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# YOUTH CARVERS AND THE INUIT ART INDUSTRY IN KINNGAIT, NUNAVUT

© James Moxon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Degree of Master of Arts in International Development  
Studies at Saint Mary's University

July, 1999

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# **Youth Carvers and the Inuit Art Industry in Kinngait, Nunavut**

James Moxon

Thesis completed for Master's degree in International Development Studies

Saint Mary's University

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Submitted June 1999

## **Abstract**

Thesis Title: Youth Carvers and the Inuit Art Industry in Kinngait, Nunavut

Author: James Moxon

Date of Submission: September 1999

This study, based on 7 weeks of fieldwork in the Eastern Arctic community of Kinngait (Cape Dorset), examines the current experiences characterizing youth participation in the community carving industry. For the purpose of the study a young carver was defined as anyone under the age of 30. During fieldwork interviews were held with 23 young carvers in Kinngait.

The discussions with young carvers illuminate the various relationships between young people, carving, and community life. The research shows that carving firmly supports and enhances the economic, social, and cultural lives of Kinngait youth while contributing to the community's vitality. However, as many youth discussed, the present structure of the industry can actually discourage their artistic freedom and imagination. In many cases, the ability of young carvers to securely develop their artistic talents is constrained by structural features of the industry and by local economic circumstances.

Planning efforts to strengthen carving in Kinngait should strive to create a supportive environment that facilitates youth imagination and talent. Community planning efforts addressing the development of young carvers is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the carving industry in Kinngait.

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## Acknowledgements

Fieldwork in Kinngait in the fall of 1997 was made possible by a grant from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs' Nunavut Secretariat and the Nunavut Unified Human Resources Strategy. I gratefully acknowledge their support. I also would like to thank the Arctic Research Committee of Saint Mary's University. The committee has closely followed and supported the entire research process. A return trip in the summer of 1998 to report the findings from the research to the hamlet council, youth, and community members was made possible by a grant from the Northern Scientific Training Program, a program of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

While in Kinngait my presence and work was met with graciousness, hospitality, insight, and friendship. In particular I would like to thank Aksatungua Ashoona and her family for the friendship and sense of home that they graciously offered me while in Kinngait on my first trip. The research was importantly assisted by the insight and support of Olayuk Akesuk in the Department of Community Development of the municipal government. His friendship and hospitality and that of his family are greatly appreciated. Fieldwork was also aided and supported by input from Terry Ryan and Leslie Boyd at the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. Also at the Co-op, Jimmy Manning's willingness to sit down and talk on numerous occasions enhanced the research and my time in Kinngait. The research itself was of course made possible by the cooperation and interest of young people in Kinngait. Their openness, views, and passions about their work and the community industry drove the entire research process.

This study has been greatly supported by the work and efforts of Christopher Fletcher and Dr. Michelle Daveluy of the Anthropology Department of Saint Mary's University and both members of the Arctic Research Committee. Throughout every stage of this study their efforts and dedication have sustained the thesis work and significantly

contributed to my learning. I would also like to acknowledge the professors and people associated with the International Development Studies Program at Saint Mary's University. The program offered a challenging and accommodating environment that complemented the research undertaken in Northern Canada.

Finally, but certainly not lastly, I must thank my family. Their enduring support has always recognized the importance of the educational experience and the humble understanding that it can provide.

Any errors, omissions, or oversights in the thesis are entirely my responsibility.

## Summary

Since the late 1950s carving production in many Arctic communities has become a sustaining activity both economically and culturally. While the future vitality and continuance of the Inuit carving industry depends upon the endeavours of young artists, there has been little work to date specifically focused on young and emerging carvers. This study, based on 7 weeks of fieldwork in the Eastern Arctic community of Kinngait (Cape Dorset), explored the experiences and issues surrounding young carvers in the community carving industry.

This study examines the current experiences characterizing youth participation in the carving industry in Kinngait. It will contribute information concerning youth perceptions and feelings of the industry and their place in it. It is hoped that this information will be of use to people inside and outside of the community who might be thinking of how to support and strengthen carving in Kinngait and throughout the north.

Fieldwork in Kinngait was conducted during September and October of 1997. For the purpose of the study a young carver was defined as anyone under the age of 30. Interviews were held with 28 carvers and artists in the community. Of these 28 people interviewed 23 were young carvers. In this group of young carvers 22 were male and 1 was female. A semi-structured interview style was adopted that allowed for informal discussion. Interviews were 45 minutes to one hour in length. A local research assistant was present during every discussion so that respondents could decide whether to hold the interview in Inuktitut or English. Of the 28 interviews, 13 were tape recorded (with consent of the interviewees) and the rest recorded in writing.

The discussions with young carvers illuminate the various relationships between young people, carving, and community life. What they have to say helps detail not only

the place of youth in the local industry, but also the connection between carving and community life.

The research examined the relationship between young carvers and the local market. There are four groups of buyers in Kinngait: the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, the Northern store, the Polar Supply store, and individual buyers (mostly non-Inuit government employees, teachers, nurses, etc.). The interviews demonstrate that each of these groups of buyers interact differently with young people.

In 1995 the Co-op and the Northern store both started to use a 'carvers list' when buying carvings. These lists contain the names of carvers that they buy from on a regular basis. The Northern store's carvers list is split into two categories. On one list carvers can be paid an unlimited amount for their work. The carvers on the second list can only be paid up to \$200 for a carving regardless of size and quality. At the time of fieldwork approximately 80 carvers in total were on both lists at the Northern, 27 of them were younger than 30 years of age, and two of these youth were on the 'unlimited' price list. The Co-op uses a single carvers list. Approximately 25 carvers were on this list of which 5 were young carvers. The highest prices for carvings in the community are obtained by carvers listed at the Co-op and on the Northern store's unlimited price list. They also show the most flexibility in terms of styles and thematic content of carvings.

When selling to the Northern's price restricted list, people are limited to making smaller pieces since they will be paid no more than \$200 for their work. Furthermore, as young people explained, the Northern favours carvings of wildlife and traditional scenes of hunting and camp life. Size, thematic content, and pricing of carvings are thus very much influenced and controlled by the use of this carvers list.

Outside of the Co-op and Northern it is possible to sell to the Polar Supply store and individuals (mainly non-Inuit) in the community. The Polar store does not use a carvers list and buys mainly smaller size 'souvenir' pieces. Selling to individuals in the

community involves walking the community selling carvings to people, door to door. Because of unpredictable cash supplies at the Polar store, and in the community in general, the sale of carvings in these markets is unreliable. As young carvers described, the prices paid in these markets are the lowest in the community. The pieces must also be small and reflect traditional themes and styles associated with the souvenir market. These two markets are supplied mainly by young people.

The discussions with youth carvers indicate that the majority of young people carve for the most insecure, artistically restrictive, and least well paying markets in the community. The structure of the community carving industry does not actively encourage the artistic development of young carvers. This has important implications for the quality of young people's work. There is a perception in the industry that the quality of youth carving is not meeting the standards of the 'fine' art market. However, the issue of carving quality must be considered in the context of the environment in which young people live and produce. The material gathered in this study suggests that the present structure of the community carving industry does not effectively support or encourage the artistic development of young carvers.

The carving industry represents an important economic opportunity for youth in Kinngait. As the young people explained, with limited employment opportunities in the community, carving is for many the only way in which to earn an income. This relationship attests to the importance of carving to the economic lives of youth.

The limited employment opportunities for youth also undermines their position when in the industry. The lack of economic security outside of the industry makes it extremely difficult for youth to pursue carving styles not demanded by the market. They must carve what they know will sell, since for many there are few other ways by which to earn an income. Therefore, issues of quality and artistic exploration in youth carving must be understood in the context of everyday economic realities facing young people.

The discussions with youth show that carving is supported by, and in turn supports, a diffuse social network throughout the community that establishes and fortifies relationships between kinship and generations. Many youth learn how to carve from older family members. Most young people keep in contact with these elder relatives for assistance when carving on their own. They see this connection with their elders as important to their artistic and personal development. Carving can thus foster and form meaningful relationships between youth and their family and elders.

Carving can also join young people to the environment. Many of those interviewed described how experiences on the land enhance their carving. Several others commented that they prefer to carve outside of the community while on the land. In Kinngait, carving can assume a central role in connecting young people to the environment.

The discussions revealed that many youth carve without a mask. Over half of the young people interviewed explained that they regularly carve without one. Given the dangers of inhaling soapstone dust and the impurities in it (including asbestos), the fact that many youth carve without protection should be of utmost concern. Their immediate and future health is being jeopardized in the carving industry.

The research with young carvers shows that carving firmly supports and enhances the economic, social, and cultural lives of Kinngait youth while contributing to the community's vitality. However, as many youth discussed, the present structure of the industry can actually discourage their artistic freedom and imagination. Planning to strengthen carving in Kinngait should strive to create a supportive environment that facilitates youth imagination and dedication. The sustainability of the carving industry in Kinngait rests upon the vibrant development of young artists and the visions they contribute to northern carving. To strengthen the sustainability of the community carving industry in Kinngait and the Inuit carving industry in general, planning efforts need to address the experiences of young carvers and how their artistic development is shaped by

the particular economic and social circumstances they confront in Kinngait. The information in this study contributes information important to this process.

The thoughts and opinions of young carvers in Kinngait also contribute to international development planning that is concerned with community art and craft development. The issues and experiences discussed by youth offer important insight into the commercialization of community arts and crafts for indigenous artists and artisans internationally.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Kinngait, Carving and Youth

This thesis examines the place of young carvers in the Inuit carving industry today. Since the early 1950s carving production in many Canadian Arctic communities has become a sustaining activity both economically and culturally. Carvings made in northern communities, both 'fine' art and 'souvenir' pieces, sell in galleries and stores throughout the world. This study is based on 7 weeks of research with young carvers in Kinngait<sup>1</sup>, an Inuit community on Baffin Island.

Kinngait is situated on Dorset Island, one of a group of islands that is connected to the mainland of Baffin Island at low tide. Dorset Island comprises part of the Foxe Peninsula, a thumb of land jutting out from the south-west tip of Baffin Island. The peninsula sits approximately 200 km across Hudson Strait from the northern shores of Hudson's Bay. Map 1 shows the location of Kinngait in Canada.

The current experiences characterizing youth participation in the Inuit carving industry in Kinngait were the focus of the research. While the future vitality and continuance of the Inuit carving industry depends on the endeavours of young people, there has been little work to date specifically focused on young and emerging artists. The goals of this thesis are to examine the issues and local circumstances surrounding young people in the

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<sup>1</sup> The town of Kinngait, in English, is named Cape Dorset. The English name however is not a translation of the Inuktitut name for the town. Kinngait, roughly translates into English as 'place of high mountains', in reference to the mountainous terrain around the community. The English version of the town's name is in reference to Dorset Island where the community is located. There are two accepted spellings for the town in Inuktitut— 'Kinngait' and 'Kingait'. I have adopted the spelling 'Kinngait' in this study as it appears on the map Nunavut Territory, published by the Nunavut Implementation Commission, 1995a.

**Figure 1-1: Location of Kinngait in Canada**



Source: Houston, James. 1995. Confessions of an Igloo Dweller. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart

carving industry in Kinngait, and to contribute information about youth participation in the industry that is important to planning efforts designed to support and develop young carvers. In order to fulfill these goals the study was guided by two primary objectives– 1) to examine through interviews with young people the various factors and experiences in the community that impact upon young carvers in their everyday lives; and 2) to explore youths' perceptions of the carving industry and their place in it. The ideas discussed by youth also provide critical perspective to the academic literature examining the economic, social, and cultural aspects of carving in northern communities. In this way an inclusive portrait is drawn that captures the diverse economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of youth carving.

Kinngait was chosen as the focus of this study because it represents an important community in the Inuit carving industry. The community has been central to the development and promotion of Inuit art and carving globally (Boyd, 1992; Houston 1995). Today, carving production in Kinngait intimately influences the artistry and commercial success of the Inuit carving industry. Carving production is also a central component of the local economy and society in Kinngait. For these reasons, a study of youth carving in Kinngait provides information important to understanding current issues in the community carving industry and in appreciating how youth contribute to and relate with the Inuit carving industry as a whole.

The focus on young people is highly relevant to regional planning in the north. Nunavut has a young demographic profile with nearly two-thirds of the population under 25 years of age (Nunavut Implementation Commission [NIC], 1995b). Attention to young people's economic and social vitality is critical for the future strength of

communities. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference<sup>2</sup> (ICC) highlights the necessity of including youth concerns in planning processes:

A comprehensive youth strategy must be formulated and implemented, in collaboration with Inuit youth, in regard to economic, cultural, and other activities. Youth programs should involve Inuit communities and have broad community support. A primary objective of the strategy is to yield tangible results and benefits to youth in both the short and long term.  
(ICC, 1992: 87)

A central feature of community development encompasses the experiences of young people. Problems identified by youth can act as a template of issues guiding planning to areas and concerns needing attention. By considering the ideas, thoughts, and experiences of young carvers in Kinngait, this study attempts to contribute to the process of planning for youth in northern communities.

The focus on young carvers is also relevant in the context of political processes surrounding Nunavut. The creation of Nunavut signifies a compelling change in the northern political and social landscape. The new territory, which came into being April 1 1999, is the result of over twenty years of negotiation between Inuit and federal and territorial governments (Duffy, 1988). Nunavut will give Inuit the ability to shape political and economic developments according to the unique social, cultural, and environmental attributes of the north (Dacks, 1981; Duffy, 1988; NIC, 1996). As this study will demonstrate, the carving industry in Kinngait permeates the economic, social, cultural, and environmental life of the community. An examination of the industry and its young producers thus closely relates to a political desire in Nunavut to have planning and development strengthen local economic, social and cultural structures.

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<sup>2</sup> The Inuit Circumpolar Conference, formed in 1977, is an Inuit organization that represents approximately 125, 000 northerners living in Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and the Chukotka region of Russia. It holds non-governmental status with the UN Economic and Social Council. For a good overview of the ICC's work and organization see Mary May Simon's Inuit: One Future- One Arctic. 1996. The Cider Press: Peterborough.

## 1.1 Art, craft, and community development

The research with young Inuit carvers presented here corresponds with development and planning processes occurring elsewhere. In particular, it connects with that part of development studies arguing for a cohesive link between culture and planning. This section outlines the broader international context framing this study.

During the past decade the field of development studies has increasingly recognized the importance of the link between culture and development (Kleymeyer, 1994; Masini, 1994; World Commission on Culture and Development [WCCD], 1995; de Ruijter and van Vucht Tijssen, 1995; Maybury-Lewis, 1997 ). Theoretical and practical thinking guided by this recognition argues for a coherent linking of local culture to development processes.

The connection of art and craft to community planning represents a significant part of this culture-development nexus. The interplay of culture, community and artistic expression when directed and guided by local community members is recognized as a constructive path for planning (WCCD, 1995; Guyette, 1996).

It has been estimated that art and craft production represents nearly a quarter of the micro-enterprises in the developing world (WCCD, 1995). This fact, combined with the contribution of arts and crafts to local cultural and social structures has significantly influenced the tenor of development studies.

Community-based creative activity should be highly valued and supported. The community arts movement in many countries has incorporated strategies to stimulate local creativity and improve skills and standards . . . It goes beyond increasing community skills and actually supports the achievement of cultural development objectives. (ibid: 242).

There is ample evidence that numerous indigenous communities worldwide are pursuing art and craft production to support their economic and cultural well-being (Graburn, 1976; Cole and Aniakor, 1984; Brett, 1986; Stephen, 1991; Swain, 1993; Whitten and Whitten, 1993; Kleymeyer, 1994; Tice, 1995). In a Latin American context, Stephen (1991: 101) explains that:

The production of indigenous crafts in Latin America for tourist and export markets depends on the commoditization of indigenous culture. While in many cases craft production for export has exacerbated increasing economic and political marginalization of the producers, in some instances craft production has resulted in self-managed economic development that strengthens local cultural institutions.

To explain how art and craft production can strengthen local culture institutions the author provides as examples the Otavaleños of Ecuador, the Nahua and Zapotec of Mexico, and the Kuna of Panama. These groups have used the marketing of their indigenous identity to develop successful community art and craft industries.

Furthermore, the success of these industries has supported community innovations and strengthened communal institutions integral to local culture and society (Alderete, Pacaldo, Huerta, and Whitesell 1992; Peterson, 1993; Tice, 1995). Indeed, as is demonstrated in this thesis, such an outcome parallels the diverse social networks supported by, and in turn supporting, the carving industry in Kinngait that are socially and culturally meaningful to community life.

