The Kwakw̱a̱ka’wakw are peoples of northern Vancouver Island and the south-central coast of British Columbia—a place where territory, culture, and livelihoods are intimately intertwined. In this chapter, we draw from the example of the ‘Namgis First Nation, focusing in particular on their efforts to steward and protect these central aspects of their lives and on their partnerships with others who share their home of Alert Bay on Cormorant Island. Since the late 1800s, Cormorant Island has served as a centre of administration, services, and social gathering for not only the ‘Namgis but also other Kwakw̱a̱ka’wakw First Nations.1 Many Aboriginal people from outlying villages have moved to the community, while still maintaining connections to their own traditional territories. Offices of ‘Namgis and Kwikwasut’inuxw Haxwa’mis First Nation and the Whe-La-La-U Area Council are located in Alert Bay, as well as the U’mista Cultural Centre, which serves all Kwakw̱a̱ka’wakw peoples. In many ways, the community of Alert Bay therefore extends beyond Cormorant Island to the North Island/Kwakw̱a̱ka’wakw region as a whole.

Directly adjacent to Cormorant Island, on Vancouver Island, the Nimpkish River empties into Broughton Strait. The ‘Namgis are the people of the Nimpkish

1 Although the term Kwak’wala is often used to describe this cultural group, the term Kwakw̱a̱ka’wakw is more appropriately used to refer to the group as a whole. Kwak’wala is the name of a specific nation within the Kwak’wala-speaking peoples. For more information, see “The Kwak’wala Speaking Tribes,” U’mista Cultural Society, http://www.umista.ca/kwakwakawakw/index.php.
River (Gwa’ni). According to the legend of the river’s origin, Gwa’ni was placed there by the Creator to support “many kinds of salmon . . . food for your descend-
ants for as long as the days shall dawn on the world” (Speck 1987, 67). It was these salmon runs that gave birth to the community of Alert Bay.

In this chapter, we describe the development efforts of the ‘Namgis and Kwakwaka’wakw peoples through two alternative economic lenses: the social economy and sustainable community development (SCD). Through our analysis of development in Alert Bay, we conclude that there are two major concerns with how the social economy is generally conceptualized: first, there is a lack of rec-
ognition of the fundamental role of lands, resources, and ecology in social and cultural well-being, and second, not enough emphasis is placed on the role that governments at various levels play in community development. The social econ-
omy might therefore be appropriately viewed as subsumed under the more holistic and inclusive SCD approach.

SUSTAINABILITY, SOCIAL ECONOMY, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES

The Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships defines the social economy as follows:

The Social Economy consists of association-based economic initiatives founded on values of:

- Service to members of community rather than generating profits;
- Autonomous management (not government or market controlled);
- Democratic decision making;
- Primacy of persons and work over capital;
- Based on principles of participation, empowerment. (CSERP 2009, 2)

CSERP envisions the social economy as a continuum from totally voluntary organ-
izations on one end to activities that blend the private sector with social enter-
prise on the other. The common thread is an acknowledgement of the utility of economic activities as a tool for achieving social benefits.

Given this definition, the social economy is subject to the same critique as com-
munity economic development (CED), which became popular in the late 1980s and is sometimes described as the predecessor of the social economy (Decter and Kowall 1989; ECC 1990). Focused on social and economic dimensions of develop-
ment, the social economy and CED tend to have human-centred objectives such as
social justice and self-reliance (Shea 1994; Bryant 1999). In contrast, sustainable community development (SCD) is an approach to development that explicitly combines the principles of both sustainable development and CED: the SCD approach strives for the health of both ecosystems and communities and recognizes their many complex interconnections. SCD, then, emphasizes the realities of the natural world in general (e.g., the limitations on human use of the environment as a source of resources and as a waste disposal site) and the local social, cultural, ecological, and economic realities, which are brought into the SCD process through meaningful public participation.

Many Aboriginal communities are determined to participate in economic development that is consistent with their culture and traditions. Studies of successful Aboriginal economic development point to projects that seek ways of keeping culture and traditions alive. Gaining control of land and resources and of how these resources are managed and developed has also been shown to be critical to achieving self-sufficiency, self-determination, and sustainability (ACOA 2003; Cornell and Kalt 1992). Aboriginal enterprises often adopt a collective approach, employing structures such as co-operatives, non-government organizations, and joint ventures, all of which are consistent with a social economy framework. These enterprises may also be supported and in some cases fully owned by First Nations governments (Vodden, Miller, and McBride 2001).

Throughout rural Canada, communities have turned to tourism as one strategy for adapting to declining primary-sector economies, “especially in areas that have unique natural and cultural amenities” (Koster 2010, i). The same is true of Aboriginal communities (Johnson 2010). The 1990s saw a rapid proliferation of Aboriginal tourism as an extension of a long tradition of tourists’ interest in the “exotic Other” (Notzke 2004), but with the important difference that Aboriginal peoples have increasingly assumed control of these tourism developments.

