

Final Revision submitted to: *The North American Geographer*

Alaska Identity Revisited

Gregory Brown^{1*}

Lilian Alessa

WORD COUNT (with abstract): 5,113

¹ Gregory Brown is Senior Lecturer in the School of Natural and Built Environments, University of South Australia, Mawson Lakes Campus, Mawson Lakes, SA 5095 (greg.brown@unisa.edu.au) Phone: 61-8-8302-3110. Lilian Alessa is Assistant Professor (lil@uaa.alaska.edu) Phone: 907-786-1507 Department of Biological Sciences; University of Alaska, 3211 Providence Dr., Anchorage, Alaska 99508.

* Correspondence author.

Alaska Identity Revisited

Abstract

Nearly 25 years ago, Cuba (1987) described how symbolic images of a wild Alaska framed the expectations of migrants to Alaska to perpetuate an identity based on comparative experiences with the world “outside” Alaska. Consistent with a frontier identity, Cuba found that Anchorage residents viewed themselves as being more resourceful, self-reliant, adventurous, and outdoor oriented than “Outsiders”. In this study, we re-examine Alaska identity using survey research that replicates and expands Cuba’s study to include proecological beliefs (New Ecological Paradigm). In survey responses from Anchorage and Kenai coastal community residents, we found that Alaska residents continue to perceive themselves as more resourceful, risk-taking, independent, and seekers-of-wilderness than outsiders. Alaska residents continue to harbor greater dislike for government intervention than those residing outside Alaska and hold a strong utilitarian view of nature. Interestingly, despite holding weaker proecological beliefs than outsiders, Alaska residents view themselves as more connected to the forces of nature. We discuss the implications of these findings for the continuing debate over resource development in Alaska.

Introduction

In this study, we examine the evidence for changes in Alaska identity by building on Cuba's (1987) study of identity and community among Anchorage residents nearly twenty-five years ago. We accomplish this through survey research that replicates and extends the identity constructs identified and measured by Cuba to address the question, "Do Alaska residents continue to view themselves as contemporary pioneers living an exceptional life in the far north?"

The common idiom of Alaska as "The Last Frontier" reflects the perception that the relative remoteness and unsettled character of Alaska create a unique Alaskan identity, one that is both a "frontier" at civilization's edge and the "last" of its kind. The frontier idiom portrays the place and people of Alaska as exceptional or different from the places and people who reside in the lower forty-eight states. This unique identity is perpetuated by Alaska folk stories that feature tales of long winter survival, harrowing bear and moose encounters, and dog sledding adventures.

Cuba (1987) describes how the forces of migration and mobility have served to reinforce and strengthen Alaska place identity among its residents. Symbolic images of a wild Alaska frame the expectations of migrants to Alaska with some migrants identifying themselves as different from other people (e.g., more adventurous or more independent) even prior to moving to Alaska. Once migrants arrive, they establish and perpetuate an identity based on comparative experiences with the world "outside" Alaska. The constructed Alaska image is one where the people are friendlier and more independent, economic opportunities are greater and more challenging, and its government more accessible and its actions more immediately felt. Consistent with a frontier identity, Cuba found that Anchorage residents viewed themselves as more resourceful, self-reliant, adventurous (risk-taking), and outdoor

oriented (more hunting and fishing) than “Outsiders” but not significantly different from other Alaskans.

The distinctiveness of Alaskan life is reinforced through travel to the continental U.S. where friends, family members, and even strangers expect them to display visible signs of their Alaskan experiences. Indeed, some Alaska residents begin to think of and reinforce an identity of themselves as Alaskans only after they travel outside of the state. Cuba proposes that, “residents of Anchorage assume a frontier mien because it is expected of them” (Cuba 1987:165). However, the construction of an Alaskan identity is not purely symbolic. The meaning of place is derived through everyday, local interaction and cannot be separated from its location. Accordingly, “the content of the Alaskan place identity is anchored in the particulars of place” (Cuba 1987:170). In other words, it is the subjective response of Alaska residents to the physical place of Alaska that also helps construct and reinforce the image of Alaska as exceptional.

We extend Cuba’s observations to suggest that Alaska is an ecological-social system (ESS) whereby the environment strongly influences the construction of identity (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981) versus a social-ecological system (SES) where human modifications dominate the landscape (Power, 1996). This identity continuum is shown graphically in Figure 1. The management implications for Alaska as an ESS are significant in that protocols developed in the lower 48 primarily for SESs may need to be modified to be successful in Alaska. For example, there are major differences in Wilderness policy and management in Alaska compared to the lower 48 states where motorized access is accommodated (Brown, 2002).

The view of Alaskans as contemporary pioneers stands in stark contrast to the realities of everyday life for the majority of Alaska residents. Historian Stephen Haycox (2001) notes that the majority of Alaskans live in what he terms a “replication corridor” consisting of a

narrow strip of human habitation that mirrors urban conditions found outside Alaska. The concept of a replication corridor is reasonably well-developed in the field of geography (*see e.g.*, Whebell 1969; Vance 1970; Borchert 1972). Here, life in both the large and smaller urban centers is nearly indistinguishable from life in cities and towns across the western United States. Residents can access all the amenities, conveniences, and comforts of urban life found elsewhere in America. Alaskans who live in the replication corridor are not self-sufficient in the frontier sense with many holding jobs in the service or government sectors of the economy. The much touted “higher cost-of-living in Alaska”, a general characteristic of frontier geography, has largely faded, at least in the replication corridor through efficient transportation and distribution channels. Thus, in modernity, Alaska’s replication corridor “manifests little that is different from the American west” despite its more remote location (Haycox, 2001).

