as Montreal and Ottawa. Thus, Inuit will encounter more serious homeless and social problems in the south because they usually move to the cities without any advance preparation for living in the new city environment. Some measures should be taken to address the problems such as employment, housing and government services.

As already mentioned, while unemployed Inuit, especially the homeless, tend to stay in downtown Montreal, employed Inuit tend to live in the suburbs. There is no intimate and close interaction between the two. The suburban Inuit tend to socialize with other employed Inuit or non-Inuit persons. As they also keep in touch with their families, kinsmen, and friends by phone and internet in the North, they receive country food from the arctic Inuit and reciprocate by sending gifts to the arctic ones. Although they take pity on unemployed and homeless Inuit in the city, they seem to avoid keeping contact with them in Montreal.

Unemployed Inuit including homeless persons contact other Inuit at the Native Friendship Center and in several parks in downtown Montreal. They communicate with others primarily on a face-to-face basis. They communicate with Inuit in their arctic home villages less often than do the employed and student Inuit.

The primary customers of the Native Friendship Center are unemployed Inuit, especially homeless Inuit living on the street in downtown area. Most customers of the Association of Montreal Inuit are unemployed and but some employed Inuit living in the

suburbs of Montreal also belong. The Inuit members appreciate the organizations because they can obtain country foods at lunch or/and monthly supper at the organizations. With some exceptions, many successful Inuit tend not to participate in any activities of either organization.

6. Recommendations

As the following needs are expressed by many Inuit, I summarize them in the following points.

- 1) Measures should be taken to provide education/ job training and housing/ job information to urban Inuit.
- 2) A shelter for the homeless Inuit.
- 3) Counseling in Inuktitut is needed for the Montreal Inuit.
- 4) The Association of Montreal Inuit and the Native Friendship Center of Montreal should increase quantity and frequency of their country food supply to the urban Inuit.
- 5) Mutual help networks among the Inuit should be established.
- 6) Inuktitut and sewing & carving classes should be established for the urban Inuit.
- 7) The Association of Montreal Inuit and the Native friendship Center of Montreal should apply for federal funds to expand and strengthen their programs.

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