This chapter presents a case study of the efforts of the ‘Namgis First Nation to capitalize on opportunities in tourism as a response to political and economic restructuring and to draw on the arts and culture as a long-term strategy for resilience in the face of repeated and long-standing threats to livelihoods and cultural security. In particular, we explore the role that social economy and SCD approaches have played in the struggles of the ‘Namgis First Nation and the community of Alert Bay to ensure cultural and economic survival based largely on the resources of the surrounding land and sea.
Cormorant Island is occupied by the municipality of the Village of Alert Bay; a small unincorporated area; three reserves belonging to the ‘Namgis First Nation; and the Whe-La-La-U Area Council, a twelve-acre parcel of land set aside by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs as a home for people from surrounding Kwakwaka’wakw First Nations. The municipality, ‘Namgis Nation, and Whe-La-La-U all have elected councils. Aboriginal rights and title and ongoing treaty negotiations apply directly only to First Nations but impact the island community as a whole. Despite this complex governance environment, most community leaders and residents identify themselves as members of one community—Alert Bay.

Alert Bay lies within the Mount Waddington Regional District, the boundaries of which closely align with those of the territory of the Kwakwaka’wakw; the Regional District includes the northern third of Vancouver Island, the adjacent mainland, and the islands in between. The total population of the region, as of the 2006 Census, was 11,370 people, 26 percent of which were Aboriginal people (GSGislason and Associates 2011). Alert Bay is a community of approximately 1,000 residents, roughly two-thirds of whom identify themselves as Aboriginal. Alert Bay’s island-wide population has remained relatively stable over time, with recent declines in the municipal population and growth on reserve, according to census figures (Statistics Canada 2012).

Located within the Pacific maritime ecozone, the region is one of world’s most productive ecosystems—it is a land of mountainous topography; warm, wet climatic conditions; and lush temperate rainforests (Gilkeson et al. 2006). Ancient forests, fjords and inlets, and rivers fed by rainfall and mountain glaciers support all six species of Pacific salmon, along with many other fish species, wild game, high concentrations of bald eagles, waterfowl, orcas, porpoises, and dolphins (Prescott-Allen 2005). The economically valuable and culturally significant western red cedar and Pacific salmon are especially important to the livelihoods and way of life of the ‘Namgis.

These rich resources also drew European settlers to the area. The village began when a salmon and herring saltery opened on the island in the 1860s, followed by a cannery in 1881 (Lyons 1969). The ‘Namgis people became the labour force and were convinced to move from their homes on the Nimpkish (Gwa’ni) River to a village next to the saltery (Speck 1987). In 1871, British Columbia joined the Dominion of Canada, placing “public lands” under the control of the provincial government and ignoring the pre-existing rights and the social and legal systems of the...
Kwakwaka’wakw peoples (Weinstein 1991). ‘Namgis access to the Nimpkish River and its salmon runs was restricted. The ‘Namgis people were assigned three small reserves in the lower Nimpkish Valley, two on Cormorant Island, and 130 acres on small islands to be used as halibut fishing stations. ‘Namgis reserve lands totalled less than 600 acres (of a 500,000 acre territory). Requests for additional lands to protect traditional village sites and resource-harvesting rights were rejected, and new fishing, canning and logging industries began.

Despite having retained relatively high levels of natural capital, ecosystems in the region are threatened. Habitat protection is either lacking or inadequate, and sharp declines in fish populations and timber reserves have reduced sources of provisioning and cultural services. While the region may be considered pristine on a national or global scale, the decrease in natural resources relative to historic levels and the vulnerability of the area to intensive resource developments makes conservation concerns significant (Prescott-Allen 2005). The forests of the Nimpkish valley have been logged extensively for more than a century; most of the area’s old growth has been harvested. The Nimpkish River was once one of BC’s top four sockeye producers, but salmon returns continue to decline, despite significant investments in enhancement, restoration, and conservation. Reasons for fisheries declines are complex but include overfishing, habitat degradation, and changing ocean conditions (Vodden 2006).

Like much of rural British Columbia, the Mount Waddington Regional District experienced significant restructuring of its economy throughout the 1990s and early 2000s because of poor market conditions, reductions to annual allowable cuts of timber supply, and changes in the fisheries. Policy changes in the mid-1990s sought to reduce the size of the salmon fleet in a time of already depleted resources; this was coupled with other policies favouring centralization, intense competition, and fishing pressure. Aboriginal coastal communities, already experiencing lower than average levels of economic well-being, were disproportionately impacted by the fisheries declines of the 1990s (Vodden 1999). Alert Bay was deemed a fishing-dependent community in “crisis” (Von Specht 1996); it was one of the communities on the BC coast most impacted by fisheries restructuring (Gislason, Lam, and Mohan 1996). A provincially commissioned study reported a loss of sixty-three jobs, representing 11 percent of total community employment and 28 percent of employment in the salmon industry (Gislason, Lam, and Mohan 1996). Prior to 1996, the community relied on the salmon industry for 39 percent of community employment, with sixty vessels employing approximately 222 people (Gislason, Lam, and Mohan 1996). By 2004, fishing employment had fallen to less
than 50 individuals (Penfold, Salter, and Carley 2004). In addition, Alert Bay had joined the dozens of coastal communities whose fish-processing plants no longer operate. It is estimated that at least 79 percent of jobs lost in Alert Bay belonged to Aboriginal people (Vodden 1999).