In some cases negative outcomes from the commercialization of art and craft can serve to exploit and manipulate local producers (Graburn, 1976; MacCannell 1984; Price, 1989; Whitten and Whitten, 1993; Marcus and Myers, 1995). For instance, since the early 1970s paintings based on 'dreaming' sequences<sup>3</sup> by the Aborigines of Central Australia

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<sup>3</sup> The acrylic paintings on canvas and sometimes bark, visually depict the dreaming sequences by which the mythological creators of Australia dreamed the continent into being. A popular account of these paintings is provided by Bruce Chatwin in his work The Songlines. New York: Viking Books, 1987.

have become internationally popular in 'fine' and 'tourist' art markets (Myers, 1995). However, many of their communities have no representative displays of their artwork (Lucie-Smith, 1994). Local artists thus have little exposure to the works and ideas of their peers. Kinngait similarly, has no art centre where local carving and artwork can be displayed, appreciated, and discussed in the community.

## **1.2 Overview of Kinngait and youth issues**

Approximately 1100 people live in Kinngait of whom over 90% are Inuit. One and two story buildings make up the neighbourhoods of the community with cars, trucks, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles (depending on the time of year) shuttling people between the homes and businesses of the community. During the summer months the beaches and shoreline of the community are crowded with a variety of boats. People in Kinngait have a strong link to the land. Subsistence hunting and fishing are practiced by many in the community. A recent survey showed that over half of Kinngait's residents regularly engage in subsistence hunting activities (Government of the Northwest Territories [GNWT], 1995a.). These activities reaffirm a traditional mode of subsistence supportive of community life and provide an important part of local diets. Frequent announcements on local radio by returning hunters inviting people to share in their game and fish is one example of the enduring community-land link.

Kinngait has experienced, and is still experiencing tremendous change. The permanent settlement of people in the community began 40 years ago. In a short period of time a nomadic and highly mobile land-based lifestyle was replaced by more sedentary living based on southern economic systems (Graburn, 1971). Today, with a fertility rate of 33 births per 1000 persons (NIC, 1995b), Kinngait is steadily growing in size.

Construction is constantly adding new homes and infrastructure to the community. As Dorais (1997: 3) has noted , “. . . in the Arctic, present-day life there has almost nothing in common with what it used to be seventy, fifty, or even thirty years ago. . . Inuit society, in many respects, is as modern as its Euro-American counterpart”. In this respect, Kinngait is a recent community.

Despite the newness of the community the area around the present town site has been inhabited for over 1 000 years. Archaeological remains of the ‘Dorset Tradition’ (c. 800 B.C- 1300 A.D.) were first discovered in the area. On Mallik Island, directly across from Kinngait and connected to it at low tide, lie the remains of ‘Thule Inuit’<sup>4</sup> (c. 1000 - 1600 A.D.) winter houses (GNWT, 1995b.). The families that first settled the present town came from camp sites located along the shoreline of the Foxe peninsula. The long history of human settlement around Kinngait is attributed to the abundance of wildlife and sealife in the area (Pitseolak and Eber, 1993).

It was not until the 1950s that Kinngait began to be permanently settled when the federal government made its first major incursion into the north.

In the fifteen years following the war, Inuit experienced the most disruptive series of events in the history of their contact with Europeans. The collapse of the fox market destroyed a century of economic relations with non-Inuit. Introduced diseases, from tuberculosis to syphilis, had become endemic. Last, the well-meant but disruptive relocation by the Canadian government of nearly all Inuit from their home villages to planned settlements strained ecological and social relations. The immediate post-war years can be said to be marked by government inspired institutionalized relations (Wenzel, 1991: 33).

The settlement of planned communities where schooling, nursing stations, housing, and other social services could be provided occurred around existing trading posts operating throughout the north. The community of Kinngait was built around one such trading post

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<sup>4</sup> The Dorset Tradition and the Thule Inuit tradition represent historical cultural phases preceding contemporary Inuit culture (Martijn, 1964).

operated by the Hudson's Bay Company. Peter Pitseolak, a prominent camp leader at the time, describes the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company and later planned settlement in Kinngait.

Next Winter when it was 1913 William Ford, the Lake Harbour Bay post manager, and his guide Esoaktuk visited our camp at Etidliajuk. He said that when summer came Kingnait– Cape Dorset– would have white people. Ever since then there have been white people at Cape Dorset.

First they [government personnel] asked me, 'would you mind having a nurse and teacher here in Cape Dorset?' After this I had to think it out . . . I knew there was no doubt white people were coming to our land . . . Since I knew the white people were coming anyway, I thought to myself, if there are no teachers in Cape Dorset and there are teachers in other places, then Cape Dorset will be behind . . . The teachers came in 1950 and the government came in '56. After this we started coming into the settlement. I left camp because my grandchildren had to go to school. (Pitseolak and Eber, 1993: 83, 143)

The movement of people into permanent communities allowed for a more efficient extension of government and social services in the north. These actions though upset the traditional rhythms of Inuit society and economy. Northern life was not sedentary, nor was it historically structured around large aggregated communities (Graburn, 1977; Burch, 1993). For this reason, "Changes that had previously been gradual picked up momentum after Inuit settled in large communities, and the result, predictably, was considerable social disorganization" (Mitchell, 1996: 338). Individuals were expected to immediately integrate into an economy where consumption of services and products depended on income from employment. However, because of limited industry there was little opportunity to participate in this economy. Where once Inuit had ". . . independence and control over their lives, many now depend on wage employment, subsidized housing, social assistance or unemployment insurance" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996: 407). Community settlement thus created a complex interaction between the social and economic characteristics of traditional northern life and those of the south.

It is to this sudden dislocation that many trace the current social problems affecting many northern communities. Alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, and physical abuse are significantly higher in the north than in the south, and northerners regard these issues as needing immediate attention (RCAP, 1996). While these traumas may at times point to the dislocating effect of modernity on northern culture and are critical to address, it is equally true that local culture displays a vitality and resiliency that unequivocally shape the texture of community life. Wenzel (1991: 15) observes that, “. . . Inuit are far from cultural demoralization: they are a people adapting southern artifacts, institutions, and ideas to their present ecological and historical situation.” It is the synergism of tradition and modernity that charges contemporary communities; the present where history and future meet and find expression.

Young people find themselves at the centre of this engagement between old and new in contemporary community life. In Nunavut approximately 60% of the population is 25 or younger (NIC, 1995b). It is critical that northern planning and development address the realities of this younger generation as their actions will intimately affect the shape of future communities.

Aboriginal peoples are generally ‘young’ peoples; they are experiencing a more rapid increase in the proportion of young adults than is occurring in the general population . . . The most important issue for the growing population of young Aboriginal adults in the North is how they will make a living. (RCAP, 1996: 401)

This need to ‘make a living’ will make close partners of youth and national and global economies. As Pitseolak foretold, “Not all of our young people will learn the good ways, but the better ones, the ones who care about themselves, will learn the new ways” (Pitseolak and Eber, 1993: 148). That this relationship between youth and outside economies will inspire new social and cultural innovations is thus seen as inevitable, but beneficial.

While learning the 'new' ways young people are also expected, particularly by their elders, to connect with cultural and social features traditionally supportive of northern life. The most important of these features include a connection to land, language, elders, and kinship (ICC 1992; Dorais, 1997; Stevenson, 1997). As an article in a regional youth newspaper comments, "Our elders are noticing the loss of our culture and language. Traditional parenting skills are not practised as they used to, and many Youth want to learn about the old ways of life" (Muk-Talk, summer 1997: 18). In this way, youth life plows the complex terrain of both tradition and modernity and must somehow make a fulfilling mix of the two. As Dorais (1997: 3, 5) explains "... in the North, modernity and tradition constantly interact ..." such that "... identity is a dynamic and creative process that is best expressed through the strategies developed to relate to one's physical, social, and spiritual environments". Youth identity is a highly complex process fed from the multiple experiences and lifestyles colouring northern life.

The meeting of tradition and modernity in youth life is at times singled out as the root cause of the difficult experiences that can touch young people (Billson, 1988; Hensel, 1996). Negative experiences with drugs, violence, and suicide in the lives of some young people are often blamed on accelerated modernization and cultural change. The traumatic experiences that can impact on youth are thus seen as resulting from the frustration of trying to combine traditional and modern life. In this sense they are seen as "... caught between two cultures, literally 'no owner of soil' and prone to the symptoms of this vice: despair, loss of identity, anxiety, depression, and suicide" (Billson, 1988: 310). It is this position, of having their feet in two distinct cultural worlds, that is seen as inherently dysfunctional for youth.

While a seemingly powerful argument, it is simplistic and misleading to see the position of youth living in two cultural worlds as inevitably dysfunctional. If we take

Dorais' conception of identity as an evolving relationship between individuals and their surrounding cultural, social, environmental, and economic landscapes, then it is clear that young people will necessarily reside in the traditional and modern since both influence northern life. Therefore, it is a healthy and indispensable response of youth to live in both 'worlds', that of the north and that of the south. By this conception, the difficulties that touch youth life are not seen as an inevitable result of standing 'between two worlds', but may rather be symptomatic of how youth are frustrated from placing themselves more firmly and totally in the cultural systems of both 'worlds'.

The image of youth anxiously residing between the old and the new also feeds the stereotype of a generally dysfunctional northern society. As Hensel (1996: 95 ) observes about this northern stereotype, "The most persistent . . . image overall is a dysfunctionality of individuals, families, and communities, generalized to the entire Native population". Youth life is therefore cast as a dysfunctional interaction between north and south where all young people, in all communities, are assumed to fall victim to the negative outcomes (drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse, violence, etc.) of this interaction. This of course is not only wrong in its simplicity, but also fails to appreciate the wealth of inspiration, imagination, perseverance, and leadership exhibited by youth.

The contemporary carving industry encompasses this dynamic relationship between youth life and the multiple aspects of tradition and modernity. Carving continually moves between the past and present. It is one of the activities connecting youth with elders and family. The instruction, tutelage, and guidance of carving is often passed on to young people between the generations and within the family. These kinship and generational relationships are considered important to the social and cultural fabric of northern life (Dorais, 1997). Carving also allows youth the opportunity to interact with

external economies. The Inuit carving industry represents a vibrant site of engagement where youth absorb and filter the diversity of northern life today.

### **1.3 History of the Inuit carving industry**

Art and craft production in Arctic Canada is a prominent part of the economy. The most recent comprehensive study on the industry released by the GNWT in 1990 indicated that sales of art and craft work contributed over \$20 million to the northern economy (GNWT, 1990: 5). Over 10% of the territory's potential labour force was employed in community art and craft industries (ibid: 2). Art and craft production includes carving, print making, sewing and jewellery, and an assortment of other handicraft items. Carving and print making are the most commercially successful arts to come out of northern communities. A brief description outlining the development of the carving industry will provide historical context to this study.

The commercialization of Inuit carving began in the late 1940s and can be largely credited to the work of James Houston, the Canadian Handicraft Guild<sup>5</sup>, the federal government, and of course Inuit carvers (Martijn, 1964; Myers, 1984; Houston 1995). In 1948 James Houston, a Canadian artist who had been travelling throughout the Hudson's Bay area, returned to Montreal with several carvings he had collected. These he showed to Guild and government personnel. At this time the price for fox pelts and other furs, which Inuit had become increasingly dependent on, were at their lowest in three decades (Graburn, 1977: 189). The government was searching for alternative activities that could

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<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Handicraft Guild (which later changed its name to the 'Canadian Guild of Crafts Quebec') was a national non-profit organization established for the development, promotion, and marketing of Canadian arts and crafts.

replace the failing fur industry and alleviate what was a crippling situation in many communities. In 1950, Houston returned to the eastern Arctic backed by the Guild and the federal government in order to purchase carvings that would be sold by the Guild in Montreal (Martijn, 1964). As Martijn explains:

They [the then federal Department of Resources and Development] were induced to take an active interest in the matter. They envisaged the building up of a carving industry whereby the Eskimo's complete dependence on the uncertain fox-fur market might be lessened, and his economy supplemented by a new source of income (ibid: 561).

Successful exhibits and sales in Montreal and Winnipeg between 1949 and 1952 confirmed the market potential of Inuit carving (Paci, 1996).

During the next two decades the thrust of artistic development in the north revolved around the establishment and management of community retail and art co-operatives that would nurture, promote, and in turn be sustained by carving and other arts and crafts (Myers, 1984; Goetz, 1993). Houston (1995: 288) comments that, "Inuit art— carvings, prints, and crafts— forms the backbone of the Inuit-owned co-operatives". By the mid 1960s a concentrated infrastructure had evolved to support, market, and administer carving production in northern communities. The organization of the Inuit art industry remains relatively unchanged to this day.

What began as a practically motivated response to the economic difficulties confronting northern communities rapidly grew into an internationally recognized art form. At present, Inuit carving covers a wide range of production moving between small souvenir pieces to large pieces priced at thousands of dollars and selling out of premier art galleries throughout the world. The materials used for carving include soapstone and other related minerals such as gypsum, quartz, limestone, and serpentine. Bone, ivory, antler, and wood are also commonly used.

Throughout the text of this study two terms will be used when discussing the production and commercialization of carving— the *Inuit carving industry* and the *community carving industry* (in reference to Kinngait). As applied to this study I use the definition of an ‘industry’ as a commercial enterprise that collectively involves the production and commercialization of a product or service (Thompson, 1996). Using this definition the *Inuit carving industry* refers to the producers, businesses, markets, and services, nationally and internationally, that are involved in the production and commercialization of carvings from northern communities. I use the term *community carving industry* as applied to Kinngait to specify the local carvers, businesses, and markets that produce and commercialize carvings in the community.

The commercialization of carving drew upon informal, small-scale carving production already existing in the north. Prior to continual European contact carving was a fundamental technique of northern life, used to fashion a myriad of hunting weapons, cooking and heating utensils, and many other household items (McGhee, 1987). Magico-religious amulets, toys, and games were also carved. These objects were often infused with a variety of artistic images (Burch, 1993). Artistic skills were thus stylistically embedded in everyday objects where the creative process could meet and reside with the practical.

Once continuous contact with European whalers, missionaries and government officials began carving quickly developed into an economic activity specifically focused on these outsiders. These people would regularly purchase, and barter for, small carved souvenirs. Martijn (1964: 558) explains that, “. . . economic incentive led to the making of figurines for sale to outsiders. As a result, carving ceased to play an integral traditional role . . . and a change-over to a culturally peripheral activity took place”. By the 1930s Inuit were supplying carvings to outsiders whenever the opportunity presented itself, but

still in an intermittent way (Graburn, 1978). It was out of this northern carving complex that the commercialized carving industry emerged.

During the early stages of commercialization carvings were done entirely by hand using such instruments as axe, file, chisel, hammer and saw. With the increased introduction of electricity into homes during the 1960s and early '70s, the use of electric power tools for carving increased (Mitchell, 1996). Equipment such as electric grinders and drills are now staple tools of the industry and almost all carvers, young and old, use them in their work. This however, has created a working environment hazardous to carvers' health. The electric grinder used to form the basic shape of a carving throws up a cloud of dust from the stone. This cloud of dust enveloping the carver contains many impurities including asbestos. Filtered masks are used to guard against inhalation of the dust but it is a reality that not everyone, at all times, wears a mask. Furthermore, because many carvers work in small huts especially during the winter months (grinding cannot be done indoors because of the dust) to shelter themselves from wind and cold, the dust becomes concentrated. Comments from two carvers graphically depict the conditions many work in:

I wear a mask when I carve, but even then, the stuff gets into my mouth and my lungs. In my community most people work outside in the wintertime and it's very cold. Most of us have bad lungs. The cold weather frosts your lungs and we get sick from being outside for three or four hours. When the weather is bad, you have to go inside, breathing dust, and it gets into the house.  
(Omalluq Oshutsiaq- quoted in Mitchell, 1996: 295)

When I carve, I wait for the wind to blow the dust away from my face. I had a mask to block the talc from the stone, a lot of dust comes up from the stone. But when it is 35 [degrees] below, my breath freezes in it and I can't use it . . . I would like to see a movie camera come around to the North and take a picture of this . . . I really want to see some movies of carvers, in 40 [degrees] below zero, with snow blowing, and then the southern people would understand how serious we are.  
(Uriash Puqiqnak- quoted in *ibid.*: 295)

These daunting and hazardous conditions that carvers work in demonstrate the personal dangers involved in the trade of northern carving.