However, it can be argued that biophysical sensory cues accumulate to create a significant though potentially subconscious perception that Anchorage residents live in a “different” city. The presence of numerous signs that connote “Alaskan” “Northern” or “Arctic” retail industries and the presence of Alaska Native motifs reinforce the perception of “Alaska”. Quotidian practices such as driving or walking with a relatively high probability of encountering large wildlife such as moose and bear in urban areas impart perceived meaning to the place of Anchorage and reinforce differences. Through daily living, the space of Anchorage is transformed into the “place” of Alaska with its own social and psychic geography. Thus, while familiar and recognizable human development in the replication corridor serves to remind residents of a larger, collective national identity, the small but cumulative material differences suggest that Anchorage is not a city that could be located anywhere else in the U.S. or Canada and remains unique in its actual and perceived biophysical and social construction.

The Geography of Identity—Alaska as an Ecological-Social System

The central concern of the geography of identity is human attachment to particular places or “sense of place.” Sense of place results from the interplay among the physical attributes of an area, people’s perceptions and interpretations and their manifested actions and activities within the physical setting (Canter, 1977). The ongoing relationship between people and the places they inhabit is a reciprocal one—generally it is thought that people create places but derive identities from them (McDowell, 1997; Williams and Patterson, 1996). For pre-modern societies, the result was a complex array of symbolic relationships with physical surroundings to invest them with value and significance (Basso, 1996:66). For modern societies, the processes of communication, homogenization, and centralization strongly challenge localized identities and social cohesion. Alaska’s long history as a collection of subsistence societies, combined with relatively recent Western settlement, has helped Alaska residents sustain a not-to-distant collective memory of local dependence on nature.

In establishing place identity, there is a tangible exchange between the outer material world and the inner person. Physical landscape features become mnemonic devices that help humans remember specific characteristics of water and landscapes while subjective and symbolic identities are formed. For example, Blake (1999) describes how residents in southwestern Colorado identify with distinctive mountain peaks that serve as symbols for community and cultural ideals. The material rendering of landscape becomes transformed from a visually engaged external phenomenon to a psychocognitive terrain of internalized symbolic meaning that might be termed “inscapes” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, as cited in Gardner, 1985). For some Anchorage residents, the inscape of Alaska preceded migration and was reinforced by the landscape of Alaska upon arrival. Because place identity is a

combination of the material and perceived terrain, and it is difficult to parse the role of the physical landscape from its cultural and symbolic rendering. Arguably, the vast natural landscapes of Alaska tip the balance in the constructivist exchange toward the physical rendering of landscape. Alaska is not merely symbolically exceptional—it is materially exceptional as well.

The history of human domination over nature has changed little with respect to the basic needs that natural resources serve in sustaining the survival and evolution of human societies. However, the scales and rates by which human communities have altered ecosystems, either as tightly coupled or distal components of them, has increased exponentially with population growth, technological innovations and changes in social norms prescribing and encouraging affluence. Thus, many ecosystems within the U.S. may be considered *social-ecological* systems where the human dimension of their existence often drives the net status of biophysical processes and biota within them. However, Alaska has yet to experience the scale and rate of human-effected change as compared to other American ecosystems. In this, Alaska may be still considered one of the last remaining regions that may be described as an *ecological-social system*.

We posit that Alaska is significantly different from other regions in the U.S. by virtue of the size of the land and waterscapes. We explore data that suggest that humans residing in Alaska possess a form of cognitive bifurcation whereby their identities are clearly coupled to the natural environment, particularly that of the ‘wilderness’ but they also view that same nature as capable of supporting utilization (resource extraction). We briefly discuss this dichotomy in the contexts of spatial perception and the possibility that Alaska represents one of the few ecological-social systems in a national framework that consists almost entirely of social-ecological systems.

Changes in Alaskan Identity

Nearly twenty-five years have passed since Cuba conducted his original inquiry into the sociological concepts of identity and community of Anchorage residents. Alaska, and especially Anchorage, have significantly changed physically and structurally over this time. Anchorage has grown from a population of 174,000 in 1980 to 260,000 in 2000 (U.S. Census). The economic structure of the state economy has shifted with natural resource industries traditionally associated with a frontier economy (e.g., fisheries, mining, forestry and agriculture) diminishing while transportation, professional services, and tourism related services increasing in importance (U.S. Census). And while Alaska is still strongly influenced by the forces of migration, the level of migration of the Anchorage population has slowed as more residents start families in-state. For example, about 22 percent of Anchorage residents were born in Alaska in 1980 while 32 percent were born in Alaska in 2000 (U.S. Census).