Despite the rise of world commodity prices and the decline of unemployment rates in the early 2000s, some researchers suggested that the problems evident during the late 1990s remained, including resource dependency and resulting vulnerability (e.g., Young and Matthews 2007; Markey et al. 2005). New sectors such as tourism, resource management, silviculture, watershed restoration, botanical forest products, aquaculture, and, most recently, mining, along with employment by First Nations governments, have been unable to fully compensate for declines in traditional sectors, although they have provided work for some in Alert Bay and elsewhere in the region who have been displaced and they have helped supplement declining fishing incomes (Ommer 2007; Synergy Management Group 2003). Many new jobs have been filled by Aboriginal peoples, which is significant given historic economic discrepancies (Vodden 2006).

Geographic isolation and kinship ties contribute to a sense of interdependence among communities in the region. The sense of community belonging is strong in the region compared to the rest of British Columbia; however, performance on numerous health indicators is low (BC Stats 2012). Strength of and pride in culture are important factors in health and well-being in the community of Alert Bay, contributing to self-esteem, mental health, and a spirit of helping one another—and increasingly, to economic activities (Vodden 1999). It is critical, therefore, to recognize that cultural well-being and ways of life are threatened in the region, in large part because of ecosystem decline and vulnerability (Rumsey et al. 2003).

SUSTAINING CULTURE, ECOSYSTEMS, AND PEOPLE IN THE ‘NAMGIS TERRITORY

In the face of these ongoing challenges, the ‘Namgis First Nation has been involved in a variety of efforts to protect and sustain their culture and the ecosystems and peoples that are inseparable from it. These efforts include integration of culture in education; language revitalization; the recording and protection of heritage resources and archaeological sites; ecosystem-based forestry management; and fisheries stewardship and restoration, particularly with respect to salmon. Wismer and Pell (1981) cite the Nimpkish Integrated Development Approach (NIDA) as an exemplar Canadian community economic development (CED) program.
Implemented in the 1970s, NIDA’s integrated, long-term, coordinated approach was considered to be “unique and innovative” for its time. The five-year plan for educational, cultural, social, and economic development included goals and objectives approved by the entire community. Outcomes included an on-reserve school (the T’lisalagi’lakw School), the U’mista Cultural Centre, and the ‘Namgis Salmon Enhancement Program. Many of the individuals who received training and experience during the NIDA years remain in positions of community leadership today. The plan provided a foundation for community development activity that has continued for more than three decades.

The treaty process represents a major effort by the ‘Namgis to sustain many generations to come. The Nimpkish (now ‘Namgis) Band Council formed a Land Claims Committee and, in 1974, declared sovereignty over the Nimpkish Valley as the “rightful owner and custodian of the watershed and its resources” (Weinstein 1991, 10). In 1997, the ‘Namgis First Nation began treaty negotiations. They are now in the fourth stage of the treaty process, with the first draft agreement-in-principle (AIP) rejected in March 2013. As part of this process, the ‘Namgis have negotiated or are pursuing interim measures in forestry, parks and protected areas, governance, cultural resource management, fisheries, and other areas (Cranmer 2004).

In addition to provincial and federally driven land-use planning exercises, the ‘Namgis First Nation has been conducting its own extensive land, resource, and economic planning. The ‘Namgis treaty team has completed a bioregional atlas describing the physical, biological, and cultural “identity” of ‘Namgis traditional territory in a series of more than sixty digital maps. Land use plans are being developed at multiple scales (territorial, watershed, community, and special areas). Each of these plans describes goals, objectives, and action plans that are linked to a range of land use zones (NFN 2006). The Nimpkish Resource Management Board, with leadership from the ‘Namgis First Nation and together with other partners, also developed the Nimpkish Watershed Salmon Recovery Plan in 2003.

After a provincial government clawback of 20 percent of major licensed tenures in 2004/2005, new annual allowable cut allocations were made for First Nations. A Forest and Range Agreement was signed between the ‘Namgis First Nation and the Government of British Columbia in March 2005 that provided access to timber and $3.8 million in revenue sharing over five years (British Columbia 2006). The ‘Namgis are working with the present tree farm licence holder to log and sell the timber, and they have used land-use planning efforts to guide harvesting.