### **1.3.1 The carving industry in Kinngait**

From the earliest stages of carving commercialization Kinngait has had one of the most successful carving industries in the north. The development of the community carving industry has been deeply influenced by the local co-operative, The West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, established in 1959 (Boyd, 1992). Part of the newly created Co-op included an arts and craft centre under the supervision of James Houston who had arrived in Kinngait in 1956 as a northern service officer of the federal government. This aspect of the Co-op specifically addressed the development and promotion of local art and craft production. Over the ensuing decades the Co-op would experiment with a variety of art and craft, including print making, jewellery, pottery, sewing, typography, and, of course, carving (ibid).

In 1965 the federal government created Canadian Arctic Producers, a wholesaler that would absorb carvings from northern art co-operatives and assume responsibility for marketing and distribution. However, in 1977 frustrated by a lack of control over financial and marketing practices, the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op established its own marketing office in Toronto called Dorset Fine Arts (ibid). This wholesale operation allowed the Co-op to market and distribute, nationally and internationally, all carvings and prints purchased from producers in Kinngait. In this way it could better support the aims of local producers as well as its own viability (Myers, 1984).

In reference to the local Co-op Boyd (1992: 18) explains that, “Perhaps its most significant contribution has been the consistency of its effort to encourage both the sculptural and graphic expression of Cape Dorset’s growing artistic community”. The Co-op, by virtue of its local ownership, offered a structure that could merge economics and artistry in a single vision that regarded carving as integral to Kinngait’s social and economic health. For this reason it has been historically regarded as an important player in the economic development of the community.

Today, the Co-op is the second largest buyer of carvings in the community. As is the case with all carvings bought in the community cash is paid up front to carvers. People can sell their work whenever it is open, Monday to Saturday. Two Inuit managers handle carving purchases.

The other central figure in the local carving industry is the Northern store. Formerly owned by the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), this is a chain of retail stores established across northern Canada at the turn of the century during the height of the fur trade. In the early years of carving commercialization in Kinngait the company provided supplies to the craft centre (Boyd, 1992: 14). Later, as the industry grew, the HBC maintained its purchases and created a southern wholesale division. This wholesale division like that of the Co-op’s, expanded to include an international clientele of galleries and customers. After the HBC sold its Northern Stores Division in 1986 the wholesale division changed to The North West Company. It is presently located in Toronto where all purchases from its Northern stores are sent. It remains one of the largest wholesalers of Inuit art and represents the largest buyer of carvings in Kinngait in terms of the number of carvings bought and money paid to local carvers.

The Northern is located in the centre of town and is the largest building in the community. Inside, it resembles a smaller version (though not by much) of a southern

supermarket selling food, clothing, furnishings, toys, hardware, hunting gear, and carving equipment. A non-Inuit manager purchases carvings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays between one o'clock and four in the afternoon. A small office in the back of the store is used for this and on 'buying days' a line of carvers normally congregates outside of the office late in the afternoon. The manager estimates that between 40 and 60 carvings are bought each buying day. On a yearly basis the number of carvings bought by the Northern is approximately a third higher, by a conservative estimate, than the Co-op's purchases.

A smaller number of carvings are bought by the Polar Supply store (commonly referred to by people in the community as 'Polar Homes' or 'Polar' store), a small retail store built by the non-Inuit owner of one of the community's two hotels. The store offers a limited selection of food and hardware with a larger selection of children's toys, games, and puzzles. It purchases mainly smaller 'souvenir' carvings but also buys some pieces destined for the 'fine' art market. The store deals with approximately nine galleries and stores in the south. It stocks purchased carvings in a back room of the store from where they are sent to the various southern businesses.

Outside of the Co-op, the Northern, and Polar store, carvers can sell to individual buyers in the community. This is the non-Inuit population of the community— teachers, nurses, government employees, tourists, contractors, etc.— who have come from outside of Kinngait to live and work. These individual buyers make up an informal though sizable network of purchasers. Most of these people buy carvings for their own personal enjoyment or to give as gifts to family and friends. However, there are a few individuals who have organized informal relationships with galleries and stores in the south. They buy pieces from local carvers, mainly targeted to the 'fine' art market, and in turn sell them to southern galleries and stores. This trade in carvings is pursued as a profit making

venture for the individual and has been a feature of the local market for at least the past fifteen years (Alia and Allerston, 1987: 19). The Co-op, Northern store, Polar Supplies store, and individual buyers<sup>6</sup> thus make up the different buying sites of the local market.

The income generated over the years by carving gives an immediate impression of the importance of this activity to the local economy. Even by 1959 carving contributed \$ 1, 062 to the average family income (May, Pearson and Associates, 1983: 28). Two decades later, by 1980, community carving income had swelled to just over one million dollars, contributing on average \$ 7, 050 to family income (ibid: 5). At the time of this study, the fall of 1997, it was estimated that carving purchases injected approximately 2 million dollars into the community.<sup>7</sup> A Co-op manager explained that this figure has not fluctuated substantially over the past few years.

As of 1995 social assistant payments in Kinngait totalled approximately \$1, 200, 000 (GNWT, 1995a.: 43). Income from carving is nearly double social assistant payments to the community. This in itself is an important point of comparison, as it demonstrates that carving as an economic activity offers an important alternative to transfer payments. The total community income in 1992 (the most recent year for which statistics are available) was \$ 7, 491, 000 (ibid: 35). If, using a conservative estimate, it is assumed that at this time the money injected into the community from carving sales fell anywhere between

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<sup>6</sup> Another sub-group of the individual buyers in the community include southern gallery and shop owners who from time to time come to Kinngait on buying trips. There seems to be a recognizable sense of antagonism felt towards this group of buyers on the part of local carvers. During fieldwork numerous stories were related to me about frustrating and dishonest buying practices used by some of these individuals.

<sup>7</sup> This figure is based on information provided by local purchasing managers. A manager at the Co-op stated that they had purchased over \$800 000 worth of carvings that year. The manager at the Polar store estimated their purchases that year at approximately \$300 000. With purchases at the Northern store surpassing that of the Co-op's, a reliable estimate puts total income paid to local carvers at approximately \$2 000 000 for the year.

\$1, 600, 000 and \$2 000 000, then it is seen that carving accounted for 20- 25 % of the community's total income. Clearly, carving is an important part of the local economy.

The economic importance of carving is further underscored by contemporary employment trends. The gross unemployment rate in Kinngait hovers around 36% (NIC, 1995b). Of the total potential labour force for the community 89% are Inuit (GNWT, 1995a.). However, from this group only 40% are employed leaving the remaining 60% without jobs (ibid). In light of this exceedingly high unemployment rate for Inuit, it is evident that carving assumes a central role in the generation of local income earning. This is confirmed by statistics showing that approximately 200 persons, 31% of the potential labour force, are considered to regularly carve (ibid). Many people in the community feel that the true figure is probably higher.

The success of the Inuit carving industry has placed it under considerable pressure. As Mitchell (1996: 279) explains, "The arts and crafts programs, carving especially, have been expected to carry the whole burden of northern development for Inuit . . . ". Carving and other art production it was thought, offered an economic panacea that could fill the space between development and underdevelopment. Terry Ryan, a manager of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op has commented that:

Due to the government's failure to develop alternative industry in the north, there is an inordinate pressure on the talent in the north to make up for the lack of development. Craft projects seem to be considered the magic solution to everything (quoted in Mitchell, 1996: 278).

This provides a more balanced understanding of carving in Kinngait. While clearly a prominent feature in the economic life of the community, it cannot be approached as if it is the primary key for development. Such an approach places unreasonable expectations on the community carving industry. From a planning perspective therefore, carving should be approached as an important feature of the community and one that necessitates

support and strengthening so that it may appropriately serve the aspirations and dedication of those who choose to carve.

#### **1.4 Carving and community development in Kinngait**

It would seem that support for the Inuit carving industry is critically needed at this time. According to Terry Ryan, who has managed the affairs and organization of the West Baffin Island Co-operative and its wholesale operation (Dorset Fine Arts) since taking over from James Houston in 1961, there are several issues of pressing concern in the industry. Among them are the quality and quantity of carvings produced by youth.

As Terry Ryan explained during research for this study, there is considerable concern among many southern gallery owners and buyers that the present quality of youth carving does not meet the standards of the 'fine' art market. There is a sense that a schism has appeared between the artistic achievements of older generation carvers and that of younger carvers. Mr. Ryan explained that the future of the carving industry is in question as a result of this perceived lack of quality from youth. This is an unsettling revelation and one that fundamentally demonstrates why examining the place of young people in the Inuit carving industry is needed.

The quantity of carvings being produced by young carvers is of concern in the industry. There is a feeling among the main buyers in the community that youth are producing at a rate that is difficult for the 'souvenir' and 'fine' art markets to absorb. These two issues of quantity and quality are often perceived as being interconnected. Young people, according to the main buyers in Kinngait, seem to focus more attention on how many carvings they can make rather than the artistic quality of what is made. The high rate of carving production is seen as undermining artistic dedication and patience.

In trying to understand these issues and others that influence the community carving industry it is important to talk with young people. A broad appreciation of the experiences and processes surrounding carving is impossible to build without the input from youth themselves. This is a central goal of the thesis.

## **1.5 Thesis organization**

Chapter 2 places this study in the context of theoretical and academic work on northern carving. This serves two purposes. Firstly, it suggests a neglect in the theoretical literature with respect to the experiences of young people. Secondly, it provides a point of comparison between theoretical ideas formed in the south and concerns communicated by northern youth. Community development theories are also discussed to demonstrate how the conceptual framework of the study connects to processes of local planning.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. The structure and approach of the interviews are detailed as well as methodological considerations unique to northern research.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the interviews with youth. Chapter 4 examines the production and selling of carvings. Discussions concerning the various buyers who make-up the local market illuminate structures and organizational features of the market that impact upon youth carving production. The chapter then considers the personal context of production and aesthetic responses that youth discussed. The chapter concludes by discussing health concerns as young people produce in the community carving industry.

Chapter 5 explores the relationships between youth carving, the local economy and the community. The chapter considers how, and to what extent, carving is entrenched in the economic lives of youth. The chapter also examines the social networks that permeate the community carving industry. The interviews highlight the many relationships youth enact with kinship, elders, and other young people as a result of carving. This is contrasted with the lack of information young carvers receive about southern marketplaces and the functioning of the Inuit carving industry in general.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis. It begins by summarizing the main issues and themes explored by youth in the interviews. The information provided by young people is then considered in the context of planning efforts aimed at supporting young carvers and the sustainability of the carving industry. The contribution of the youth experience to regional and international development studies, introduced in the first chapter, is explored further. Finally, important areas for further research as suggested by the work in this study are outlined.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Inuit Carving and Conceptual Framework**

The chapter begins by surveying literature that examines how carving relates with the social and cultural landscapes of northern communities. This survey highlights issues surrounding youth participation in the art industry. From this review the conceptual framework of the thesis is established. The conceptual framework of the study is then considered in the context of local planning and its articulation with community development theories.

#### **2.1 Perspectives on Inuit carving**

In general, the body of theory relevant to this study can be grouped into two thematic categories: 1) theories that consider the positive relationship between ethnic identity, culture, and Inuit art; and 2) examinations of the negative impact of international markets on art production in Inuit communities. The thematic groupings relate to the study because they assess the various positive and negative repercussions for northern communities involved in the commercialization of art and craft. As is demonstrated in subsequent chapters it is precisely these repercussions and the bearing they have on youth life that the carvers explore in their discussions.

A suitable introduction to the two themes identified is provided by Nelson Graburn's work *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* (Graburn, 1976). This publication offered a comparative analysis of art and craft being produced by

various indigenous peoples for global marketplaces. A chapter of the book is devoted to Inuit art in northern Canada assessing its development in aesthetic, economic, and cultural terms. Of relevance to this study are several conclusions resulting from Graburn's analysis. He comments that, "... the market expects models from traditional Eskimo life, not the present-day world of the artists, which include guns, snowmobiles, manufactured clothing, and movies" (ibid: 54). Tastes and demands in global market places can thus constrain local artistic expression. However, this constraint on artistic expression does not exclude the potential affirming qualities that art can assume.

Though undoubtedly the art form started from souvenir models and the cheaper objects are still mere souvenirs, the bolder sculptures, even when made entirely for sale, are important to the Eskimo and have become integrated into their modern culture (ibid: 55).

As envisioned by Graburn, the Inuit art complex is a dynamic interaction between the marketplace and local space. Both negative and positive processes for communities can result from this interaction.

I will now examine in more detail the literature that considers the positive relationship between carving, culture and community. The discussion will then examine how global markets can negatively impact upon art and craft industries in Inuit communities.

### **2.1.1 Carving as a foundation of community and culture**

George Elliot as chairman of the Eskimo Art Council, offered an anecdotal experience he had with the sculptor Piungituk, "Finally to make his point of humanity in search of itself, he brought out an unfinished whalebone sculpture . . . In that moment the gulf that separates our two cultures narrowed a little. We touched but we did not corrupt" (Elliot, 1971: 10). Contemplating this interaction between art and cultures Elliot captured what

he believed to be a defining element of the northern art complex in the gestures of Piungituk:

All along, he has been using the language of art that is universal, the language that can bind cultures together, that can preserve a culture, the language that can strengthen a multi-cultural society without weakening or emboldening one of its members (ibid.: 10).

These words highlight an idea central to much of the writing surrounding Inuit sculpture; that sculpture, and Inuit art in general, as an ethnically distinct art can strengthen Inuit culture and identity within the multicultural mosaic of Canadian society (Svennsson, 1987; Millard, 1987; Mitchell, 1997).

In a report (May, Pearson and Associates, 1983) commissioned by the Arctic Co-operative Limited examining the cultural, social, and economic aspects of carving, the significance of the above ideas at the community level is shown. The report examines the sociological relationship between carving and northern communities and suggests that carving “. . . allows for an expression of cultural identity; is an opportunity for the older generation to have contact and an education time period with young people; is a record of personal history; [and] is a record of social history” (ibid: ii). Carving can thus act as a communicator of culturally meaningful codes and activities.

Inuit artists have expressed how art production including sculpture can fortify and reaffirm culture. Charlie Kogvik, an Inuk carver explains that, “The way I see it, our art is part of a tradition that is still going strong. There are a lot of things you can put into stone. You can put stories into stone, legends that a lot of us will forget. But they will still be there in the stone” (quoted in Inuit Art Quarterly, 1996: 8). William Gruben, another Inuk carver comments that, “I started carving because I wanted to interpret my own thoughts about the stories that I used to hear from elders. I think it is the desire to portray some aspect of our culture that inspires me to carve” (quoted in Inuit Art

Quarterly, 1996: 10). Manasie Akpaliapik, a carver, discusses the relationship between Inuit art, carving and culture “We are and still are trying to document are own history . . . My biggest concern is to record the legends. These are important to us because we use them as guide posts to the old days. If we get stuck in life, we remember the legends and it gives us guidance” (quoted in Inuit Art Quarterly, 1990: 11). As these artists explain, Inuit art and carving assumes a central role in supporting and enhancing the cultural fabric of northern communities.

Svennsson (Svennsson, 1987: 330) outlines the supportive role that Inuit art can provide:

. . . it serves the purpose of keeping the ideas and knowledge alive internally, constantly strengthening cultural awareness among those belonging to a particular culture . . . When one considers their use in external communication the information power of art objects is strengthened further. Here art in various forms presents an ethnic image to the outside world; the information value it has in the expressing of cultural distinctiveness and the reminder of ethnic peculiarity.

Art production, including sculpture, fortifies and reaffirms Inuit culture and identity. It not only maintains vibrant symbolic markers of Inuit culture for the outside, but also communicates and disseminates the knowledge and values contained in those markers to Inuit. By physically rendering in sculpture images and ideas that are culturally significant, carvings can act as a repository of values and themes historically and contemporaneously meaningful for communities (Routledge and Hessel, 1990). In this perspective, carving offers an economic vehicle by which to strengthen local social and cultural structures.

### **2.1.2 Local creations and global markets**

This section contrasts notions of identity formed in-situ with considerations of cultural

meaning formed in global marketplaces. The negotiation of Inuit art and identity mediated in global marketplaces signals for some scholars a process detrimental to the cultural and aesthetic vitality of producers (Swinton, 1972; Graburn, 1976; Carpenter, 1983; Myers, 1984; Geertz, 1988; Mitchell, 1996; 1997).