By most measures, the tangible indicators of “modern civilization” have increased substantially in Alaska in the last 20 years. Under such civilizing forces, one might expect the self-identity of Alaskans as contemporary pioneers in a frontier setting to wane as the place of Alaska becomes less distinguishable from places in the lower 48 states. However, according to Cuba, the actual closing of the American frontier and loss of community at the beginning of the last century did more to elevate these symbols in the hierarchy of cultural values than to diminish them, “It was not until they had ceased to occupy a particular physical form that the importance of frontier and community could be fully realized” (Cuba 1987:151). In this sense, it is arguable that the very knowledge of the increasing scarcity of undeveloped lands suffuses the daily lives of Alaskans and this contributes to their identity as inhabitants of a unique landscape. Following this line of reasoning, the greater the loss of the physical attributes of the Alaska frontier (e.g., increased density of settlement and large-scale

landscape alteration), the stronger the symbols of the frontier and community may, in fact, become. Accordingly, it is possible that increasing development and homogenization of the Alaskan landscape may actually strengthen the contemporary pioneer identity held by Alaskans.

Ecological Perspective in the Frontier

Our second research question is an important one in the context of management and concerns the relationship between an assumed frontier mien and one's environmental or ecological perspective. If as Cuba suggests, identity is rooted in the particulars of place, then the pervasiveness of the natural and wild landscapes in Alaska should affect one's ecological perspective. Are Alaska residents attracted by the opportunities to exploit and civilize the wild landscape consistent with a frontier attitude or are Alaska residents closer to development refugees, former outsiders with stronger proecological beliefs attracted to the undeveloped character of the landscape?

A frontier attitude would presumably represent the values and beliefs of the dominant social paradigm (see Dunlap and Van Liere 1978; Milbrath 1984) that accepts humanity's right to rule the rest of nature while discounting humanity's ability to upset the balance of nature and the need to limit growth for human societies. A belief in limitless resources on the "frontier" combined with the harsh realities of coping with a challenging life in the far north would lead to an environmental perspective grounded in opportunity and expediency rather than consequences of resource exploitation. Flannery (2001) makes the contrast between a frontier attitude and conservation ethic explicit in his ecological history of North America:

The very essence of the frontier experience lies in the extent of its resources, and when resources are boundless, why conserve them or even utilise them efficiently? The principal goal is to exploit them as quickly as possible, then move on. It is this frontier attitude to resource utilisation that lies at the heart of much capitalism, and which presents such a major challenge to conservationists today. In this sense, the legacy of the American frontier is still very much with us (p. 292).

The frontier legacy may be strongest in the “last” of the frontiers. With an assumed frontier mindset in Alaska, one might expect its residents to be slower to embrace (if at all) the dimensions of the New Ecological Paradigm (Dunlap et al., 2000) than individuals living outside Alaska. The New Ecological Paradigm measures responses to questions about the balance of nature, limits to growth, human domination of nature, and human exemptionalism from nature.

We are particularly interested in Alaska resident beliefs about human exemptionalism from nature. Can a frontier ethic based on an instrumental and exploitative view of nature be mollified by the physical place of Alaska that commands intimate knowledge, if not respect of nature, for survival?

We examine the similarity and differences between Alaskans’ responses to the New Ecological Paradigm and those U.S. residents living outside Alaska by comparing the results of Alaska residents with recent results from a national study of U.S. residents conducted as part of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE, 2000).

Methods

We developed a survey to measure what Anchorage and Kenai Peninsula residents value about coastal areas on the Kenai Peninsula and to have respondents identify special

places and areas where they engage in various coastal outdoor activities. For purposes of this study, we focus on parts of the survey containing questions that measure purported aspects of Alaska identity and environmental beliefs of respondents.

Three parts of the survey are examined in this analysis—the Alaska identity questions, the New Ecological Paradigm, and respondent demographic characteristics. Our Alaska identity questions are a modified and expanded set of questions originally created and measured by Cuba (1987) asking participants to rate themselves, other Alaskans, and those living outside Alaska on a set of identity attributes. Eleven attributes such as resourcefulness, risk-taking, and affinity for the outdoors were solicited on a five point bi-polar scale in the revised Alaska identity questions. Seven of the 11 items closely parallel constructs reported by Cuba (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1]

The Alaska identity questions were preceded by the following instructions:

In this question, think about what it means to be an Alaskan. How do Alaskans, in general, compare to people living in the lower 48 states? Below is a list of opposite characteristics. Where would you place yourself, other Alaskans, and those who live outside?

Two respondent subsets—Anchorage only and whole sample—are analyzed to answer the research questions. Anchorage resident responses are analyzed separately to achieve the best direct comparison with Cuba’s study that included only Anchorage residents. Entire sample responses are analyzed to achieve the strongest insight into a collective Alaska identity. Because our Alaska identity question format and measurement scale are not

identical to the previous study, the *relative* rather than *absolute* differences and similarities in item responses are emphasized in the comparative analysis.

Similar to the previous study, paired sample t-tests are used to analyze responses to perceptions of self, other Alaskans and outsiders on the Alaska identity items. Factor analysis is used to probe for more general or latent constructs within the revised Alaska identity questions. Finally, Alaska identity questions are examined for significant relationships to demographic variables (length of residence in Alaska, age, gender, and formal education level).