Other current economic development projects include Orca Sand and Gravel and small-scale power production. The ‘Namgis are partners with Vancouver-based
Polaris Minerals Corporation in Orca Sand and Gravel Ltd., a sand and gravel extraction operation and associated ship-loading facility. The quarry is expected to generate over $1 million per year in revenue for the ‘Namgis and up to twenty-five new jobs. Currently, over half of the quarry’s employees are Aboriginal people. The venture is also contributing to a foundation dedicated to supporting the social, cultural, and environmental interests of the ‘Namgis and local communities. The ‘Namgis are involved not only as owners and employees but also as participants in award-winning environmental monitoring and management of the project.

Several small-scale run-of-river hydroelectric projects have been proposed within ‘Namgis territories. Following the model of Orca Sand and Gravel, the ‘Namgis First Nation has partnered with Brookfield Renewable Energy to develop Kwagis Power LP. Care was taken to ensure that environmental concerns, particularly impacts on fish and fish habitats, could be eliminated or minimized to acceptable levels (NFN 2006). Negotiations and scoping of available opportunities is ongoing. Most recently, the ‘Namgis’s closed-containment project (KUTERRA LP) was launched to demonstrate the viability of producing Atlantic salmon in a land-based, closed-containment aquaculture system rather than the ocean-based aquaculture operations that have put the wild salmon fishery at risk (NFN 2012). Sales began successfully from the facility in 2014.

THE ARTS AND CULTURE: KEY ELEMENTS OF DEVELOPMENT IN ALERT BAY

The community of Alert Bay is world-renowned for Kwakwa’kawakw song, dance, and carving, activities that are considered art by some but are thought of as much more than art by those for whom these practices represent an essential part of their identity and their long history of resistance to assimilation. William Wasden Jr., member of ‘Namgis First Nation and singing teacher explains “the songs are cultural property . . . specifically to families. And that’s pretty sacred and important to people. And the masks, masks go along with the songs” (quoted in Bell, Raven, and McCuaig 2008, 40). For the Kwakwa’kawakw, the dances and songs, and the masks and regalia associated with them, also represent life teachings. Lillian Hunt (2011) explains, for example, that the “laughter dance” reminds us that we have to make each other laugh because laughter is important for well-being.

These stories, songs, and dances can be viewed as a cultural heritage, with particular families and villages having rights to certain ancestral images, crests, songs, and creation stories. In its traditional use, an object such as a mask “has little to no meaning or value if it is separated from the other elements of its whole
being,” such as “particular songs, dances, land use, or rights, names, and families associated with it” (Bell, Raven, and McCuaig 2008, 39).

In traditional times, chiefs held potlatches for the purposes of distributing surplus wealth and carrying out ceremonies associated with important events such as the naming of children, memorials, marriages, the raising of totem poles, and the transfer of rights and privileges. Catherine Bell, Heather Raven, and Heather McCuaig (2008, 46) explain: “Potlatches were the foundation of Kwakwâkâ’wakw economic, political, social, spiritual, and legal systems and the means for transferring cultural knowledge to future generations. They also promoted values such as humility, generosity, responsibility, and respect. Potlatches were the ‘essence of Kwakwâkâ’wakw culture.’” Artists were commissioned to make regalia, masks, and gifts for these ceremonies, as well as totem poles and other carvings to indicate rank and acknowledge special occasions (Hawthorn 1979; Hunt and Neary 2000). Wasden explains: “In the olden days, artists were hired and paid with blankets and things of value at the time because the artwork was really valued and the artists were very highly respected” (quoted in Neufeld 2009, 108). Peter Mcnair, Alan Hoover, and Kevin Neary (1984) suggest that the Kwakwâkâ’wakw people are one of few First Nations groups of the Pacific Northwest who resolutely and continuously maintained their ceremonial and artistic traditions despite the efforts of others to destroy them. The Government of Canada banned potlatches in British Columbia in 1884. In 1921, forty-five Kwakwâkâ’wakw were charged, twenty were jailed, and goods were seized when a large potlatch was held by Chief Dan Cranmer of Alert Bay (Sewid 1969). Legal prohibition, coupled with the Depression, caused the near collapse of the potlatch in the decades to follow. The disappearance of the potlatch would have been devastating, for “to destroy it was virtually to destroy the culture itself” (BC Indian Arts Society 1982).