In many cases the content of carvings can be determined by the tastes and perceptions not of local producers, but of the consuming public. Since consumer demands are often guided by stereotypical beliefs of what for southerners signifies northern life and culture (Wenzel 1991; Stevenson, 1997), carving production becomes a reflection not of locally defined culture but of what southern consumers believe this culture ought to be. Graburn (1977: 190) observes that, "From the near beginning the Eskimos were encouraged to carve what the buyers wanted, most often representations of what the outside world saw as 'Eskimo' . . . ". Likewise, Myers (1984: 142) explains that:

Inuit have learned that southerners place considerable value on the portrayal of the traditional Eskimo lifestyle, and are playing to this by repeating stereotyped themes in their work. The realistic renditions of Inuit engaged in 'traditional' pursuits are marketplace classics, what everyone thinks of as 'Eskimo' and the meagre Inuit commentary which exists also reflects this ideology.

Renditions of hunting and fishing scenes, traditional camp life, polar bears, seals, walrus, geese, and other wildlife, thus become the popularized domain of artistic expression (Graburn, 1993; Hoffman, 1993).

Inuit artists have commented on how market demands can influence the thematic content of their work. Mattiussi Iyaituk, a carver, explains that:

Some people don't allow . . . 'allow' is not the correct word– they don't give us the freedom to create what we want with what we want . . . I've tried to tell them that an artist has the right to create what he feels. When I think of people telling us, 'Okay, you do it this way, or you do it that way,' I feel like it's putting people on an assembly line telling us the size to make, the material to use.  
(quoted in Inuit Art Quarterly, 1996: 4)

In similar tones, Gilbert Hay an Inuk carver comments that, “Right now, at the stage we’re at, everybody is producing art. But we can only produce a certain type of art– the so-called accepted art. It’s the safest place to be” (quoted in *Inuit Art Quarterly*, 1990: 11 ). In this sense, Inuit identity and how it might be communicated through carving is influenced by stereotypes in southern markets that judge what Inuit culture is expected to embody and reflect.

The importance of these contributions is in recognizing the potentially overwhelming power that the marketplace can assume in its relationship with local producers. Participation in commercial art markets can function to subsume local carvers to the ebbs and flows of consumer temperament. The content of carving becomes influenced more by market demand than by local creativity, ultimately undermining local cultural expression. In this way, the elusive and often fickle tastes of distant markets can come to dominate thematic and aesthetic judgment at the site of production.

Part of the transformation of meaning as artistic creations shift between cultural contexts is the separation of products into art and craft. The manner in which northern art is labelled is important to consider for the two categories distinguish the output of northern production. Not all northern carving is art, nor is it all craft, and some writers (Myers, 1984; Svennsson, 1995) have explored the implications of the ‘art’ and ‘craft’ distinction.

In considering the perception of the division of art and craft at the community level Myers (1984: 132) explains that:

The ‘split market’ for Inuit products, commonly delineated as the ‘gallery’ and the ‘gift shop’ trades, roughly parallels the folk distinction we make between art and craft. This distinction made at the level of the market, finds, however, no counterpart at the level of production.

Within the Inuit community art and craft co-exist along a continuum of production.

Svennsson (1995: 99) discusses the practical importance this fluid movement between the sites of art and craft production can have at the community level:

Netsilik [Central Arctic Inuit] . . . artists are firmly sustained by the production of tourist art. The economic value of such production constitutes an essential prerequisite for the continuous development of creative art which shows continual renewal.

At the local level, the labels of art and craft that filter traded artistic commodities into specific categories in the marketplace become blurred and restyled.

## **2.2 Conceptual framework of the study**

The theoretical and conceptual perspectives presented above identify a number of themes relevant to this study. Artistic production has been examined as it relates either in an affirming or undermining way to Inuit culture and community. The broad terrain over which these academic discussions range testifies to the complex nature of art and craft commercialization. This complexity seems to embody an unescapable paradox whereby peripheral communities are absorbed into a system that both supports and constrains cultural expression. The production of Inuit carving and art can provide a means of displaying and communicating stories, activities, and symbols important to Inuit culture and society. However, the commercialization process can also serve to limit and distort the artistic and cultural content conveyed in Inuit art and craft.

The literature on the commercialization of Inuit carving is relevant to this study since it highlights the positive and negative social and cultural impacts that can occur within communities. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter it is precisely these repercussions and the bearing they have on youth life that the carvers explore in their discussions. The literature on Inuit art and carving identified above thus receives critical

input from this study's conceptual framework that focuses on the practical, everyday processes surrounding youth carving production. Such a conceptual framework contributes to past work for three important reasons: 1) it promotes the practical over the symbolic, 2) local issues and voices are highlighted, and 3) a youth perspective is presented. Each of these contributions will be outlined as they relate to this study and the past work on Inuit carving.

The academic perspectives examining the positive and negative effects of the commercialization of Inuit artwork are constructed primarily on a symbolic basis. It is the content of carving that, for some writers (Elliot 1971; Svennsson, 1987; Millard, 1987; Routledge and Hessel, 1990; Mitchell, 1997), demonstrates how cultural information is communicated visually and is thus supportive of Inuit society. For others (Swinton, 1972; Graburn, 1976; Carpenter, 1983; Myers, 1984), it is the content of carving that visually demonstrates how market stereotypes influence and distort cultural ideas. Both of these theoretical outlooks tend to ignore the practical, everyday events that surround these issues because they premise their argument on the physical object. For instance, those writing about the imposition of styles and themes in the commercialization process tell us little about how such an imposition actually occurs at the local level. How do stereotypes become practically applied in the community? There is a sense from these writings that local carvers will inevitably succumb to the fickle demands of consumers. This casts local carvers as a rather powerless and complacent lot. However, it is reasonable to suggest that there are practical circumstances and structures at work in the community that help explain more thoroughly how and why such an application of taste might occur. By appreciating the local processes involved in this imposition of taste a better understanding can be formed as to how planning might be used to help the local industry guard against this feature of commercialization.

Similarly, the academic work that argues that Inuit art and carving strengthens culture and community gives little evidence of how this reinforcement is practically expressed at the local level. Again, what is overlooked are the everyday lived actions and processes that are involved in, and demonstrate, the support of local society and culture through carving. A broader understanding of how carving fits into the contemporary social and cultural milieu is sacrificed by focusing exclusively on the aesthetic content of carving.

The second contribution that the study's conceptual framework offers to previous academic writing is a focus on local issues and voices. Mitchell (1997: 4) has commented that, "What is virtually never considered in all the debate surrounding the authenticity and significance of contemporary Inuit art is what it means to the people who make it". A nuanced and comprehensive understanding of contemporary carving and its economic, social, and cultural contributions to Inuit communities receives critical input from the insights and ideas of individual carvers. Furthermore, this tendency of the academic literature to ignore the views of local carvers serves to homogenize the Inuit carving industry, as if all carvers create and live under similar circumstances and conditions. They do not. Community space, in almost any setting, is a site of hybridization with multiple experiences, realities, and confrontations mixing to express the variety of community life (Geertz, 1983; Korten and Klauss, 1984; Marcus and Fischer, 1986). Much of the theoretical debate surrounding northern carving therefore casts local carvers into a unified mass of experience. This marginalizes the eclectic mix of realities that make up the community carving industry. The study's conceptual framework, by focusing on local views and issues, presents information important for appreciating the daily and practical circumstances surrounding carving production today.

The third contribution the study's conceptual framework makes to the work on Inuit art and carving is a focus on a youth perspective. As far as I can tell from an extensive

search of the literature, such a focus has rarely been featured in the writing on the northern carving industry. While there certainly exist studies that have examined individual artists and captured some of their thoughts and experiences (Eber, 1971; Inuit Art Quarterly; Pitseolak and Eber, 1993), they have focused specifically on older and established artists. The voices that do permeate these studies and that are encountered in the literature in general, are primarily those of established artists that have been involved in the industry since its inception or shortly thereafter. Absent is a consideration of the realities, views, and thoughts of young carvers and their place within the carving industry.

As Dorais (1997) suggests, identity is a dynamic and creative process engaging physical, social, and economic environments in an ever evolving and shifting relationship. Thus, the ways in which young people interact with the carving industry and the ways in which the industry impacts upon youth, entail processes and considerations unique from older generation artists. Indeed, the world of young people is considerably different from that of their parents. As the trade in northern sculpture is a hybrid process of production that joins a diverse group of people including sculptors, art critics, collectors, and academics into the folds of a northern 'artworld' (Myers, 1995), so too are local communities a hybridization of young and old, artist and craft persons. However, it has been the experiences and voices of young carvers that have been ignored in the academic debate surrounding northern carving. This missing perspective is addressed in this study. Consequently, I use a conceptual framework that focuses on youth participation in the carving industry examining the practical, everyday community processes that surround their carving production.

## **2.3 Community development theory and youth carving**

By highlighting some of the central ideas informing community development theory, it will be seen how concepts discussed in development studies relate to this study's conceptual framework. The localized focus of community planning makes this development approach pertinent to the study of youth carvers in Kinngait.

The concept of community development is a term widely traded in academic, governmental, and non-governmental circles. Understandably then, there exist numerous ideas and outlooks that argue not only how community development should proceed but what objectives it should fulfill (Campfens, 1997a). What is of concern to this study's conceptual framework are those perspectives of community development that recognize the multi-layering of communities, that argue that development must include local knowledge and insight in all aspects of the planning process, and that stress the importance of understanding the practical experiences and realities characterizing community life. Each of these perspectives will be examined as they relate to the study.

### **2.3.1 The multi-layering of communities**

Communities, as mentioned earlier, are sites marked by multiple experiences and confrontations. This has often been missed by development theory concerned with macrolevel analysis (Max-Neef, 1989; Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Escobar, 1995). However, it has not been macrolevel development strategies alone that have ignored the stratified nature of community life. So too has community development at times disregarded the multiple layers comprising local space. As Campfens (1997b.: 21) explains, "Appeals for community mobilization to address issues of economic and social

development have often been based on an idealized notion of the community as a 'unitary' concept . . .". Likewise, Burkey (1993:43) indicates that "So-called community development projects seem to have been trapped in their own nomenclature: since we are carrying out a community project, we have to treat the village as a whole entity". An important facet of recent theoretical discussion has addressed this tendency for generalization in community planning.

The variety and differences in community life are conditions important to capture in research on, and the implementation of, development planning. For this reason community planners must be aware of, among other things, the ". . . stratification of communities along the lines of social class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and cultural tradition . . ." (Campfens 1997b.: 22). This helps ensure that the diverse experiences stemming from community living are appreciated. Without an awareness of the different ways in which different groups of people interact with processes inside and outside of their community, an ultimately incomplete portrait will be drawn as to how, and towards what objectives, development should proceed. Since not all individuals face similar circumstances and experiences, the needs of community members and therefore the means by which to meet these needs will vary significantly. This recognition of local plurality understands, ". . . the possibility of multiple representations and identities . . . The acknowledgement of these multiple and diverse rationalities refutes the idea of an emancipatory process that articulates aspirations within one dynamic only. . . ." (Commonwealth of Learning, 1996: 83). In order to gauge the multiple circumstances marking community life, it is sometimes necessary to focus research on specific groups of individuals within a community as a number of practitioners and theorists argue (Chambers, 1983; Holloway, 1989; Ghai and Vivian, 1992). By this approach, research conducted with a specific group of individuals within a

community becomes an integral part of any development process that attempts to incorporate people traditionally excluded from planning agendas.

This need to recognize the heterogenous nature of local space underlines a weakness in the work studying the Inuit carving industry. Overall, this has neglected the diversity of experiences and individuals that make up the industry. Thus, within the context of community development, it is appropriate and valuable to focus research and planning on a specific group of individuals in the community– in this case young carvers. Not to do so would impoverish planning by marginalizing the unique concerns, needs, and knowledge of young people.

### **2.3.2 Local discourse and knowledge in community planning and research**

The recognition of the multiple layers in local space in turn demands that the views and ideas of community members are incorporated into every aspect of the development process. Part of assessing the complexity of community life requires listening to individuals describe, in their own terms and in their own context, the circumstances and experiences that touch their lives. Indeed, it would seem a fairly obvious point that if planning is to properly support local aspirations then it must be guided by local insight. However, as Edwards (1990: 77) explains, this inclusion is often neglected in planning.

As a fieldworker for a number of development agencies, I also knew that much of this research was inaccurate because it failed to incorporate the views, aspirations, wisdom, and imperfections of real, living people. Research and practice were ‘two parallel lines that never met’, and both suffered accordingly.

There are many theorists and practitioners who explain that the research, implementation, and guidance of planning must be determined by local thought. With this recognition, “A search has begun for previously silenced voices, for the specificity and power of

language(s) and their relation to knowledge, context, and locality” (Commonwealth of Learning, 1996: 117). Likewise, as Escobar (1992: 429) comments, “. . . the need is now felt for creating discourses which are more endogenous, which are articulated in relation to internal referents”.

This placing of the development process into the vernacular space of action and perception helps ensure that local individuals become a fulcrum around which research and planning revolves. As Korten and Carner (1984: 207) remark, “In people-centred analysis people and environment are the primary endogenous variables, the point of departure for development planning”. Research by its immersion into the discourse of individuals makes community members the foundation of analysis (Korten, 1984). In this way it is local voice that sharpens the precision of development research. According to Maguire (1983: 27, 29) such an orientation:

. . . brings the focus of research back to individuals and groups in the particular social context being investigated. The purpose of research is shifted from constructing grand generalizations for control and predictability by detached outsiders to working closely with ordinary people, the insiders, in a particular context . . . Research should give them a voice in articulating their perception of their problems and relevant solutions.

In this sense, the framework for local research is a space in which individuals find room to present their ideas. These ideas and insights can then act as a template of issues that form and guide community planning efforts. Consequently, this study allows youth to present their ideas and insights in the hope that their discussions will provide practical information for planning in the Inuit carving industry.

### **2.3.3 Practical processes and issues in community planning and research**

The objective of the study to examine practical, everyday issues surrounding carving

connects to an area of community development theory that argues the importance of focusing research on day to day lived processes and structures.

Without a focus on the practical considerations texturing everyday life an important element is lost; one that explains more completely the sustaining and constraining features of local space. As Edwards (1990: 78) explains:

The practice of development work teaches us that problems are usually specific in their complexity to a particular time and place. In addition it is impossible to understand real-life problems unless we grasp the multitude of constraints . . . and emotions which shape the actions of real people. Conventional research cannot do this because it divorces itself from the everyday context within which an understanding of these emotions can develop.

Research focused on daily lived processes thus offers important input to planning designed to meet the unique realities of a particular community.

For this reason research frameworks must be highly malleable, able to adapt to and accommodate community processes that could not have been anticipated from a distance. A flexible approach to research is necessary when the objective is to “. . . seek to understand the more specific, local reasons that have led people to construct their adaptations to and struggles over the material and cultural conditions of their existence” (Commonwealth of Learning, 1996: 69). As a result, development research becomes grounded in local society and culture. It works to appreciate the multifaceted social, economic, and cultural interactions that individuals have in the community.

The aim of community planning to include practical, everyday issues in its research agenda is an objective that has been neglected in the body of work on northern carving. Since much of the theoretical work has been abstracted from the local level and concerned with the aesthetic and symbolic content of carving, there has been little consideration of the practical, lived engagements that surround carving. By appreciating the lived experiences and circumstances surrounding carving a more comprehensive

understanding can be gained as to how carvers' artistic and personal well-being are supported and constrained as they work in the carving industry.

The review of theoretical perspectives on both the Inuit art industry and community development approaches is used to assemble the conceptual framework of the study. The study focuses on the experiences of young people in the carving industry in Kinngait. It examines the practical, everyday processes and considerations surrounding their carving. An attention to the practical processes and issues characterizing youth carving in Kinngait will offer information important to community planning processes focused on the development and support of young carvers.

The discourse of young people is important not only for planning purposes. It also provides a compelling critique of academic theory. I will consider how the expressions of young people contribute to the academic work examining northern carving. Instead of acting as a rigid landscape of ideas that define the meaning of local thought, theory becomes malleable and contested terrain through which youth discourse moves. In this way more exact contours of understanding can be shaped. To accomplish this the theoretical issues surrounding Inuit carving and art will be interspersed with, and contrasted against, the discourse of young carvers so that it may be shown how local ideas offer critical scope to theory. As Weismantel (1995: 695) explains in reference to research with an indigenous Ecuadorean community, "The opinions of people in the parish should not be interpreted by theorists simply as support for their own positions; these opinions should be used to challenge the very terms on which academic debate is conducted". Young carvers contribute a vital source of thought to the study of Inuit carving and art.