The survey also contained the New Ecological Paradigm scale (Dunlap et al., 2000). This scale, and its precursor, the 12 item New Environmental Paradigm scale, have been widely used to measure environmental concern or proecological beliefs among various population samples. Alaska resident responses (means) are compared to a national study completed as part of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE, 2000). We also conducted reliability and factor analysis on the New Ecological Paradigm scale responses to determine whether sub-scale dimensions are present in Alaska responses compared to other population samples for which data exist. The survey was sent to 2,582 Alaska households in March 2002 using the total design method (Dillman, 1978). Each survey had a unique identifying number to track responses. The sample was drawn from the Permanent Fund Dividend² list available from the state. A reminder card was sent a few weeks after the initial mailing, and a second survey package was sent to non-respondents in April 2002.

²The Permanent Fund Dividend is an Alaska program that provides an annual dividend payment from oil revenues to Alaska residents. The PFD list provides the names and addresses of most Alaska adults.

Results

The overall survey response rate was 23% with community response rates ranging from a high of 34% in Kasilof to a low of 11% in Nikiski (see Table 2). A total of 561 responses were available for analysis.

[Insert Table 2]

Alaska Identity

Anchorage resident responses to questions about Alaska identity from Cuba's (1987) study (collected in 1979) and our study (2002) appear in Table 1. Consistent with the previous findings, current Anchorage residents continue to perceive themselves as more resourceful, adventurous, outdoor-oriented, more knowledgeable about world affairs, more reliant on their own personal opinions, and show a greater dislike for government intervention than Outsiders (paired samples t-test, $p < .05$).

Of the seven constructs measured in both studies, only one change in perception was significant. Whereas Anchorage residents of yesteryear believed they adhered more to tradition than Outsiders, current Anchorage residents perceive no difference between themselves and Outsiders on the construct of tradition. Further, Anchorage residents today perceive other Alaskans to be more traditional than themselves, a new perceptual gap not found in the previous study.

All of the four new constructs in the latest study—knowledge of nature, philosophical orientation toward nature, desire for wilderness, and individual vs. community orientation show significant contrast between self-perception of Anchorage residents and the perceived attributes of Outsiders. Not only are the item results statistically significant, the responses reflect an actual difference in perception where the mean item responses lie on opposite ends of the bipolar scales. Anchorage residents today view themselves as more individual

oriented, nature knowledgeable, wilderness seeking, and philosophically view nature as a resource to be used. These perceptions stand in contrast to those of Outsiders who are perceived to be more community oriented, avoid wilderness, have less knowledge about nature, and view nature as a place to be preserved.

The identity responses of Anchorage residents were similar to responses from the entire study sample (Table 3). The only statistically significant difference between Anchorage residents and their more rural counterparts on the Kenai Peninsula was on the item measuring resourcefulness. Anchorage respondents perceive themselves to be somewhat less resourceful than non-Anchorage respondents ($p < .05$), though still far more resourceful than outsiders.

[Insert Table 3]

Exploratory factor analysis of the Alaska identity questions for perception of self using principal components extraction and varimax rotation results in 3 factors explaining 50 percent of the total item variance (Table 4). The 3 factors correspond to affinity for the outdoors (items: outdoor orientation, knowledge of nature, preference for wilderness, resourcefulness), sense of independence (items: individual orientation, risk-taking, utilitarian view of nature), and attitude toward authority (items: dislike for government, preference for tradition). Two items—knowledge of world affairs and reliance on personal opinions—did not have factor loadings above .5. Though not reported here, the factors extracted for Alaska identity items measuring perceptions of other Alaskans and Outsiders were similar.

[Insert Table 4]

Correlational analysis of the Alaska identity questions with available demographic variables indicates several weak, but statistically significant relationships. Increased length of residence in Alaska was related to a more utilitarian view of nature ($r = -.17$, $p < .001$),

individual rather than community orientation ($r=-.14$, $p < .001$), and preference for tradition ($r=.15$, $p < .001$). Alternatively stated, the longer one lives in Alaska, the more likely one is to be individual oriented, accepting of tradition, and to instrumentally view nature. Increased age has an inverse relationship with seeking out wilderness ($r=-.18$, $p < .001$) and a positive relationship with perceived knowledge of world affairs ($r=-.12$, $p < .001$). Increased formal education has a positive relationship with wanting to preserve nature ($r=.21$, $p < .001$), viewing government intervention more positively ($r=-.14$, $p < .001$), being more knowledgeable about world affairs ($r=-.16$, $p < .001$), and preferring new ideas and ways to tradition ($r=-.14$, $p < .001$). Finally, men, compared to women, tend to have a more utilitarian view of nature, tend to be more individual than community oriented, tend to be more outdoor oriented and with perceived greater knowledge about nature, tend more to dislike government intervention, are more knowledgeable about world affairs, and are more inclined to seek out wilderness.

Environmental Concern

Responses to the questions in the New Ecological Paradigm scale are provided in Table 5. The table also includes NEP scale results from a national public survey (NSRE, 2000). Overall, there is a tendency for Alaskans to endorse proecological beliefs with the mean score on the proecological belief side of the scale midpoint (3.0) for all but one item (item 6). This is especially true for seeing the balance of nature being threatened by human activities (items 3,8,13) but much less true for accepting the idea that there are limits to growth (items 1,6,11).