After the Second World War and a period of international criticism of the Canadian state, treatment of Aboriginal peoples by the federal and provincial governments began to change. The potlatch prohibition was lifted in 1951. By 1960, Aboriginal people were recognized as full citizens of Canada; they were granted the right to vote and to organize for land claims. Kwakwâkâ’wakw potlatches were once again publicly practiced, and the Alert Bay Big House, referred to as Gukwdzi, was built in 1965 for holding potlatches and other cultural events. The Big House is described as “the cultural and spiritual center” of the ’Namgis and other Kwakwâkâ’wakw people (Wiwchar 2000). To the dismay of community members, an arsonist destroyed the Big House in 1997. A tribute to the community’s resilience, a new Big House (christened I’ustoo, “to rise again”) was built in
1998–99 after an extensive fundraising effort. The potlatch remains an important institution in the community. As young men inherit chieftainships or other significant privileges and young adults name their children, new songs and dances continue to be created for ceremonial purposes, contributing to cultural maintenance and rebuilding.

The U’mista Cultural Society was formed in 1974, and the U’mista Cultural Centre opened six years later. The mandate of the non-profit society is to provide protection for the cultural values and property of the Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw peoples. The cultural centre and museum was created to house the regalia that had been confiscated during the potlatch ban and returned by the National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization), the Royal Ontario Museum and the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of the American Indian. The society has continued to work to reclaim confiscated artifacts and historical items, including those sold to collectors by Indian Agents. The returned pieces of potlatch regalia are extremely important for young artists, who, since the first items were returned in 1979, have studied how they were created, learning about their First Nation’s culture and teachings in the process. The histories, dances, and songs associated with these items are infused with cultural significance. Thus, the repatriation of potlatch items and the information associated with them provides a “basis for rebuilding and strengthening” Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw culture (Bell, Raven, and McCuaig 2008, 62).

The U’mista Cultural Society and Cultural Centre act as a repository for language, heritage, and cultural resources and as a central location for culturally related development activities. The society offers culture and language education programs for all ages in its waterfront location next to the former St. Michael’s residential school building which was torn down in February 2015, where people’s language was once taken away, and has been involved in developing legislation for the protection of Aboriginal languages. The society conducts research as a method of retaining traditional knowledge and assisting members to gather information about their family histories. In 1991, for example, U’mista initiated the recording of traditional songs, along with related legends and histories, which were then entered into an audio database and catalogued according to family (Bell, Raven, and McCuaig 2005). This resource is now available to all Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw people, including future generations.

Since the mid-1990s, the U’mista Cultural Society, through its gift shop, website, and wholesale activities, has also served as a worldwide marketing and distribution centre for local artists. In 2009, fifty to sixty practicing artists were selling their work in Alert Bay (Neufeld 2009), roughly double the estimated twenty-five
artists who earned a significant portion of their incomes from artistic activities in the late 1990s (Vodden 1999). The art produced includes not only carvings, totem poles, and masks, but also the work of Kwakwaka’wakw singers, drummers, and writers, as well as items traditionally considered “craft,” such as blankets and baskets and other cedar-bark weaving (Neufeld 2009). The ‘Namgis First Nation has developed a cedar strategy to ensure that cedar resources needed for cultural purposes are protected from forestry activities—just one example of their ongoing resource management and stewardship activities (Vodden 2006). Red cedar, “the tree of life” to the ‘Namgis, is still used today to create ceremonial regalia, cedar canoes, artwork, jewellery, and more.

Other organizations, such as the T’sasala and Gwa’wina dance groups, also play important roles in the cultural well-being and artistic life of the Kwakwaka’wakw people, as do the individuals who commit themselves to learning, practicing, and sharing their language and culture. Artists play essential roles in the community as teachers and holders of the culture. They also contribute to the local economy, selling their work locally in shops and galleries, in markets in Vancouver and Victoria, and to international collectors. They are capitalizing on what Neufeld (2009, 90) describes as a “resurgence of Northwest Coast art as a form of cultural expression and economic development.” For some, their creation of art for the community and their ceremonial responsibilities are paramount, with artistic income seen as a way to facilitate these cultural activities. Others are more business focused. These multiple roles are not always easy to balance as contemporary artists struggle with questions such as what is appropriate to sell and what is not, what is authentic, and how to respond to the varying expectations of the market and the community (Bell, Raven, and McCuaig 2005; Neufeld 2009).

First Nations governments, such as the ‘Namgis First Nation, and non-government organizations, such as U’mista, both play a role in supporting these individuals, but artists and community leaders argue that more could be done. The language and culture of the Kwak’waka’wakw remain threatened despite strong leadership over many generations. Language is considered key to long-term cultural survival (Anonby 1997). Yet a study done by the U’mista Cultural Society demonstrated that less than 9 percent of Kwakwaka’wakw people speak their language fluently. Lack of funding has been identified as the single most important barrier to language retention programs, along with the need for further curriculum development, more Kwak’wala teachers, and more support from community leaders and parents (UCS 1997). With respect to the arts, the biggest challenges have been the high cost and legal barriers to protecting and repatriating heritage
resources. Residents argue that these costs are properly borne by the government agencies and institutions responsible for the loss of cultural items and by private parties who have benefited from this process (Bell and Napoleon 2008).