In using this conceptual framework I hope that two often contradictory practices can be pursued simultaneously. Firstly, the illumination of processes and ideas that are of

practical relevance to local community members, governments, and regional organizations who are thinking about how the carving industry might be supported and strengthened; and secondly, the highlighting of discussions that critically inform previous theoretical thought thereby contributing to, and refining it. This is by no means an inventive objective. Rather, it testifies to the vigour of the youths' discourse and the importance of their insight to development and academic studies.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The first section of this chapter outlines the community and territorial research licencing process that precedes research conducted in Nunavut. The use of a semi-structured interview style is then examined in the context of the study's focus. The chapter discusses the research process in Kinngait. Methodological and practical considerations with respect to fieldwork and the interviewing of young carvers are outlined. The concluding section presents the post-fieldwork process of organizing and analyzing the information provided by carvers.

#### **3.1 Pre-fieldwork research**

Any research conducted in Nunavut must receive approval and licencing from the Nunavut Research Institute.<sup>8</sup> A research proposal that outlines the specific topic to be examined while in the community, the methodological approach of the fieldwork, and the reporting of results back to the community is submitted to the institute and the community. The research proposal must be approved by the institute and by representatives of the community before a research licence is issued. Once the licence has been granted fieldwork can begin. The licencing process requires that information (ie.

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<sup>8</sup> The Nunavut Research Institute, located in Iqaluit, oversees the administration and enforcement of the NWT Scientists Act. The act regulates all science and research activity within Nunavut except for research concerning wildlife and archeology.

reports, studies, theses) resulting from any research be delivered to the Nunavut Research Institute and the community.

A research proposal for this study was reviewed by the Nunavut Research Institute and the Hamlet Council in Kinngait during the spring of 1997. The proposal outlined the approach to research with young carvers, research methods, reporting mechanisms, how the respondents' anonymity would be protected, and the overall aim of the study. The research licence for this study ( Scientific Research Licence 0102197N-A) was issued mid-summer 1997 (a copy of the research licence is provided in Appendix 1).

The overall research design must adhere to the *Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North* (Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, 1982). This policy document developed by the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, outlines certain principles that research in the north must adhere to. The licencing process thus requires that the focus of the study is already clearly defined before fieldwork and that the purpose of the research is firmly established. This reflects a demand in the north, and in indigenous communities throughout Canada, that research be controlled and thoroughly monitored by community members (Warry, 1990; Dyck and Waldram, 1993; Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, 1993; Reimer, 1993).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a focus on young carvers has been absent in the work on the Inuit carving industry. Before submitting the research proposal to the Nunavut Research Institute and the community I contacted some people in Kinngait by phone to discuss the possibility and relevance of conducting research with young carvers. Discussions with a manager at the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op and the director at the time of the Community Development department of Kinngait's municipal government confirmed the relevance of working with young carvers.

### **3.2 Semi-structured interview design**

A semi-structured interview style was adopted during all of the 28 interviews conducted in Kinngait. This approach was used so that a more informal, conversation-like setting could emerge. Semi-structured interviews use, at most, a general guideline of themes and topics that the discussion will touch on rather than a list of predetermined questions that formally guide the interview. (Theis and Grady, 1991; Devereux and Hoddinott, 1993). This technique allows questions and more specific areas of focus to emerge as the interview progresses.

Before beginning the fieldwork a general guideline to be used during the interviews was prepared that outlined broad categories through which the discussions would move. The categories included: the production and selling of carvings; the learning of carving; communication and interaction between carvers; social and economic features of youth life; tools and soapstone; and issues related to culture and community. However, after a few interviews had been conducted in Kinngait it became obvious that the guideline needed to be revised to better accommodate the information and ideas discussed by the respondents. The guideline expanded to include ten categories. These ten categories were— carving production; the selling of carvings; health and safety; communication between carvers (including the learning process); information passed on to carvers concerning the industry; motivation for carving; tools and soapstone; perceptions of the place and importance of carving in the community (including cultural significance of carving); considerations of young people and community life; and, feelings and emotions as a result of being a young carver.

Each interview conducted covered the ten categories in the guideline. The interviews would normally begin by talking about when and how a person had started carving. From there the interview would move in and out of the various categories as the discussion unfolded. This outline ensured that similar themes were touched on so that comparisons could be made and evaluated between interviews.

For two important reasons I feel that a semi-structured interview design offered the best possible approach to use. Firstly, because there has been little work done with young carvers it would have been difficult to properly gauge what relevant and practical concerns impact on their lives. For this reason, it would have been counterproductive to draw up a set list of questions with little background information as to the realistic and everyday circumstances that young carvers face. Secondly, it allowed for a better control over the discussion by youth than a set questionnaire could have provided for. In this way, what mattered to each individual and what affected him/her most closely would determine the direction and tenor of each interview. This in turn meant that concepts touching upon the myriad practical issues that surround youth carving but that could not have been anticipated prior to fieldwork could be explored during the discussions. As Wary (1990: 65) points out, “. . . unstructured interviews have been shown to be vastly superior to standard questionnaires employing closed questions, which are commonly regarded as ‘tests’ by Native people and rarely solicit accurate assessment of local lifestyles”. Furthermore, what became quickly apparent during fieldwork were the many common sentiments and situations shared between young carvers. This is not meant to simplify and homogenize the experiences they face. Rather, and this will be made clearer in subsequent chapters, it is indicative of the shared economic and social constraints of young people in the local carving industry and economy.

Participant observation was a central part of the research process. By participant observation I mean the process of living and participating in the life of the community. The research included several visits to young carvers specifically to watch them carve. This helped contextualize the carving process and the physical and practical demands made on a carver during production. Trips out on the land with local families, some of which lasted several days and included hunting and fishing, offered an important insight into the enduring link between the environment and community life. Fieldnotes chronicled the observations and impressions arising from this kind of interaction with people and offered a valuable source of information contextualizing the ideas and concerns raised by young carvers.

### **3.3 Fieldwork in Kinngait**

Once in the community a local research assistant was hired to help form and guide the research. This was informally done by talking with a number of different persons before deciding on one individual. This individual, a male in his mid 30s, worked with me during the entire length of fieldwork.<sup>9</sup> During the course of research the assistant participated closely in the design, guidance, and overall approach of the research. His help and talent went far beyond acting merely as a translator and ambassador to the community. As many researchers have commented, a collaborative relationship between researcher and assistant where the two work more as equal partners recognizes that local

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<sup>9</sup> By referring to the research assistant as 'this individual' I do not mean to deflect attention from the fact that his guidance and help was central to the research process. It is simply necessary to retain confidentiality since any error and problems with the study are solely my responsibility.

input into the research design is invaluable for the ideas and knowledge it adds to fieldwork (Devereux and Hoddinott, 1993; Ryan and Robinson, 1990).

During the initial stages of the fieldwork discussions were held with individuals from the various buying outlets in the community– the Co-op, the Northern, and the Polar store– to compile a list of the young carvers they regularly purchased from. The list was supplemented by the research assistant who knew many of the young people regularly carving in the community. In this way a broad cross-section of carvers was included in the research design. The young people interviewed included beginners who had been carving only a short time and those who were accomplished carvers with many years experience. Young people carving for both the ‘souvenir’ and ‘fine’ art markets were thus included in the research. This helped ensure a comprehensive look at the various experiences marking youth participation in Kinngait’s carving industry.

### **3.3.1 Interviews with youth**

Fieldwork in Kinngait took place over a 7 week period in September and October of 1997. During this time a total of 28 people were interviewed. For the purpose of the study a young carver was designated as anyone younger than 30 years of age. Of the 28 people interviewed, 26 were carvers, 1 was a drawer, and 1 was a jeweller. Among the 26 carvers, 23 were younger than 30 years of age and were between 16 and 28 years of age. The remaining 3 carvers were between 30 and 35 years of age. Except for one female carver and one female drawer, all those interviewed were males. The male gender bias in the group interviewed reflects the gender make-up of young carvers in Kinngait where there are very few young women carving. Table 3-1 lists the carvers and artists interviewed in Kinngait and includes the age, gender, experience, and the artistic medium

for each person interviewed. The table also lists the language and method of recording each interview. This list offers a point of reference for the quotations of the respondents found in the next two chapters.

Each person was asked what language, Inuktitut or English, he/she wanted to have the discussion in. The assistant was present during every interview so that translation could be provided. Of the 23 young carvers we talked with, 18 decided to hold the interview in English. The respondents were also asked if it would be possible to tape record the interview. Of the 28 people interviewed, 13 people agreed to have our conversation tape recorded. In this group of 13 tape recorded interviews, 10 were with youth carvers, 2 were with carvers older than 30 years of age, and 1 was with a youth jewellery maker. A small tape recording 'walkman' with a 90 minute tape was used. Notes were taken during the remainder of the interviews that were not recorded on tape. These notes were typed into a laptop computer following the interview. The tape recorded interviews, which were in English, were transcribed after returning from fieldwork. Each interview was normally between 45 minutes and one hour in length.

Quite simply, the interviewing process involved walking around the community primarily during the late mornings and afternoons introducing ourselves to young carvers. Interviews were held whenever it was most convenient for the person. Interestingly, almost all the young people approached agreed to talk with us. Only on a couple of instances were interviews declined.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> That young people were so accommodating in agreeing to talk with us, I think reflects the fact that they have been largely ignored in studies looking at Inuit carving. Many commented that they had talked to no one outside of the community about their thoughts and ideas concerning their experiences as carvers.

**Table 3-1: List of Carvers and Artists Interviewed**  
(names not used to ensure anonymity of interviewees)

<b>Reference letter for interview<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Method of recording interview</b>	<b>Language of interview</b>
a.	Carver	16	9 years	Hand written notes	Inuktitut
b.	Carver	16.5	2.5 years	Tape recorded	English
c.	Carver	17	12 years	Tape recorded	English
d.	Carver	18	3 years	Hand written notes	English
e. (female)	Carver	19	5 years	Hand written notes	English
f.	Carver	19	2.5 years	Tape recorded	English
g.	Carver	20	10 years	Hand written notes	English
h.	Carver	20	2 years	Hand written notes	English
i.	Carver	20	4 years	Hand written notes	Inuktitut
j.	Carver	21	10 years	Tape recorded	English
k.	Carver	21	10 years	Hand written notes	Inuktitut
l.	Carver	22	11 years	Hand written notes	Inuktitut
m.	Carver	22	2 years	Tape recorded	English

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<sup>11</sup> The last five respondents have not been given reference letters in the table. They are either not youth or do not carve and thus are not directly considered in the text of this thesis.

**Table 3-1 (Continued)**

<b>Reference letter for interview</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Method of recording interview</b>	<b>Language of interview</b>
n.	Carver	24	9 years	Hand written notes	English
o.	Carver	24	11 years	Hand written notes	Inuktitut
p.	Carver	24	6 months	Hand written notes	English
q.	Carver	25	13 years	Tape recorded	English
r.	Carver	25	5.5 years	Tape recorded	English
s.	Carver	26	13 years	Tape recorded	English
t.	Carver	27	8 years	Tape recorded	English
u.	Carver	27	2 years	Hand written notes	English
v.	Carver	28	15 years	Hand written notes	English
w.	Carver	28	2 years	Tape recorded	English
	Jeweller	28	1 years	Tape recorded	English
	Carver	32	15 years	Hand written notes	Inuktitut
	Carver	33	3 years	Tape recorded	English
	Carver	35	28 years	Tape recorded	English
(female)	Drawer	36	?	Hand written notes	Inuktitut

Discussions were held either at the home of the carver or at the assistant's home. Before beginning any discussion time would be taken to go over exactly who I was, what institution I represented, and the focus and purpose of the study. A participant consent form (provided in Appendix 2) was given to each respondent before every interview, that again, detailed the focus of the research and explained that the anonymity of the individual would be protected. This consent form was reviewed and signed by each respondent before any discussion could begin. The Nunavut Research Institute provides a model for participant consent forms that are to be used in fieldwork.

The issue of the language of the interviews is an important consideration. Those that spoke in English were, for the most part, very capable with the language. However, it was clear that at times respondents would be searching for words or having slight difficulty in expressing themselves. This was not the case for those who chose to be interviewed in Inuktitut. However, the flow of ideas and information back and forth between respondent and interviewer by way of a translator is rarely exactly communicated. I recognize that because of my own limitations at not being able to speak Inuktitut and having to rely on translation, that the nuances of what was being said were at times lost to me. I do not feel though, that these complications due to language differences hindered the overall success of the interviews and the sharing of experiences and impressions between the three of us. The research assistant's first language was Inuktitut and he spoke excellent English, so that he was adept at communicating the carvers' point of view.

### **3.3.2 Reporting of the research findings back to the community**

A return trip lasting three weeks took place during July and August of 1998. The

purpose of this trip was to report back the findings from the research.

Discussions and meetings were held with the Hamlet council, various individuals in the community, and with youth concerning the results from the research. A presentation in English and Inuktitut of the research with young carvers was given on the community radio after which people could call in with questions and comments. A copy of the research summary report in Inuktitut distributed to the Hamlet council and interested community members during this trip is provided in Appendix 3.

### **3.4 Post-fieldwork methodology**

After returning from fieldwork the interviews were analysed through a thematic content analysis. The ten categories that acted as an outline for the interviews were used as a thematic guide in the content analysis. The themes identified were– carving production; the selling of carvings; health and safety; communication between carvers (including the learning process); information passed on to carvers concerning the industry; motivation for carving; tools and soapstone; perceptions of the place and importance of carving in the community (including cultural significance of carving); considerations of young people and community life; and, feelings and emotions as a result of being a young carver. By grouping the information from the interviews into these thematic categories the diversity of ideas presented by youth could be organized in such a way as to effectively sort out the similarities, differences, and converging veins of thought in their discussions.

The two chapters that follow– *Production and Selling among Youth Carvers*; and *Youth Carvers, Economy, and Community*– represent a synthesis of the findings from the interviews. The reader will notice that the chapters contain many quotations and excerpts

from the interviews. This was done in the hope that it could be made clear how the findings in the study flow from the insights and observations of young carers.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Production and Selling among Youth Carvers**

This chapter examines the production and sale of carvings in the community. Structures and processes that characterize the community carving industry and how these impact upon and relate to youth carvers are discussed. In reviewing the discussions with carvers it becomes clear that Kinngait is marked by multiple local markets, or buying sites, each of which articulates differently with youth carvers. Factors such as carving prices, regularity of purchases, influence over carving themes, and type of carvings purchased differ between the various local markets young people sell to. The multiple relationships between the carvers and local markets influence both the creative inspiration and personal well-being of youth.

In order to examine these ideas the chapter is organized around the discourse concerning the local buying sites– the Co-op, Northern store, Polar Supplies store, and individuals in the community. The chapter addresses the pricing of carvings in the community, some of the frustrations youth carvers experience, and the creative processes of carving. The chapter concludes by considering the issue of personal health as young people produce in the community carving industry.

#### **4.1 The Co-op and Northern store**

Beginning in 1995, the way in which carvings were purchased by both the local Co-op and the Northern store changed. Both stores at this time introduced the use of a carvers list. These lists contain the names of the carvers in the community that the stores will

purchase from on a regular basis. Before this change, the stores operated with a flexible buying policy that did not restrict purchases to a specific group of carvers. The managers at the Co-op and Northern explained that the need for these lists was made necessary by the volume of carvings being created in the community and the subsequent build up of inventory in their wholesale galleries in the south. Since the lists are made up of the names of carvers whose carvings are selling regularly from their wholesale galleries in Toronto, the managers structure their buying quite rigidly around the names on these lists. The use of the carvers lists represents a recent and significant altering of the community carving industry and the place of young people within it.