[Insert Table 5]

Ten NEP scale items were included in the national survey on recreation and the environment. Of these 10 items, Alaskans hold the same or somewhat weaker proecological

beliefs on 8 of 10 items when compared to the national sample. Alaskans deviate from the national results on two NEP items (4 and 14). Alaskans are more skeptical about human ingenuity being able to keep the earth livable and are less inclined to believe that humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it. These two NEP items are part of the anti-exemption dimension of the NEP scale that measures human beliefs about whether humankind can overcome or is exempt from the laws of nature. The other anti-exemption NEP question (item 9) was not asked in the national study.

Reliability analysis indicates the NEP scale appears to measure a single construct for the sampled Alaska population with a Cronbach's alpha of .90. However, there are significant distinctions within the overall single dimensionality result that reinforce the above reported NEP differences between Alaskans and outside populations. Factor analysis suggests the extraction of 3 factors as shown in Table 6. When Alaska respondent factor analysis is compared with other reported results from Washington state residents (Dunlap et al., 2000), the largest differences also involve the three NEP items (4, 9, and 14) representing the "Anti-Exemption" dimension—the belief that humans can control nature and are thus exempt from its laws. All three items load on separate factors—NEP 4 and NEP 14 items on factor 2 and NEP 9 (exclusively) on factor 3. With the exception of NEP item 6 that appears to load on all factors, the Anti-Exempt NEP items are distinguishable from the other NEP scale items. The distinctiveness of the Anti-Exempt items is also reflected in lower item-total scale correlations with two of the 3 NEP items detracting from the overall single dimensionality of the alpha coefficient.

[Insert Table 6]

Relationship Between Alaska Identity and Environmental Concern

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated between Alaska identity items and NEP items. As expected, the Alaska identity item about viewing nature as a resource either to be used or preserved had statistically significant bivariate correlations ($p < .05$) with all 15 NEP items in the expected direction with proecological NEP beliefs tracking nature preservation responses. Two other Alaska identity items also had statistically significant correlations. The Alaska identity item about avoiding/seeking wilderness had statistically significant correlations ($p < .05$) with 11 of 15 NEP items with individuals seeking wilderness holding more proecological beliefs. The other Alaska identity question of liking/disliking government intervention had 12 of 15 significant correlations ($p < .05$) with NEP items. Individuals who dislike government intervention hold weaker proecological positions vis-à-vis the NEP scale.

Discussion

It is remarkable that “Alaska identity” appears little altered from when it was last measured almost twenty-five years ago. Its persistence in the face of change serves to remind us of the tremendous reinforcement of a socially constructed identity which, we hypothesize is driven by the perception of physical place and landscape which serve as constant visual reminders of uniqueness. Whereas other populations in the U.S. have significantly altered their linkages to the land and modified the natural environment, Alaska residents are continually reminded of the vagaries of climate and natural hazards such as earthquakes, avalanches, and flooding. The landscape of Alaska commands a greater respect for nature than is likely felt elsewhere, at least in the continental U.S. Alaska residents appreciate the risks of interaction with the natural environment and it reinforces their identity. Alaskans, more than outsiders, recognize they are not entirely exempt from the forces of nature. There

is, however, a paradox between control of nature and exemption from its demands. The construction of the Alaska Highway and the Trans-Alaska pipeline, in particular, epitomize the ultimate human control and dominance of nature and environment. No development projects in Alaska appear beyond human hubris and the pioneer spirit. Yet, the day-to-day personal, and sometimes inconvenient, demands of living in the far north keep Alaska residents connected to the forces of nature.

Alaska residents hold somewhat weaker proecological beliefs than other U.S. residents, but, contrary to anecdotal discourse, the differences are very small. This is not surprising given the relatively high migration rate of Alaska residents from more developed areas to the state. The majority of Alaska residents were not born in Alaska and the extent and range of one's proecological beliefs is not correlated to the length of residence in Alaska. In fact, we predict that one's environmental beliefs are established before arriving in Alaska and are modified by the 'ground truthing' of, or challenges to, values that are manifested within a clear biophysical framework on a regular, if not daily basis. It is interesting to note that the longer one lives in Alaska (length of residence), the more one becomes individual rather than community oriented, the more one views nature as a resource to be used rather than preserved, and the more one relies on the opinion of others rather than personal opinions. However, viewing nature as a resource to be used may be more related to age than length of residence.

Alaska Identity and Resource Development

Sense of place perceptions may be reflected in value preferences for natural resource management decisions (Sack, 1992; 1993). Alaska is unique in the U.S. because it contains vast and visible areas of undeveloped lands that, in American culture, have been historically suggestive of extractable and exploitable natural resources. Thus, even as technology and

globalization continue to significantly alter the nature of living in Alaska, key ideological issues such as subsistence, predator control, and access to public lands for resource development tend to dominate political discourse and serve to inform migrants of Alaska's link to the past. In other parts of the American continent, population pressures and the overt loss of 'natural' lands has driven a strong pro-conservation/preservation land ethic. With time, migrants come to appreciate the role of these wild lands as symbols that continue to reinforce a unique Alaska identity regardless of their position toward a specific issue (e.g., whether to develop or preserve).