Greater support for the mentoring and training of young artists may be useful in strengthening this culturally and economically important element of the community. While senior artists have traditionally taken on the role of mentoring and training young people, “a structured program would only enhance that and could offer more room for artists, but it’s not the number one priority in the community” (Randy Bell, pers. comm., 16 August 2004, quoted in Neufeld 2009, 109).

**ECO-CULTURAL TOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

As jobs are lost in the traditional resource sectors, the community of Alert Bay increasingly looks to tourism—particularly tourism focused on education, culture, and ecology. Cormorant Island is a launching point and service centre for many people who come to the surrounding area by boat to visit the numerous archaeological sites, abandoned villages, totem poles, and other cultural sites and to participate in outdoor activities such as whale watching, sea kayaking, sport fishing, nature tours, and diving. The highest growth in tourism markets is occurring in the areas of wilderness and cultural experiences, and these are tourism demands that Alert Bay is well positioned to meet. Visits to the Alert Bay Tourism Information Centre rose from 1,526 in 1986 to over 12,000 in 2006. In the words of ‘Namgis artist Bruce Malidi Alfred, “People come here from all over the world to study the language, the art, the potlatch. This is the Mecca” (quoted in Neufeld 2009, 96).

Until recently, however, few First Nations firms were providing tourism services. Today, Aboriginal tourism products and services are being offered to visitors, along with culturally related attractions that include the U’mista Cultural Centre, the T’sasala and Gwa’wina dance groups, totem poles, culturally modified trees, a traditional-style Big House, and tours in traditional cedar canoes. Residents are involved in whale watching, fishing, and nature tours; accommodation (hostel, hotels, and B&Bs); and food services businesses. Several of these tourism-related businesses have been launched by First Nations operators, and the Aboriginal tourism industry is expected to expand in the future as new products are developed and residents receive training and experience. The work of world-renowned Kwakwaka’wakw artists and carvers attracts visitors, and in turn, tourism helps artists to build relationships that can lead to on-site sales and private commissions.
The ‘Namgis Nation’s ecotourism and cultural development strategy includes the reopening of ancient trade routes, joint management of protected areas, and resort development and land-based whale watching. The ‘Namgis have developed a campground and trails and have acquired additional park facilities: two recreation sites, including camping facilities, were turned over to the ‘Namgis First Nation by the ministry of Forests in 2003, and in May 2006, the ‘Namgis First Nation signed an agreement with the Province to co-manage six provincial and marine parks and four ecological reserves within their traditional territory. One of these is the world-renowned Robson Bight Ecological Reserve (an orca rubbing-beach sanctuary). Three neighbouring nations (Mamalilikulla, ‘Namgis, and Tlowitsis), through the Yukusam Heritage Society and in co-operation with the Province, agreed in 2003 to co-manage Hanson Island (Yukusam) and its significant cultural and ecological resources. In 2010, representatives of the ‘Namgis First Nation and the ministry of Tourism, Culture, and the Arts signed a memorandum of understanding to work together for future development of the Mount Cain Ski Area as a regional ski resort.

Training Aboriginal people in outdoor guiding and entrepreneurship has been an important aspect of the ‘Namgis tourism strategy. Speaking of tourism development, Harry Alfred, a ‘Namgis land use planner, says, “What is clear is that we need to gain experience step-by-step. And as we do so, not only do we benefit from an expanded presence in our territory, but we are able to create new employment opportunities too” (2003, 4).

The U’mista Cultural Centre is a focal point for Alert Bay tourism. The centre, itself a tourism destination, provides instructions for proper protocol when visiting cultural sites and has sponsored training programs in tourism, marketing, and entrepreneurship. In 1996–97, U’mista facilitated the re-creation of a Kwakwaka’wakw village for a permanent display in the Netherlands; the crafting and construction of the village employed eight Alert Bay residents In the summer of 1998, six Alert Bay youth were employed to share their culture with thousands of park visitors for five weeks (Speck 1999). The exhibit continues to promote the community in Europe.

In 2003, U’mista entered into a partnership with the local Nimmo Bay Wilderness Resort to incorporate a cultural component into the resort’s high-end tourism product: resort guests were offered the opportunity to visit the cultural centre, hear stories, participate in dance presentations, and visit First Nations territories (UCS 2003, 19). This is the type of collaboration encouraged by the ‘Wi’la’lmola Accord, whose purpose is “nurturing cultural renaissance and economic revival through tourism business joint ventures with experienced, ethical
local operators” (UCS 2006). ‘Wi’la’mola means “we are all travelling together.” As the business arm of the U’mista Cultural Society, the ‘Wi’la’mola Program pursues opportunities to create economic benefits while nurturing and stewarding the cultural heritage of the Kwakw̱aḵa’wakw through education of both visitors and local residents. It does so by combining “the cultural expertise of the Kwakw̱aḵa’wakw people and the successful experience of business operators” to produce “high-quality cultural tourism products” (Thomson 2010, 9).