To be on either of the lists is to have a 'name' at the store. Being on a store's list means that a person can regularly sell carvings to the store. Each store follows the lists closely, though the Co-op is more flexible in looking at carvings by individuals not on their list. The way this policy impacts on carvers is outlined by two youth when discussing how they sell their carvings:

Q: *So you've only sold two pieces to the Northern, have you tried to go [back] there?*

A: *No. Those guys have a list.*

Q: *So you don't even go in?*

A: *No. I don't go to Northern to sell my carvings. I have no name there.*  
(Interview w)

Q: *Tell me about when you're finished a carving, where do you sell it?*

A: *We [girlfriend and himself] sell it to Northern, but they just started to buy carvings today. Co-op, I try Co-op. They just keep saying 'no' we've got to use people's names instead. I try and take it to the Co-op and they keep saying no.*  
(Interview t)

It is generally understood that to approach either of the stores one must have a name on their carvers list. Indeed, the carving manager at the Northern explained that due to high volumes at their wholesale gallery she was, with few exceptions, only looking at those carvers who were on their list. The Co-op and the Northern pay the highest prices

for carvings in the community. To have a name on either list has obvious repercussions on the income earned from carving. Being able to get your name on either list becomes an essential consideration for any carver in the community. In discussing this a young carver explains how, as he understands it, a person is put on the Northern store's list:

A: *... like if I don't have a name in their store, I have to make a polar bear to try and get a name. If they buy it then I got a name. Ever since I made polar bears I have a name.*

Q: *Why polar bear?*

A: *Because they are the ones that they are mostly buying down south or anywhere ... Sometimes I used to ask them why is it only polar bears that ... get a name. They couldn't answer me. All they say is the 'polar bear'.*

(Interview m)

As another explains, "*... they mostly say they want polar bear, walking bear. That's what they tell us*" (Interview g). Entry onto the list at the Northern is therefore clearly restricted in terms of theme and style. It is also, as a carver describes, restricted in terms of size, "*I only carve small ones, because if I make a big one they won't take it. Northern just likes smaller carvings, because of the price*" (Interview r). A youth (interview i) who had recently been put on the list at the Northern explained that the store had liked the small polar bears he had brought in so, after about 5 months, they added his name to the list. What becomes clear from these comments is how the Northern store determines what type of carving, and of what size, will be used as criteria for judging entry onto the store's list. In fact, this was confirmed by the buying manager for carvings at the store. The manager stated that it is only by bringing in small polar bears that a carver might be considered for inclusion on their list.

The use of a carvers list is more flexible at the Co-op. According to young people I spoke with the Co-op does not appear to favour any one theme or type of carving. As one carver explained, "*They can buy anything*" (Interview l). The Co-op is also more accommodating than the Northern with respect to looking at carvings brought in by

people not on their list. There is nevertheless a feeling among many young people that one cannot approach the Co-op without having a 'name' on their list.

The list at the Northern store is split into two categories. On one list are the names of carvers who can be paid an unlimited amount for their carvings according to size and quality of the work. On the other list, carvers can only be paid up to \$200 for a carving regardless of size or quality. In explaining a recent sale to the Northern a young carver illustrates the functioning of this limit:

Q: *What kind of carving was it, can you tell me what happened?*

A: *Polar bear, walking bear. I asked for the price and they called out to Toronto first [Northern's wholesale gallery] and the guy from Toronto said that is the price that we can buy.*

Q: *How much was the price?*

A: *\$200. I was asking for \$450, or something like that. They had a limit for \$200 . . . If it's a big carving they sold it for \$200. That was a rip-off.*

Q: *They wouldn't go higher than \$200?*

A: *Only the famous people go higher than \$200.*

(Interview t)

Many of those interviewed viewed the use of this limit as unfair and often exploitive. As explained in the comment above the price paid for a carving becomes a function not of the size or inherent quality of a piece, but instead is determined by the price ceiling on the carvers list. The purchases from carvers on the unlimited price list at the Northern also appear to show greater flexibility in terms of the type and style of carvings bought. Carvings purchased from people on the limited price list however, normally reflect traditional themes of hunting, camp life, and wildlife scenes. Thus, a relatively arbitrary categorization limits the potential income of young carvers and restricts their stylistic production.

In establishing two separate lists the Northern store has created a structural distinction between youth and elder carvers in the local industry. It is the older, more well known carvers that dominate the list with a limitless pricing regime. As one youth explains,

*“Yes, they have a \$200 limit by name, but the other guys, like the well known carvers, they’re on the other price. They can get higher”* (Interview q). That this feeling should be shared by the young people throughout the community becomes understandable when the exact make-up of the carving lists are appreciated. At the time of fieldwork approximately 80 carvers were on both lists at the Northern. Of these 80 carvers, 27 were younger than thirty years of age, and of these 27 youth, only 2 were on the list of carvers who could be paid more than \$200 for a carving. The outcome of this for the local industry is succinctly demonstrated by the buying manager when explaining that their store, *“Gets the volume off of the ‘younger list’ with smaller carvings and pays the big bucks for the older guys on the smaller list”*. Furthermore, the manager explained that besides the market popularity of polar bears any wildlife carving is always saleable, whereas shamanistic and more abstract, interpretive carvings have limited appeal and thus are not regularly bought by the store from carvers on the limited price list.

The Co-op has a smaller percentage of youth on its carvers list as compared to the Northern. At the Co-op, 5 of the 25 people on the carvers list were youth. This has created a sense among many of the young people interviewed that the Co-op deals primarily with the older, more established carvers in the community. As one youth carver comments, *“Yes, there’s a list at the Co-op. Only famous people can sell their carving to the Co-op, famous people”* (Interview c).

By structuring buying around these lists, the local carving industry has been segregated by age. While it has always been the case that older, more established carvers have commanded higher prices on account of their market popularity and skill, what has happened since the introduction of the carvers lists is that this phenomenon has become ‘institutionalized’ within the community. The use of these lists has drawn recognizable lines in the community carving industry that function to differentiate local carvers with

respect to their age and the thematic content of their work. Youth by virtue of their place on the price restricted list at the Northern must produce smaller pieces that cater to a demand for wildlife carvings or traditional northern scenes such as hunting or camp life. Since there are so few youth on the Co-op's list where there exists a more accommodating buying program, the influence of the Northern's buying process becomes even more pronounced. The desire of the Northern to buy only a certain type and size of carving is not lost on the youth who have a clear understanding of the carvings sought by the store and produce accordingly. As one youth commented in discussing this buying habit, "*. . . it's kind of restricted. It depends on the buyers at . . . the Northern. They usually ask for polar bear or men. I know they're going to buy it. It's what they want*" (Interview s). Securing a name on the Northern's carving list requires not only skill and talent, but equally as important an adherence to a limited set of carving themes. There exists then, a relationship between store and carver that serves to influence the type of carvings produced by young people.

At this point it is possible to see how the expressions of the youth are able to inform and sharpen some of the theory discussed in the second chapter. By understanding the relationship between store and carver as it is lived in the community, a more meaningful explanation is offered as to how market demands and 'outside' tastes influence local carvers. Myers (1984: 142) explains that, "Inuit have learned that southerners place considerable value on the portrayal of the traditional Eskimo lifestyle, and are playing to this by repeating stereotyped themes in their work". When this comment is considered in the light of a youth perspective, what becomes clear is that it is not so much carvers exercising unfettered choice in deciding to 'play' to these stereotyped themes, but it is a decision often imposed upon them by the particular features of the local carving industry. For example, the themes and styles associated with the second 'limited' list at the

Northern demonstrate how consumer and market demands become structured in practical and recognizable ways into local buying sites. It is not simply local carvers pandering to stereotyped market demands. It is the more complex day to day relationship between carver and local market in which styles, themes, and sizes of carvings are influenced and determined by buying habits established by local stores. Furthermore, as youth explain, it is evident that this market influence over carving theme and content does not apply evenly to all carvers in the community. The presence of only a few young carvers on both the Co-op's list and the price 'limitless' list at the Northern, shows that they are less able to resist the influence of stereotyped consumer tastes than their older generation counterparts are able to.

What is gained from the discussions is a more complex understanding of how market demands and carving production is lived, experienced, and structured in the community and the implications these have for youth. In this light, it becomes clear that the community incorporates structures and processes that intimately influence the works of young carvers, and are thus critical to appreciate for a more complete view of northern carving. The next section will examine the other community buying sites outside of the Northern and the Co-op.

## **4.2 The Polar store and individual buyers**

The Polar store and individuals such as teachers, nurses, government employees, construction workers and other non-Inuit living in the community will at times buy carvings. It should be noted that these individual buyers in the community are predominately 'Qallunaats' (non-Inuit) who have come from elsewhere to live and work in Kinngait. Four important qualities mark these purchasers; they are supplied primarily

by youth, the buying is sporadic and unpredictable, the prices paid for carvings are the lowest in the community, and it is mainly 'souvenir' type carvings that are bought.

The management at the Polar store regularly deals with three galleries and six other galleries on an irregular basis. The Polar store has no carvers list. The store mainly purchases smaller 'souvenir' carvings, but it also buys a small amount of larger more expensive pieces destined for the 'fine' art market.

In discussing the selling options outside of the Northern and Co-op a youth explains, "*. . . sometimes I sell to teachers, that's where I usually sell to— to teachers. When I can't sell my carvings to somebody else [Northern and Co-op], the only place I can go is Polar Homes and teachers*" (Interview w). As another discusses:

A: *. . . I don't go to Northern to sell my carvings. I have no name there.*

Q: *So the only place you can sell to is the Polar store?*

A: *Yes, and teachers and stuff. . . [but] it's very hard. Sometimes you go back and forth.*

(Interview f)

In describing the lower prices paid for carvings from the Polar store and individual buyers a youth explains that, "*. . . the prices are quit a bit low, but at the Northern it's all right . . . The lowest prices are from the teachers and Polar Home*" (Interview j). The low selling prices when dealing with the Polar store and individual buyers were discussed by many of the youth interviewed. A defining characteristic then of the Polar store and individual buyers is that the price paid for carvings are the lowest in the community.

These local markets are also characterized by inconsistent and unreliable buying. Unlike the more robust buying power of the Northern and Co-op, the amount of cash circulating in the community on a daily basis can be quite limited. Several times during fieldwork the Northern store and Co-op, who operate saving accounts for people (there is no bank in Kinngait), both exhausted their cash supply. For several days people were unable to draw money from their saving accounts. This is important to understand since

the sale of carvings to individuals and to the Polar store depends on the buyer having immediate access to cash. In a small northern community such as Kinngait the amount of available cash can fluctuate dramatically on a weekly and daily basis. A carver comments that, “. . . *Polar Supplies mostly runs out of money for a couple of weeks. It's been doing that for a while now that little store*” (Interview m). The manager explained that carving purchases are often limited since profits must be re-invested not only into the store, but also into the newly constructed hotel that is operated by the store's owner. A young person observes that, “*They're sometimes short on cash. They have to have some cash, so they just trade sometimes at the Polar Supply. It's more like a trading post sometimes over there. It's a very confusing place sometimes*” (Interview w). This ‘trading post’ quality of the store was mentioned often by youth. Instead of paying cash for a carving the manager will sometimes extend credit to be used for purchases in the store. However, as many commented, this credit can be rather meaningless since there is little of practical use that can be purchased such as food, hardware and hunting material<sup>12</sup>. As one carver said, “. . . *money is the only object sometimes. You need money . . . That store has not many groceries, just some toys, junk*” (Interview r).

Selling to individuals in the community involves walking door to door mainly at night calling on teachers, nurses, government employees, etc., to see if they are interested in buying a carving. Normally the carvings being sold door to door are small carvings and cost between ten and sixty dollars. At times some larger carvings costing several hundred dollars are sold this way. In discussions with some of the teachers, nurses, and government employees, they described how they are solicited almost every evening at their home to buy carvings. Furthermore, in practically every such visit the carver is a

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<sup>12</sup> However, it should be noted that because the Polar store will extend credit to people it seems to have a better and more personal relationship with the community than the Northern Store .

youth. It was a rare circumstance when an older carver would be selling door to door in the community. Youth described that the best time for selling in the community is immediately following pay days when there is a larger supply of cash in the community. Selling in this market is a hit and miss, day to day process. A youth describes this fact, “... *especially when nobody is buying around– the teachers or cops. Especially when you have no food or something that you want. You just sit down and do nothing and wait for another day*” (Interview f). Clearly, it can be a frustrating experience trying to sell in this way.

As outlined above, the Polar store and individual buyers represent local markets characterized by lower prices and insecure and unreliable purchasing in comparison with the Northern and Co-op. Furthermore, the majority of carvers in these markets are youth who must therefore contend with the instabilities and insecurities.

It may well be the instability of these markets combined with the cut back in carvings bought by the Northern and Co-op, that has given rise to the ‘pieceworking’ of carvings for individual buyers who are not affiliated with any particular gallery or business. There are a number of individuals in Kinngait who buy carvings on a regular basis and sell them personally to galleries and dealers down south. These people are non-Inuit who have migrated into the community to manage local businesses, work in construction, or fill governmental positions. On occasion these individuals will commission a specific type of carving and give soapstone that they have bought themselves to a carver. In almost every case these ‘piecework’ carvings are for sale down south.<sup>13</sup> Few, if any, are

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<sup>13</sup> A director of the Co-op explained that this trade in carvings undermines the industry’s price regime. Individual buyers will often sell to galleries at prices below those of the Co-op and Northern. This process, though not often discussed in the literature, has been evident for at least the past decade—see Alia and Allerston. 1987. “The Once and Future Market”, *In Up Here*. Oct/Nov. pp. 18-22.

requested for personal reasons beyond making a profit. A discussion with a young carver highlights this process:

A: . . . *I have to make a big Inukshuk right now. You can finish a big one in three hours. It's only shaped like that* [gesturing outline of carving].

Q: *How much do you get for one that big* [foot and a half tall approximately]?

A: *About \$300 to \$400. But it's going to be really cheap with* [name of buyer] *because he bought the soapstone.*

Q: *So he gives you the soapstone?*

A: . . . *that's his first time. So I'm going to have to make it. I had to make it today and I haven't started out yet. He's going to give me \$100 for it.*  
(Interview m)

The price paid for carvings obtained in this manner, because of the nature of the relationship, is well below prices normally paid in the community markets. Furthermore it is youth, as a result of their relative exclusion from the more secure markets of the Co-op and Northern, that would appear to be most susceptible to this type of buying. Given the tenuous nature of the carving industry it could be argued that this form of buying might become more prevalent and influential in the community carving industry. It is youth carvers, unestablished and without secure outlets for their products, who would come to be the staple carvers for this market; a market that subsumes individual creativity and productivity to outside taste and price control.

While there are obvious difficulties with the informal carving market in Kinngait it does contribute to the development of young carvers. Individual purchasers in the community represent a training ground of sorts for beginner carvers who cannot immediately sell to any of the stores. This market represents a useful niche in which junior carvers can develop their talents. However, it is important to consider how accessible the more dependable and supportive markets of the Co-op and Northern are to young carvers. It seems that the use of carvers lists at both stores entrenches the separation between the two markets. The widening of the gulf separating the market of

the Co-op and Northern and individual buyers is important to appreciate since it is the latter market that is conspicuously marked by unreliable buying and cheaper prices. Therefore, by impeding the movement of younger carvers out of this 'training' ground more and more youth are left with no other option then to remain in the weakest community markets.

The discussions with youth demonstrate the multi-layered reality of the community carving industry. In Kinngait, the different markets are each characterized by their own particular traits. Table 4-1 outlines the main features of Kinngait's marketplace. The table summarizes the defining aspects of the local buying sites and how these in turn interact with young carvers. There is not one unified structure but a highly differentiated community industry containing multiple layers. This must be understood when considering the lives and experiences of young carvers, as they often inhabit the most precarious and tenuous layers in the industry. Furthermore, an understanding of these layers reveals community structures and everyday events that form and preserve the insecurities young people must contend with.

In discussing the pricing of carvings in the community the next section further explores how this heterogeneous layering of the industry affects youth.

### **4.3 Pricing**

The way in which carvings are priced in the community applies, like the lists used at the stores, differently to youth and elder carvers. Respondents frequently discussed how, when selling a carving, they are rarely given the price they ask for particularly when selling to the Northern and Polar stores and to individual buyers. As a youth explains, “. .