Alaskans occupy an interesting position of choice—a proximity to the natural world with ample opportunity for interaction while simultaneously believing the land to possess an abundance of natural resources ripe for exploitation and development. The requirements of large-scale resource development place Alaskans in a position of historical and current dependence on the federal government for both capital and access. The role of the federal government is thus integral to the position of choice—as enablers of development or protectors of the landscape (Keith and Pile, 1993). Thus, it is clear to see how Alaskans' political views toward government become bound up with ecological perspectives leading to one of the great Alaska paradoxes—Alaskans who favor development of Alaska resources tend to dislike government intervention, and yet virtually no large-scale development of Alaska's natural resources would be possible without significant government subsidy and intervention. Conversely, Alaskans who favor landscape protection tend to view the federal government as a collective ecological conscience to moderate resource development proposals.

The effectiveness of resource management policies in Alaska will increasingly rely on an understanding of not only the biophysical drivers in the ecosystem but also the sociocultural ones. The perception of identity is powerful in creating acceptance or conflict

regarding resource development and should be carefully considered by resource management agencies and practitioners. Because Alaska is unique both in the scale and diversity of its resources and the sociocultural components that interact with them—it is one of the few remaining ecological-social systems in the U.S.—management protocols developed outside Alaska that fail to account for the significant variable of Alaskan identity may be limited in their success.

References

- Basso, Keith H. 1996. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscapes and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Blake, Kevin S. 1999. Peaks of Identity in Colorado's San Juan Mountains. *Journal of Cultural Geography* 18(2): 29-54.
- Borchert, John R. 1972. America's Changing Metropolitan Regions. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62(2): 352-373.
- Brown, Gregory G. 2002. Alaska Wilderness: Is it Exceptional? *International Journal of Wilderness* 8(2): 14-18.
- Canter, David V. 1977. *The Psychology of Place*. London: The Architectural Press.
- Cuba, Lee J. 1987. *Identity and Community on the Alaskan Frontier*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Dillman, Don A. 1978. *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Dunlap, Riley E. and Van Liere, Kent D. 1978. The 'New Environmental Paradigm': A Proposed Measuring Instrument and Preliminary Results. *Journal of Environmental Education* 9(4): 10-19.
- Dunlap, Riley E., Van Liere, Kent D., Mertig, Angela G., and Jones, Robert E. 2000. Measuring Endorsement of the New Ecological Paradigm: A Revised NEP Scale. *Journal of Social Issues* 56(3): 425-442.
- Flannery, Tim. 2001. *The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History of North America and its Peoples*. New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Gardner, William H. (editor). 1985. *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.
- Haycox, Stephen W. 2001. The View from Above: Alaska and the Great Northwest. In *The Great Northwest: The Search for Regional Identity*, ed. William G. Robbins, pp. 145-157. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press.
- Keith, Michael, and Pile, Steve (editors). 1993. *Place and the Politics of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- McDowell, Linda. (editor). 1997. *Undoing Place?: A Geographical Reader*. London: Arnold.
- Milbrath, Lester W. 1984. *Environmentalists: Vanguard for a New Society*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE): 2000-2002. The Interagency National Survey Consortium, Coordinated by the USDA Forest Service, Recreation,

Wilderness, and Demographics Trends Research Group, Athens, GA and the Human Dimensions Research Laboratory, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.
<www.srs.fs.usda.gov/trends/Nsre> (last accessed 3 August 2004).

Power, Thomas M. 1996. *Lost Landscapes and Failed Economies: The Search for a Value of Place*. Covelo, CA: Island Press.

Sack, Robert D. 1992. *Place, Modernity, and the Consumer's World: A Relational Framework for Geographical Analysis*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sack, Robert D. 1993. The Power of Place and Space. *The Geographical Review* 83(3): 326-329.

Stokols, Daniel, and Shumaker, Sally A. 1981. People in Places: A Transactional View of Settings. In *Cognition, Social Behavior, and the Environment*, ed. J.H. Harvey, pp. 441-488. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Vance, James. 1970. *The Merchant's World*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Whebell, C. F. J. 1969. Corridors: A Theory of Urban Systems. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59(1): 1-26.

Williams, Daniel R., and Patterson, Michael E. 1996. Environmental Meaning and Ecosystem Management: Perspectives from Environmental Psychology and Human Geography. *Society and Natural Resources* 9(5): 507-521.

Table 2. Distribution and Response Rate for Kenai Coastal Study.

Community	Surveys Mailed	Undeliverable/did not participate ¹	Surveys Returned	Response Rate ²
Anchorage ³	501	50	90	20.0%
Anchor Point	110	3	28	26.2%
Clam Gulch	125	5	24	20.0%
Homer	406	23	122	31.9%
Hope	80	1	26	32.9%
Kasilof	103	4	34	34.3%
Kenai	408	33	90	24.0%
Nanwalek/Port Graham	100	1	13	13.1%
Nikiski	110	6	11	10.6%
Ninilchik	125	3	19	15.6%
Seldovia	110	3	27	25.2%
Seward	404	12	73	18.6%
All communities	2582	144	561	23.0%

¹ Undeliverable or unable to participate.

² Proportion returned of surveys sent to that community.