The Village of Alert Bay operates a campground and invested significant resources in the late 1990s in waterfront beautification. The precedent-setting Alert Bay Accord was signed by the ‘Namgis First Nation and Village of Alert Bay in 1999 in recognition that the two governments “have historically worked together to promote a better standard of living for all the residents of Cormorant Island.” The two jurisdictions resolved to coordinate their efforts to revitalize the economy (e.g., through tourism and infrastructure development), to obtain community and government support for these efforts and to “preserve and enhance the unique environment, heritage and other qualities of Alert Bay which are important to the community and the well-being of its inhabitants.” The regional government of Cormorant Island and various organizations have collaborated to enhance infrastructure on the island that serves residents and visitors alike. Both the Village of Alert Bay and the U’mista Cultural Centre received significant funding from a federal adjustment program initiated in the late 1990s for waterfront and infrastructure improvement. The Village and the ‘Namgis have also undertaken joint funding of island-wide services such as a new hospital, sewage treatment facilities, and a waste management system. Recently, the ‘Namgis Nation embarked upon a partnership with the Village and the regional school district to launch the Cormorant Island Community Learning Centre. While some underlying tensions do exist, the community is seen as a model of co-operation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Despite these successes, enthusiasm is tempered by the reality that, to date, First Nations-owned tourism companies (and several non-Aboriginal companies as well) have struggled to achieve business success. This is also true for Aboriginal tourism in Canada more generally. Notzke (2004, 32) suggests that to date, Aboriginal tourism development in Canada has fallen “far short of its potential.” Reasons include a lack of training and the rush to enter the industry necessitated by the need to survive in a changing economy. Reluctance on the part of the former fisheries workforce to accept tourism as a new economic base has further slowed
progress. The transition from a primary sector to a service-based economy is a slow and difficult one—for both individuals and communities.

The market realities are also difficult. Although demand for wilderness and cultural experiences is among the segments with the highest growth in BC tourism, the Mount Waddington region attracts only 2 percent of total visitors to Vancouver Island. The vulnerability of the tourism-based economy is highlighted by such circumstances as the increasing value of the Canadian dollar, the events of 9/11, and the sinking of the BC Ferries vessel Queen of the North in 2006, which disrupted ferry service on the Inside Passage route, a major tourist draw in this region (Penfold, Salter, and Carley 2004). After peaking in 2006, visitation numbers in Alert Bay began to drop in the late 2000s. Economic conditions and the discretionary nature of tourist activity are important factors (British Columbia 2012).

Finally, the Alert Bay community recognizes that tourism activities are not intrinsically sustainable and involve dangers such as cultural exploitation and ecological disturbance. As a result, care has been taken to ensure that tourism development is conducted in an ecologically and culturally sensitive manner, that it makes positive contributions to the community, and that it provides economic and social benefits such as opportunities for youth employment and engagement (Vodden 2002). Tourism development in Alert Bay remains a work in progress; it proceeds under significant constraints but also with great potential for the future, and the community’s enthusiasm to get involved is increasing.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONVERGENCE OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY AND SCD

A key strategy used by Alert Bay organizations is the formation of partnerships and alliances with others in pursuing common or complementary goals. As described above, alliances have been formed with local, regional, provincial, and federal governments; environmental groups and industry; private foundations; academic institutions; and other entities. These partnerships, some of which are financial, have been established to protect areas of social, cultural, and economic significance; restore and more responsibly manage resources and habitats; and build stronger local economies and communities. For U’mista, as government cutbacks create growing financial challenges, foundation and private donations together with volunteer efforts have become increasingly important. The ‘Namgis Nation has been a key partner in and supporter of U’mista. Both organizations have also entered into partnerships with private firms to begin joint ventures such as Orca Sand and Gravel and the ‘Wi’la’mola-initiated Nimmo Bay project in an attempt to
reduce reliance on government funding and foster corporate social and environmental responsibility. The ‘Namgis have also collaborated with both the forestry industry and provincial and federal government agencies to restore and protect fisheries resources. Ecotrust Canada has provided technical and financial assistance for community initiatives, and partnerships have been formed with post-secondary institutions to launch a range of research and education programs. Perhaps the most significant collaboration in recent years has been between the Village of Alert Bay and ‘Namgis First Nation, as described above.

This strong collaborative ethos, together with engagement of an active civil society in community and economic development and an insistence on corporate social responsibility, is well aligned with a social economy perspective. Service clubs have raised money for infrastructure projects such as a boat launch and playground; associations have hosted well-attended annual community events and are engaged in cultural development, treaty, health, and other issues; and citizens participate in land use and resource management planning, volunteer for community services, and contribute on an ongoing basis to trail and community beautification projects. All of these efforts have played a role in tourism and cultural development.