**Table 4-1: Young Carvers and Kinngait's Market Structure**

<b>Buying Outlets in Community</b>	<b><u>Co-op</u></b>	<b><u>Northern</u></b>		<b><u>Polar</u></b>	<b><u>Individual Buyers</u></b>
<b>Carvers List</b>	Yes	Yes– 2 lists · unlimited price list · \$200 limit list		No	No
<b>Presence of Young Carvers</b>	Very few youth	<u>Unlimited list</u> 2 youth	<u>Limited list</u> 25 youth	Mainly youth	Almost entirely youth
<b>Price for Carvings</b>	Highest in community	<u>Unlimited list</u> Same as Co-op	<u>Limited list</u> Less than Co-op	Less than Co-op and Northern	Lowest prices in community
<b>Type of Carvings Bought</b>	Mainly 'fine' art	<u>Unlimited list</u> 'Fine' art	<u>Limited list</u> Mix of 'fine' art and 'souvenir'	Mainly 'souvenir' with some 'fine' art carvings	Predominately 'souvenir' with some 'fine' art carvings
<b>Stability of Market</b>	Reliable buying from those on list	<u>Unlimited list</u> Reliable	<u>Limited list</u> Reliable	Sporadic and unpredictable	Highly sporadic and unpredictable
<b>Control of Carving Themes</b>	Freedom of expression	<u>Unlimited list</u> Freedom of expression	<u>Limited list</u> Influence over size and themes	Influence over size and style due to 'souvenir' target market	Influence over size and style due to 'souvenir' target market
<b>Ease of entry for young carvers</b>	Difficult for entry onto list	Difficult for entry onto both lists		Open and receptive to entry	Open and receptive to entry

. every time I sell my carvings, I say \$300 for that. I get \$200, \$250. All the time the price goes down” (Interview s). Another carver (Interview h) explained how he had recently gone to the Polar store with a large piece that had taken three days to carve. It was worth he thought about \$500. However, the manager stated that the store would only give him \$160. This process cuts across most of the buying outlets. A youth (Interview v) described how he had recently gone to the Northern with two large carvings and had asked for between \$850 and \$900 for each carving. The manager stated that they would pay no more than \$400 for each piece. Tired of carrying the carvings from home to store, and aware of the lower prices normally found outside of the Northern, he sold them for \$400 apiece. The experience of having prices undercut was discussed time and again during the interviews. From these comments it can be seen that carvings are often bargained for when purchased in the community.

Two rhetorical questions asked by a young carver underscore how this process is not only economically discriminating, but how it discriminates between generations of carvers: “*Why can't I get the price I want? Why can old guys get the prices they want?*” (Interview o). Another young carver bluntly comments, “*The older ones get their price.*” (Interview g). These comments reflect a feeling among many of the young people interviewed that they are denied the ability to realize a fair selling price for their carvings, whereas older carvers normally control the selling prices for their work. Young people seem to be offered little explanation from the stores as to why this happens. This pricing system is generally understood as reflecting the popularity of the person selling the carving. When one is popular and famous down south then one can determine the selling price for a carving. Indeed, this is a typical characteristic of the market for art. Nevertheless, it creates a sense of frustration among young carvers as they are consistently denied what they see as fair value for their work, while more established

carvers are better able to set their own prices. The appreciation of this pricing regime is significant, as it further demonstrates how the buying system works at multiple levels within the community.

To consider further some of the frustrations experienced by youth, discussions involving young people's emotional and personal well-being will be examined.

#### **4.4 Discontent among young carvers**

The interviews highlighted the frustrations and disappointments that can surround the issue of selling carvings. Much of this frustration can be attributed to the Co-op's and Northern's change from an open buying policy to one that is guided by a carvers list.

Some of those interviewed had regularly sold carvings to the Northern and Co-op in the past, but had subsequently found their name absent from the newly created lists. Needless to say this creates a sense of confusion among youth. When asked how a person's name might be added to one of the lists some of the youth talked about making sure the quality was good; waiting until "*. . . some of my carvings down south are selling, then I can start to go there [Co-op] again . . .*" (Interview t). Some were not entirely sure. As one carver said when asked why his name was left off both lists, "*. . . they never explained. I don't know why. They're only looking at the really big carvers. I think so?*" (Interview m). These comments capture the paradoxical nature by which the buying system has been structured around these lists. On the one hand they have formalized and systematized the purchase of carvings, but on the other hand there is no obvious or specified route by which a person may enter onto the lists.

A discussion concerning a person's attempt to sell to the Co-op demonstrates the frustration felt. He explains that, "*. . . they announce on the radio that anybody can go*

*and sell their carving. When we go there [Co-op] they just say that I don't have any name . . . That pisses me off . . . Most of the guys my age they try and sell their carvings down there, they get pissed to"* (Interview r). Another stated that the price limit at the Northern makes him "*. . . feel very paranoid*" (Interview o). In commenting on the sense of frustration he has felt when constantly rejected by the stores, a youth admits:

*"Sometimes I feel like throwing the carving to their face"* (Interview h). Indeed, this sentiment has been occasionally acted upon. In referring to situations involving both the Co-op and Northern a youth comments that *"Sometimes we used to throw that carving. . ."* (Interview q). A manager at the Co-op stated that within the last year the RCMP had been called on a number of occasions to help diffuse violent situations involving young carvers. According to the manager they have been contacted by cooperative managers from other communities. These people have wanted to know how Kinngait's Co-op has dealt with violent incidents involving youth carvers since they too have faced the same situation. Similar outbursts have also occurred at the Northern Store.

These outbursts I think, offer the most visible and plain example of how the change from an open buying approach to a more restricted structure has impacted on youth. The fact that these events have involved younger carvers demonstrates that it has been this group that has had to react most thoroughly to the changes in the community carving industry. These are manifestations of the anger youth feel at being marginalized in the weakest and most insecure community carving markets. It also points to the alienation that some young people may feel in the rest of their lives. Understandably, it cannot be suggested that these outbursts are solely the result of events occurring in the carving industry. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that anxieties encountered in the industry can exacerbate feelings of insecurity and alienation already felt by young people as a result of economic and social difficulties they face in the community.

The purpose of highlighting these responses from youth is not to cast blame or criticism in any one direction. It should be clarified that the Co-op has been put in an unfortunate and unenviable position due to changing industry conditions. They have historically been an integral component of not only the Inuit art industry but also of economic development in the community. Therefore, there is a sense that the Co-op is compromising one of its fundamental objectives— namely the support of the community carving industry. As one youth mentioned, the use of names at the Co-op “... *pisses me off*” since the “... *town owns the Co-op*” (Interview d). Unfortunately, without support and left to its own devices there is little the Co-op can do about this situation. Like any retailer, it must ensure that it is commercially healthy and viable before it can earnestly pursue the development of Kinngait’s carving industry.

The preceding sections explored processes and structural features of the carving industry that influence both the selling and production of youth carvings. However, this does not tell the whole story of the creative process of carving. While it is true that the thematic and stylistic expression of youth carving is often highly influenced by local buyers, it is equally true that there exists a vital and vibrant personal sense of expression at work among young people. This creativity is manifested throughout the act of carving; in the personal imagination committed to carving, in its connection to the environment, and in the articulation of what might be called a youth ‘aesthetic’. The remainder of the chapter explores these themes.

#### **4.5 Creativity and carving**

In the comments made by youth describing how they begin to carve a piece of soapstone there is a clear demonstration of the personal expression and imagination that

is committed to carving. These show that carving is not solely an economic activity for young people.

Q: *How do you decide what you're going to carve when you first start out?*

A: *I see the whole carving before I even start the soapstone. I see some bear in there . . . I see it before starting— that's how I do it. I try and find the right bear in there.*

(Interview w)

Likewise, another youth explains that before beginning to carve, “*You usually look at the rock first and decide what's in there and what's not in there . . . I always try and decide what it's supposed to be*” (Interview q). As they describe, the initial stages of any carving involves an imaginative interpretation of what the final carving will look like. The shape of the rock predetermines what types of forms may be carved from a particular stone. A carver mentions that the chosen image, “*Depends on the soapstone— the size of it; the shape of it. When it's thin I usually make the owl. If they're a triangle or rectangle then I make a human or seal*” (Interview c). When asked where the ideas come from another explains, “*From my mind. I just imagine it— how am I going to fix this*” (Interview j).

The comments portray the imaginative expression that underlies the act of carving. That the above comments are from carvers who produce both ‘art’ and ‘souvenir’ carving testifies to the fact that all carvers, to some degree, take part in this mental engagement between person and stone. This is in contrast to the literature on carving where issues like the production of souvenir art, and the catering by carvers to market demands and tastes, casts an overly simplistic portrait of what is actually involved in carving. For example, in reference to northern carving Carpenter (1983: unpaginated) asserts that, “Art and poetry are channels whereby passions reveal themselves. Increasingly this souvenir industry reveals subservience. It's not the art of a free people, but merely a means of exploitation and manipulation.” Or, as an organizer of Inuit art exhibits in France

explains, “You have to watch out for the second-rate commercial works that to some extent tarnish the image of Inuit art” (in Pelaudeix, 1998: 21). Talk of carvings being ‘stamped out’, the advent of ‘grinder art’, and the ‘repetition’ of images for both the souvenir and art markets demeans the creativity of carving casting it as a mindless pursuit, as if creating a carving was simply an act of picking up tool and stone. It is not. Whether producing art or souvenir, your first walrus or your hundredth, what the young people interviewed for this research have explained is that the act of carving involves a personal and creative engagement. The process of carving out of a piece of stone, a polar bear, an owl, a hunter, or a seal, regardless of who ultimately purchases it, demands a dedication to skill, technique, and practice. These thoughts parallel comments raised in the second chapter discussing the blurred distinction between art and craft in northern communities, such that “This distinction made at the level of the market, finds, however, no counterpart at the level of production” (Myers, 1984: 132). Indeed, in listening to youth carvers explain their approaches to carving it can be argued that while not all carvers are artists, there can still exist a fulfilling sense of personal expression and accomplishment when carving pieces that will be sold in the ‘souvenir’ or ‘tourist’ markets.

#### **4.6 Carving and the land**

Interviews with carvers frequently brought forth comments that described how carving connects young people to the environment. This point seems important to elaborate, for this issue— the link between community and land— is often at the heart of discussions examining the social and cultural vitality of contemporary northern communities.

In several instances youth describe how their experience on the land is translated into their carving. A carver explains that while he is on the land he purposefully watches the animals and people, “. . . so I won't forget anything that I want to carve. That's how I do it” (Interview s). He goes on to explain “. . . I try and think when I see a seal or walrus or polar bear or hunter, I started to watch them and 'how can I try and carve them'? I started keeping [them] in my mind so the image can be like those.” Several others described this same contemplation of animals and scenes confronted on the land with an eye for translating them into their carvings. One carver (interview i) described a recently completed carving of a seal hunter. He described how experiences of hunting on the pack ice helped him style and detail the carving. During another discussion (Interview l) a youth brought out a carving he was working on of a person carrying a caribou. His description of caribou hunting illustrated how his experiences had helped guide the shape and form of the carving.

At times this infusion of the environment into carving can be intensely personal.

A: *I usually do dancing bears and sometimes mother bear with cub.  
That's what I do. . . .*

Q: *Why do you do those ones?*

A: *It reminds me, because about 20 years ago we were attacked by a polar bear down at the camp. That's why I started in bears. We were lucky nobody was hurt, my father was out hunting while the bear came in. That's how I got interested in bears.*

Q: *How old were you when that happened?*

A: *I was about five years old, very small . . . That's why I'm always interested in bears-- to remind me in some way.*

(Interview w)

This comment also demonstrates that the production of polar bears carvings, which are favoured for instance by the Northern store, are certainly not always a product of imposed market demands and tastes.

The discussions indicate that in many cases there is an intimate relationship between the creative process of carving and experiences with the surrounding landscape. For

some young carvers this connection is something that they feel as an integral part of their carving and personal life. Several of those interviewed discussed their preference for carving while on the land. This can provide a quiet and undisturbed environment beneficial for carving.

*“At an outpost camp it's fun. It's a lot quieter, you take your time, concentrate better”* (Interview l).

*“We won't be worrying about anything else, [it's] nice and quiet, not too many people”* (Interview b).

*“... I really like it. It's better than in town... I make better carvings, because when I'm in this town people ask me for anything... I always have to stop”* (Interview c).

*“Most times camping is better. When you carve- talking with your grandpa or your boss [camp leader], and ask him 'how do you guys make better carvings'? And they tell us just try and put what you see in the carving.”* (Interview q)

As well as providing a tranquil atmosphere benefiting the creative process, being on the land provides a setting conducive for communication between generations of artists. The creative benefits of a camp setting are seen as important to share. In a telling statement speaking of the value and importance that some place on their connection to the land, a youth (Interview d) described how he would like to have an outpost camp where people could go to carve. As he explained many people do not have the opportunity to regularly, if ever, stay at a camp to carve. This would be a place where people could take their time, relax, and not have to rush their carving.

In presenting these comments I do not mean to imply that their importance lies in showing how the environment may or may not be related to aesthetic considerations, or that such a connection between carving and the land must be a necessary part of Inuit art. To do so, would be to dilute the message contained in the youths' remarks. I think the importance of the young people's comments lies in how they connect to discussions

examining the social and cultural currents of contemporary northern communities. Central to these discussions is the consideration of the social and economic threads linking community to the environment. In most Inuit communities a productive and meaningful relationship between land and community is viewed as fundamental in giving strength and support to culture and identity (ICC, 1992). The comments of young people demonstrate that the link between land and community is a significant part of many youths' lives. Furthermore, this link has social, cultural, and economic significance. It would seem therefore, that in contemporary communities the carving industry assumes a focal position connecting young people to the land.

#### **4.7 Youth aesthetic**

From discussions with youth carvers it is evident that an aesthetic common to this group exists. The defining characteristic of this aesthetic is a valorization of attention to realistic detail. It is the presence of accurate details in a carving that many youth describe as signifying a good or impressive carving. This feature was commonly used to distinguish between what they felt were unappealing or poor carvings and those of better quality.

A consistent theme throughout many of the interviews is a belief that accurate detailing in a carving signifies aesthetic and technical excellence. Many youth comment that they not only try to realistically detail a carving but that they enjoy the challenge in doing so. One youth explains that it is important for him to try and be different, to "*Make a new legend. . .*" (Interview h) and doing this meant putting "*good details*" into the carving. In explaining how the carvings that he puts the most work and effort into are those rich in detail, a carver comments that, "*. . . when I'm really into it and making*

*details— it's really hard, making so many details. You have to think to make details"*

(Interview f). When making human figures for instance many youth explained how they tried to carve the hands, the figures, the face, the arms, etc., as faithfully and intricately as possible. This attention to detail attempts to convincingly capture a realistic portrait of the image being carved.

On several occasions during the interviews youth brought out copies of *Inuit Art Quarterly* magazine<sup>14</sup> or other Inuit art books and pointed out pieces they felt were unappealing. Invariably these carvings were those of a more interpretive, surreal, and blockish nature where the image or purpose of the carving was not easily identifiable. During an interview when a youth and his girlfriend were pointing out such carvings from a book, he asked rhetorically "*. . . when we see carvings like this . . . we see something a lot uglier than my carvings . . . How would they stop buying carvings when they buy not a nice one from somebody else? Why would they tell us to stop carving for that?*". This comment succinctly illustrates the confusion as a result of the aesthetic ideal pursued by many youth. Their carvings tend to be discriminated against most thoroughly on the market but they nevertheless attach a great deal of aesthetic pride and purpose to the works they create.

It is frustrating for youth when they see carvings that seem poorer when judged against their own sense of artistic merit commanding much higher prices and popularity. As one young carver explains, "*The famous people make a lot of money besides the younger carvers. Even though the . . . detail is better they [youth] get a lot less*" (Interview r). Another expresses similar sentiments when commenting that, "*Some of the older carvers carve really good, and some of them, they carve crappy carvings and make*

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<sup>14</sup> The *Inuit Art Quarterly* is published by the Inuit Art Foundation based in Ottawa. The quarterly magazine provides information about northern art, artists, and exhibits.

*a lot of money. I find that my carvings [have] much better detail, sometimes*" (Interview s). While youth do at times make such comparisons between their carvings and those of their elders, they do not feel frustration towards older carvers. Frustrations resulting from these comparisons are directed towards the functioning of the industry and the ambiguities and inconsistencies it seems to embody. Youth are critical of buying practices in the Inuit carving industry that do not seem to value their aesthetic judgements. Young people are not critical of the aesthetic sensibilities of older carvers but question why their sense of what is artistically and aesthetically valuable is not recognized in the Inuit carving industry.

It is important to appreciate the youth aesthetic since it indicates the presence of an articulated sense of artistic and stylistic merit particular to this age cohort. This aesthetic demonstrates that youth are not simply pandering to the themes and styles favoured by store managers or magazine pictures, but that a refined sense of what is stylistically and artistically worthy guides their carving. An understanding, on their own terms, and by their own hands, of what is stylistically virtuous exists and flourishes among young carvers. This offers another example of how carving production is not always dictated or guided by market standards in Kinnigait's carving industry.

Discussions concerning aesthetic and stylistic perceptions were offered by young people carving for both the 'fine' and 'souvenir' markets. This further demonstrates how art and souvenir, separated as distinct categories in the marketplace, are more fluidly integrated at the community level. Such a conceptualization joins with Svennsson's assertion that art and craft co-exist along a continuum of production in which "The economic value of such production [craft] constitutes an essential prerequisite for the continuous development of creative art which shows continual renewal" (Svennsson, 1995: 87). The comments of youth carvers offer an important addition to this statement.