³ Included communities of Girdwood and Eagle River

Table 3. Responses to Alaska Identity Scale (n=513).

Alaska Identity Item ^a	Self	Other Alaskans	Description of Outsiders	Difference (Self & Outsiders)	Difference (Other Alaskans & Outsiders)	Difference (Self & Other Alaskans)	Anchorage Residents
Resourceful; Not Resourceful	1.48	1.78	3.23	1.75*	1.45*	.3*	1.65**
Not willing to take risks; Willing to take risks	3.31	3.29	2.90	.41*	.39*	.02	3.55
View nature as a resource to be used; View nature as a place to be preserved	2.72	2.26	3.38	.66*	1.12*	.46*	2.69
Individual oriented; Community oriented	2.65	2.63	3.02	.37*	.39*	.02	2.60
Nature knowledgeable; Not knowledgeable about nature	1.58	1.95	3.54	1.96*	1.59*	.37*	1.73
Like government intervention; Dislike government intervention	3.65	3.98	2.64	1.01*	1.34*	.33*	3.60
Rely on personal opinions; Rely on opinions of others	1.88	2.13	3.43	1.63*	1.3*	.25*	2.00
Outdoor oriented; Indoor oriented	1.49	1.62	3.40	1.91*	1.78*	.13*	1.64
Knowledgeable about world affairs; Not knowledgeable about world affairs	1.90	2.52	2.53	.63*	.01	.62*	1.84
Prefer new ideas and ways; Prefer traditional ideas and ways	2.71	3.18	2.67	.04	.51*	.47*	2.60
Avoid wilderness; Seek out wilderness	4.31	4.04	2.65	1.66*	1.39*	.27*	4.13

^aBipolar scales (1=very 2=some 3=neither 4=some 5=very)

* Statistically significant differences, paired t-test, (p < .01)

** Statistically significant difference between Anchorage (n=81) and non-Anchorage respondents (n=430), independent samples t-test (p < .05)

Table 4. Principal Components Analysis of Alaska Identity Items with Varimax Rotation.

Alaska Identity Item	Factors		
	1	2	3
Resourceful; Not Resourceful	55	28	-14
Nature knowledgeable; Not knowledgeable about nature	78	05	10
Outdoor oriented; Indoor oriented	79	03	-04
Avoid wilderness; Seek out wilderness	-62	32	27
View nature as a resource to be used; View nature as a place to be preserved	15	71	-07
Individual oriented; Community oriented	05	69	-05
Like government intervention; Dislike government intervention	-30	-16	65
Prefer new ideas and ways; Prefer traditional ideas and ways	03	08	74
Rely on personal opinions; Rely on opinions of others	46	19	-19
Knowledgeable about world affairs; Not knowledgeable about world affairs	47	09	41
Not willing to take risks; Willing to take risks	-12	55	46
Eigenvalue	2.6	1.6	1.3
Percentage of variance	23.7	14.8	11.8

Note: Loadings of .50 and above appear in bold.

Table 1. Comparison of Anchorage Resident Perceptions 1987-2002.

Cuba (1987)	Self (n=133)	Other Alaskans	Description of Outsiders	Diff	Brown and Alessa (2002)	Self (n=81)	Other Alaskans	Description of Outsiders	Diff
Alaskans are individuals with a great deal of resourcefulness	4.45 ^a	4.56	2.95*	1.5	Resourceful; Not Resourceful	1.65 ^b	1.77	3.18*	1.5
Alaskans welcome adventure; they're willing to take a chance.	4.40	4.47	2.96*	1.4	Not willing to take risks; Willing to take risks	3.55	3.44	2.99*	.6
Alaskans do a lot of hunting and fishing.	4.76	4.83*	2.61*	2.1	Outdoor oriented; Indoor oriented	1.64	1.61	3.50*	1.9
Alaskans have little respect for tradition; they prefer the new to the old	1.96	1.96	2.88*	.9	Prefer new ideas and ways; Prefer traditional ideas and ways	2.60	3.24*	2.80	.2
People in Alaska don't know very much about world affairs.	1.99	1.83*	2.88*	.9	Knowledgeable about world affairs; Not knowledgeable about world affairs	1.84	2.47*	2.53*	.7
When it comes down to it, most Alaskans dislike government intervention.	4.71	4.75	4.29*	.4	Like government intervention; Dislike government intervention	3.60	4.03*	2.75*	.8
When it comes to making value judgments, Alaskans rely more on their personal convictions than on the opinions of others.	4.20	4.31*	3.11*	1.1	Rely on personal opinions; Rely on opinions of others	1.97	2.14	3.51*	1.5
Alaskans are more concerned with making money than with job satisfaction.	3.21	3.16	3.44	.2	View nature as a resource to be used; View nature as a place to be preserved	2.69	2.31*	3.68*	1.0
Alaskans are geographically mobile; they don't stay in one place for long.	3.05	3.09	3.42*	.4	Nature knowledgeable; Not knowledgeable about nature	1.73	1.92*	3.59*	1.9
The natural surroundings of their environment are important to Alaskans.	4.76	4.80	3.81*	.9	Individual oriented; Community oriented	2.60	2.43	3.18*	.6
					Avoid wilderness; Seek out wilderness	4.13	4.11	2.61*	1.5

a. Respondents replied in Likert-type items where 5="strongly agree" and 1="strongly disagree".

b. Responses to bipolar scale where two opposing concepts were separated on 5 point scale. A score of 3 would be midway between the two concepts.