Several authors argue that activities related to subsistence and the informal economy—the part of the economy that is not taxed, monitored by government, or included in formal economic measurements—form a critical part of Aboriginal social economies (e.g., Bennett, Lemelin, Johnston and Lutsël K’e Dene First Nation 2010; Natcher 2009; Southcott and Walker 2009). The importance of the informal economy is evident in Alert Bay. Although many residents and community leaders suggest that mutual aid has declined, food is still distributed among friends and relatives within large extended families. Duties such as wood cutting, fishing, hunting, and gathering are also shared. Households often include a mix of those employed full-time in the cash economy and those who contribute in other ways. This mixed economy helps to enable seasonal industries such as tourism (Vodden 2006).

All of these characteristics together—the collaborative approach, the civil engagement, and the informal economy—have provided Alert Bay with a vibrant social economy. While the unique circumstances of this region may not be directly replicable in other communities seeking to employ a social economy approach in their development efforts, there are lessons to be learned from the case of Alert Bay that might be applicable to other regions. Partnerships and alliances could be built and nurtured, for example, and mixed economies, which remain important in many rural communities across the country, could be encouraged and supported.
The social economy—economic development that focuses on people and social benefits rather than on profit for its own sake—has captured imaginations across Canada and beyond and has resonance with development approaches focused on culture and community, such as those being used in Alert Bay. Yet the Alert Bay and ‘Namgis First Nation examples highlight two major concerns with the social economy as it is generally defined and practiced. The first is a critical weakness in the social economy literature and in many social economy initiatives: the lack of attention to ecological sustainability despite the importance of ecosystems to socio-economic well-being. While a focus on social rather than purely economic impacts is an important advance over conventional economic development approaches, the social sphere is intimately connected with culture and environment—they are all parts of the interconnected whole of social-ecological systems. Alert Bay leaders and organizations have adapted to the changes that threaten their community’s survival by putting into place a proactive, community-driven, comprehensive approach to tourism and territorial development that incorporates planning, training and education, infrastructure development, cultural research, and protocols that ensure cultural and environmental responsibility and stewardship. This approach is accompanied by continued efforts to increase local control over lands and resources. We suggest that it is more appropriate to conceptualize the ‘Namgis responses to restructuring as sustainable community development (SCD) than as a social economy approach to development. Christopher Bryant (1999, 84) argues that community economic development has evolved from a “war on poverty” to an integrated approach that includes environmental values—which might now more appropriately be referred to as sustainable community development. The same shift is needed in the social economy: both practice and literature need to incorporate and converge with issues of sustainability. To some extent, this integrated approach is already present, but surely the primary importance of ecological integrity to sustainable development demands explicit recognition of the need for a movement toward ecological sustainability and environmental responsibility, along with social and economic change. As suggested by the United Nations in the report on the Conference on Environment and Development (UN General Assembly 1992, Principle 22), “Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development.”

A second issue highlighted by the Alert Bay story concerns defining the social economy as being necessarily driven by non-governmental organizations and individuals from outside both the private sector and government—sometimes referred to as the “third sector” (Johnson 2010). In the case of Alert Bay, however,
First Nations and municipal governments, as well as private firms, have been key players in economic development broadly and in cultural and ecotourism activities more specifically.

Historically, a relatively small proportion of natural resource benefits have flowed to First Nations and local communities, in part because rights to forest harvesting in the Mount Waddington region are held primarily by large multinational companies. Opportunities for such benefits, including access to land for tourism development and to forest resources critical to artistic endeavours, have begun to increase. These benefits are expected to increase as relationships between First Nations governments and forest companies improve—in large part due to assertion of Aboriginal rights and title and the pursuit of treaties led by ‘Namgis First Nation and other Kwakw̱aq̱w̱̱̱ governments.

Despite the worthwhile efforts described above, the community of Alert Bay is struggling to reshape itself after over two decades of upheaval in the fishery, an industry that created and has supported the community of Alert Bay since its inception. The community and the region as a whole have experienced significant ecological, economic, and social restructuring in recent decades. Yet they are no strangers to change and adaptation, having survived through the eras of Kwakw̱aq̱w̱̱̱–European trade and European settlement and colonization, as well as through cyclical depressions and boom years. The arts have been an element of each of these eras while tourism has taken on a prominent role in the most recent period of adaptation. Both municipal and First Nations governments have been key players in the growing importance of tourism. Thus, social economy definitions that exclude government also exclude First Nations as critical participants in development within their territories and are thus inadequate as a way of explaining the development process underway in Alert Bay.

The experiences of the community of Alert Bay illustrate the need for greater integration of SCD and social economy perspectives. One possibility is to view the social economy as subsumed under the broader SCD approach, since the social economy does not—as of yet—fully incorporate the importance of cultural and ecological dimensions of development or the roles that municipal and First Nations (as well as Inuit and Métis) governments, as well as the private sector, can and do play as social economy actors.

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