* Difference between means of Self and other two levels is statistically significant ($p < .05$) using paired samples t-test

Table 5. NEP Scale Comparisons Between Alaska Residents and National Sample .

NEP Scale Item ^a	2002 Kenai Coastal Study (Mean) N=544	2000 National Survey on Recreation and Environment (Mean) N >7000
1. We are approaching the limit to the number of people this earth can support.	2.36	2.42
2. Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.	3.06	3.27
3. When humans interfere with nature, it often produces disastrous consequences.	2.21	1.85
4. Human ingenuity (skill and resource) ^b will ensure that we do not make the earth unlivable.	3.17	2.62
5. Humans are severely abusing the environment.	2.23	1.76
6. The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them.	2.36	N/A
7. Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist.	2.25	N/A
8. The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrialized nations.	3.77	N/A
9. Despite our special abilities humans are still subject to the laws of nature.	1.55	N/A
10. The so-called "ecological (environmental) crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated. ^b	3.20	3.28
11. The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources.	2.45	N/A
12. Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.	3.36	3.57
13. The balance of earth is delicate and easily upset.	2.20	1.70
14. Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it. ^b	3.73	3.21
15. If things continue on their present course, we will soon be experiencing (experience) a major ecological catastrophe. ^b	2.68	2.17

a. Respondents replied in Likert-type items where 1="strongly agree" and 5="strongly disagree".

b. Some wording changes were made on NSRE scale items. Word changes for NSRE items appear in parentheses.

Table 6. Principal Components Analysis of NEP Items with Varimax Rotation

NEP Dimension (Dunlap et al. 2000)		Factors		
		1	2	3
NEP 1 ^a	Limits	69	14	-.13
NEP 2	Anti-Anthro	57	35	08
NEP 3	Balance	67	04	.22
NEP 4	Anti-Exempt	26	74	09
NEP 5	Eco-Crisis	77	26	16
NEP 6	Limits	36	53	-40
NEP 7	Anti-Anthro	68	-06	39
NEP 8	Balance	54	53	-17
NEP 9	Anti-Exempt	18	17	80
NEP 10	Eco-Crisis	66	44	-03
NEP 11	Limits	72	19	-16
NEP 12	Anti-Anthro	59	23	22
NEP 13	Balance	65	22	04
NEP 14	Anti-Exempt	01	80	23
NEP 15	Eco-Crisis	78	26	10
Eigenvalue		6.4	1.3	1.1
Percentage of variance		42.4	8.9	7.3

a. NEP item wording appears in Table 5.

Note: Loadings of .50 and above appear in bold.

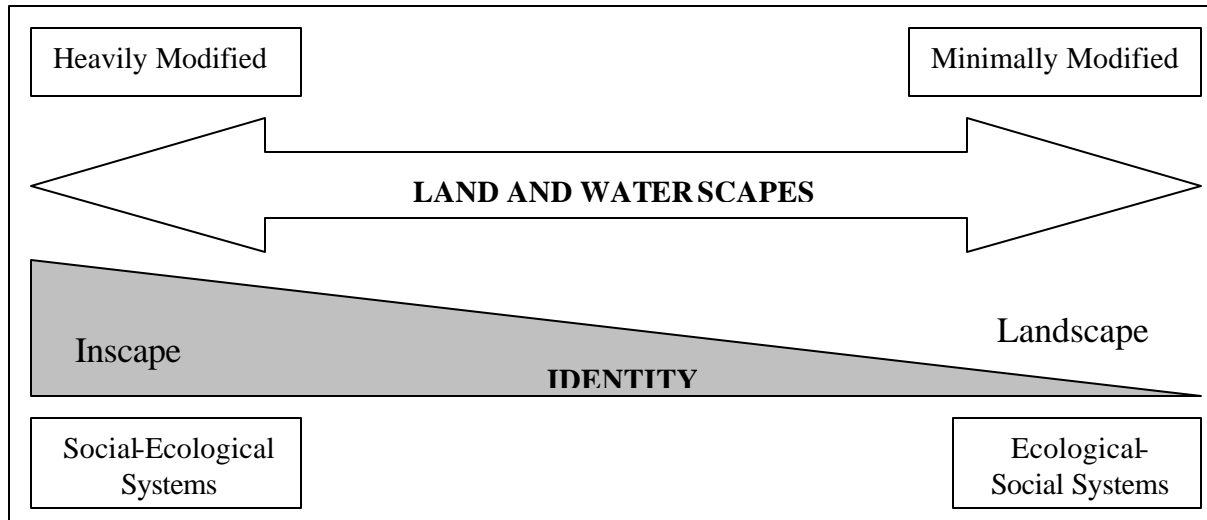


Figure 1. The creation of identity may be expressed as a gradient or continuum of interactions between social and ecological systems. With significant water and landscape modifications, identity is increasingly driven by human cultures associated with the modification. This may be thought of in the extreme such as in large cities (e.g., New York) where an “inscape” dominates and at the other end, Wilderness where land and waterscapes dominate.