They demonstrate how the production of souvenir carving is not only economically supportive, but also stylistically, technically, and aesthetically supportive of the 'fine art' industry. Therefore, instead of viewing craft production as something derogatory to both carver and carving it can be seen how craft and art production are connected and mutually affirming in an artistic sense.

#### 4.8 Carving masks and youth health

This final section of the chapter explores the issue of personal health as young carvers produce in the community carving industry. Discussions revealed that many youth regularly work without the protection of a mask.

A constant cloud of dust that engulfs the carver is thrown up when carving with an electric grinder. Filtered masks that cover the mouth and nose are used to reduce the inhalation of soapstone dust when carving. As discussed in the first chapter, the dust from soapstone is extremely damaging to the lungs and health of carvers. However, discussions revealed that many youth carve without a mask.

In the group of 23 young carvers interviewed just over half, 12 people, stated that they regularly carve without a mask. Some mentioned that they wrap a rag or shirt around their mouth for protection. Many explained that they carve with the wind at their back, believing that most of the dust is blown away from their face. A youth explains:

*Q: Do you wear a mask?*

*A: No. I've never worn a mask. Never.*

*Q: Do you think that it hurts your lungs?*

*A: Yes, sometimes yes. When there's no wind . . . It's okay without a mask when there's a wind.*

*(Interview f)*

Another carver, when asked if he uses a mask comments "*No, no. I just face the wind and start grinding . . . It doesn't go to my face that much*" (Interview p).

Some people described the adverse effects they have felt on their health as a result of carving without a mask. A youth who admitted that he has used masks only sporadically over the ten years he has been carving, explains "*. . . I'll be carving for probably another 5 years or so. I'm going to quit soon. I have a problem with my lungs, from the dust*" (Interview q). Likewise, another explains that he is trying to carve without power tools because, "*I'm trying to stay off from the dust . . . Because one time I was working and I couldn't breath anymore, so I stopped using power tools*" (Interview r). A young carver states, "*Once I got sick from the dust in my lungs. I couldn't get rid of it*" (Interview a). These remarks demonstrate the serious health consequences as a result of carving without a mask. Furthermore, the comments show that the danger from soapstone dust impacts significantly on young carvers. This is not a problem only for older carvers who have had many years exposure to soapstone dust.

Young people however, do have a clear understanding of the threat to one's health from inhaling the dust. As a carver discusses, "*Yes. [It's] very harmful. There was a guy who got cancer— [name of carver]. He died. From the dust, smoking dust. He got cancer and died a couple of years ago*" (Interview b). This connection between soapstone dust and cancer was raised frequently during interviews. A carver comments:

A: *The dust from the soapstone, you can get cancer from it.*

Q: *Would you say that most of the young guys have masks?*

A: *No. I talk to them about wearing masks— 'You're going to get sick.' One guy died from cancer, from soapstone, a famous guy . . . He was about 40 or 50.*

(Interview s)

A paradox emerges from discussions concerning the use of carving masks. On the one hand there is a clear understanding among young carvers of the dangers associated

with inhaling soapstone dust, but on the other hand there are many who regularly carve without a mask. This raises an important question— why do many young people work without a mask? Answering this question is difficult as the issue involves compounding choices of personal responsibility with choices influenced by economic and social circumstances. Some of the young people interviewed commented that the masks were uncomfortable to wear, did not fit properly or were too hot. Some explained how the masks blocked a person's view, making it difficult to see when carving. The cost of the mask and filters was also raised as an important consideration. As a youth discusses:

Q: *Do you see a lot of young carvers carving without masks?*

A: *Yes. Most of them. They are usually white up here [pointing to face]. Some of them always try to carve when it's windy because the dust just blows away by the wind . . . I think they're not looking after themselves. The masks are very expensive, around \$32, and the filters you have to buy are \$30 too, so most people can't afford them.*  
(Interview m).

The purchase of a mask must be considered in the economic context in which many youth live; living day to day on a limited income.

In more expressive tones a person discusses the many young carvers he sees working without masks:

*They don't care. They just carve away most of them . . . There's one guy who doesn't give a shit if he gets cancer. He just carves away inside the shack sometimes. I told him once before, 'You better use a mask man.' He told me, 'I don't care if I die.' As long as he makes money".*  
(Interview q)

I think this last comment points to the troubling convergence that can occur between the health problems inherent in carving and the lives of some young people. Given the difficult economic and social conditions that some youth must confront, attention to one's future health may be overshadowed by more immediate concerns involving day to day living. The repercussions to health as a result of this situation are severe in an industry where exposure to carcinogenic soapstone dust can be a daily occurrence.

The fact that a significant number of youth are jeopardizing their health by carving without a mask should be of vital concern. In fact, they may be the generation of carvers most at risk from the dangers of soapstone dust. Unlike their parents who carved with the gradual introduction of power tools into the industry, young people are introduced into an industry where power tools and grinders are standard equipment. As a result, exposure to soapstone dust begins from the earliest moment a person first begins carving. This continual exposure to soapstone dust without the protection of a carving mask makes for a dangerous situation that can have serious consequences for the health of youth. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the profits collectively earned by businesses and galleries in the south are made while many people, on a daily basis, sacrifice and undermine their health for the carvings that support this business. The fact that there exists, at this time, no formal or structured mechanisms linking business, government, and individuals to help ensure the health and safety of local carvers, jeopardizes the future health of carvers for the immediate needs of the industry.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Youth Carvers, Economy, and Community**

This chapter begins by examining how the carving industry relates to the economic lives of youth. To examine this relationship the economic factors motivating youth towards the carving industry and how carving relates to other employment available in the community are discussed. The discussion examines how the economic link between young people and carving contextualizes the issues of the quality and quantity of their carvings. The personal well-being of youth will be considered in light of the economic considerations that join them to the industry. The chapter then discusses how a locally sensitive view of the relationship between youth and Kinngait's economy can inform theoretical perspectives examining Inuit carving.

The social networks in Kinngait built-up around carving are also explored in this chapter. The chapter considers how carving contributes to meaningful relations between youth and their elders and family. Carving equipment and the mining of soapstone and how these aspects of the community carving industry benefit from and contribute to the social networks enacted by carving are also discussed. Finally, I look at the contacts youth have with industry insiders (local and southern buyers, galleries etc.) and the information they receive about the Inuit carving industry.

#### **5.1 Economic motivation for carving**

The relationship between carving and economic concerns of youth life must be

considered in the context of Kinngait's economy. All of the 23 youth interviewed explained that the main reason they had first taken up carving was to make money.

There are few employment options for youth in Kinngait. Given the limited opportunities for earning an income, carving becomes one of the few ways to secure food, clothes, housing, and every other amenity needed to support oneself and family. As one youth explained, "*. . . there are hardly jobs out there. There's mostly carvers to make that. I think carving is the only way to make money, because there are no jobs*" (Interview b). This sense that carving is the only way to earn money was raised repeatedly during the discussions. A young carver explains that, "*. . . when there's no jobs available, it's the only thing to get money and buy something, something to eat. That's why I started doing carvings*" (Interview f). In commenting on the opportunities made available to him by local employment another states that, "*. . . carving was more important than jobs in my life*" (Interview o).

This feeling that carving represents one of the few opportunities for earning an income is a dominant theme in the discussions with youth. This is significant because it demonstrates that carving is a fundamental vehicle for realizing economic productivity in a community facing high unemployment. The importance of this form of economic productivity is further underscored when understood in the light of family dynamics. Youth who are parents and supporting children when asked about their motivations for carving, in almost every case discussed how it helped them in providing for their children. A young man who had been carving for six months explained (Interview p) how he had started when he was 16 but stopped shortly thereafter. When asked why he had started again he stated that he needed money to support his girlfriend and two children. Another explains that:

*I'm 27, I've been carving ever since I got kids, trying to support them. I couldn't get any job so I started carving— looking at my father carving and trying to do what he was doing. That's all I do is carve, nothing else. That's what I can do to make a living.*  
(Interview t)

Thus, in many cases the motivation to carve comes as a direct result of trying to provide for children and family. The opportunity that carving can give to help feed one's children, clothe them, pay for their necessities and wants, and the significance this has for youth is important. A young carver affirms that, *"Everything is all right when I'm doing carving. When my family has nothing I have to do it. They want me to keep on carving"* (Interview r). Given the limited job market in the community carving can be the only way in which a young person can, outside of social assistant payments, meet the needs of his/her children.

The comments demonstrate that economic considerations are a prominent motivating factor when choosing to pursue carving. For contemporary youth, carving has become the dominant activity that allows for a socially and economically productive link between person, family, and community. In order to further examine how carving fits into Kinngait's economy, the next section describes how carving compares to other employment in the community.

### **5.1.1 Carving vs. other community employment**

Carving interacts with the local economy in a fluid way. Some of the young people interviewed had held jobs with the Northern Store, the Co-op, the Hamlet government, and various contractors in town since beginning to carve. Young people move in and out of carving sporadically taking up other employment as opportunities become available.

Of those who had worked outside of the carving industry, almost all commented that carving seemed to be a better way to earn money.

One of the major drawbacks to most employment in the community is the low wage earned.

A: . . . *I quit at the Northern, because it was too cheap.*

Q: *What were you doing?*

A: *Stock boy.*

Q: *It was cheap?*

A: *Yes— \$7.50 an hour. Too cheap.*

(Interview j)

Another carver compares the lower wages associated with employment in the community to carving income— “ . . . *the people in town who are working— they make only \$400 bucks every two weeks. I can make that in three days or less*” (Interview f). In more expressive tones, a young carver makes a similar comparison:

Q: *Do you do other work?*

A: *Yes. I used to but not anymore. Down there.*

*They were ripping us off— [name of construction company].*

Q: *What was happening?*

A: *Ripping off people . . . So I quit. We were supposed to be making \$800 a week and they were paying us \$500 week. So they ripped us off. 14-13 hour days.*

Q: *So you can make better money carving?*

A: *Yes, much better.*

(Interview m)

The comments are indicative of the widespread belief among those interviewed that when compared to other forms of employment, a person could earn more money carving. It should be understood that this is critical in northern communities where the cost of living is substantially higher than in the south. For example, food prices are at the least twice as high than in southern supermarkets. At the time of fieldwork a loaf of white bread at the Northern Store cost over \$2; four litre bags of milk around \$10; Kraft Dinner— \$2; and 500 grams of rice just over \$2. It is important to recognize such disparities in food prices since they serve to undermine the food security of Inuit. In

connecting the cost of living to economic and youth issues Campbell (1997: 107) explains that, "The high cost of food is of increasing importance in view of the . . . high rates of unemployment, and the trend among young people toward a higher consumption of store-bought than traditional country food". By appreciating the cost of living in Kinngait it is understandable why comparisons between carving income and income from other sources of employment are important to youth.

Income comparisons are not the only considerations drawing youth to the industry. There is a feeling among young people that carving, as a vocation, is more interesting than most employment to be found in the community. Many youth discussed the rather unappealing and unrewarding nature of working the entry level jobs which are available in town. In contrast, carving allows a degree of personal control over one's effort, space, and time and this is recognized as a positive benefit of participating in the carving industry. As one youth states about his recent work as a stock boy, "*I was working for Qallunaat ways at the Northern*" (Interview o). Carving then can be seen as a form of economic resistance to the 'white' working world. Indeed, the need to shape and amend southern working habits to the particular social and cultural context of northern communities is an alternative receiving close attention in the north. Discussions at a recent conference, 'The Future of Work in Nunavut Conference', held in Iqaluit March of 1997 captured this point. In reference to the conference Muk-Talk, a newspaper published by the Baffin Regional Youth Council, commented that:

There was no stronger point than the need to bring Youth and Elders together in order to strengthen our society. The lack of communication among the two was recognized as being one of the main blocks to creating employment while respecting and applying our traditions through our work in Nunavut (Muk-Talk, 1997: 8).

I would also contend that because a significant amount of the employment in the community is controlled and managed by outsiders (except for the Co-op and the municipal government), youth see little potential for one day advancing to assume these more prestigious managerial positions and thus have little incentive to devote time and effort to lower, entry-level positions. Therefore, one of the reasons why carving is the dominant industry in terms of youth employment is that it offers a more valued work environment compared to other jobs in the community.

## **5.2 Issues of carving quantity and personal well-being in the carving industry**

The comments by youth about the economic and personal factors motivating them to carve provide important insight into the increased number of carvings being produced in recent years. During a discussion at the Co-op a manager expressed concern that the community is becoming saturated with carvings. He noted that it is among youth carvers that the most dramatic increases are being seen. The presence of the carvers lists at both stores bears practical testimony to this observation. Some people in the community, particularly the managers of the local buying outlets, refer to the speed of carving by grinder, the efficiency of repetitiously carving the same piece, or the general ease at making money through carving when explaining the proliferation of carvings produced by youth. I think however, this phenomenon also points to the fact that the carving industry has assumed a position as the most important economic opportunity for the community's youth. The economic landscape in the community provides so few meaningful and productive options for them. The high number of young people participating in the industry and their apparently high output is indicative of the void in the local economic fabric that has left youth with few options. The number of young

people carving indicates that, despite formidable obstacles, they are striving to be productive and that they want to work for their income.

The day to day success a young carver achieves can affect his/her personal attitude and outlook. As one youth explains,

*. . . that person who didn't want to buy the carving tells him that and the guy who was carving, he just feels low and he won't want to carve anymore because his carving doesn't work. The Co-op doesn't want them, he won't carve anymore because he felt so low about what they said (Interview j).*

This comment I think captures the depth of the relationship that can form between carving and youth. Carving, whether for art or souvenir markets, is done in order to realize an income. For many youth it is important that they succeed in selling their work since there are few other alternatives by which to earn an income in the community. To understand this is to appreciate how a lack of success in carving can lead to feelings of frustration, anger, self-doubt, and anxiety.

During an interview one young person discussed how a perceived lack of success in carving can affect feelings of self-worth:

Q: *How many carvings do you make, say, in a week?*

A: *Maybe 10 carvings in a week sometimes. Most not so big, small ones*

Q: *And how much do you get for. . . ? [responded before finishing]*

A: *It's kind of hard to tell you. Well I won't tell you how much it is.*

Q: *That's okay.*

A: *Because it's not much of a good price to me. It touches me too much to say the price.*

Q: *It feels kind of bad to say. . . ?*

A: *Yes. It's very, very disappointing.*  
(Interview w)

An individual's sense of confidence, merit, and self-worth can become closely related to how one performs and achieves in the carving industry. This is more expressively discussed by another carver:

A: *You have to have a name in the store to sell a carving. At the Co-op they only buy from people that have a name there.*

Q: *So it's difficult when you're first starting out.*

A: *Very difficult. I've seen people suicide because of how hard it is to carve. It's hard work. I think twice now I've seen two people suicide because they don't sell their carvings. I think that was the reason why they killed themselves.*

(Interview q)

This is a troubling statement. While the youth can only speculate as to the crises behind the suicides, the fact that he attributes a failure in carving as precipitating the action is significant. It dramatically captures the extent to which carving can assume paramount importance in the economic and social lives of youth. A youth's sense of self-worth, achievement, pride and purpose can become profoundly attached to his/her relative success in carving.

### 5.3 Local economic considerations informing theory

The appreciation of the economic and practical considerations motivating youth towards the carving industry has implications for academic debate on Inuit carving. According to some writers, artistic expression among carvers has been undermined by a pursuit for monetary gain in the carving industry (Swinton, 1972; Carpenter, 1983; Mitchell, 1996). As these writers explain, carving is pursued to make money and not with a dedicated attention to individual artistic expression. Mitchell (1996: 282) observes that:

Inuit are forthright about the fact that they produce art for money . . . There has always been a direct relationship between carving production and consumption . . . [When] a carver needs thirty dollars, he makes a thirty dollar carving . . . Most Inuit carvers produce what are referred to by some as 'gas money' carvings.

Unfortunately, when distanced from the realities of community life this observation tells us little about why there is, or should be, such a close relationship between carving and economic considerations.

Given the limited employment opportunities and the desire and need of youth to provide for themselves and family, it is understandable why such a binding relationship exists between economy and carving. Taken out of local context the above comment describes little about the daily, practical considerations that have to do with food, with clothing, with family, and with a personal sense of social and economic accomplishment that carving can provide. It is not simply the act of selling ‘art for money’ – it is the act of striving for economic and social meaning in the face of local economic obstacles confronting young people.

The manner in which young people participate in Kinngait’s economy has a strong influence on what they carve. Since for many youth, their ability to earn an income rests almost entirely upon their success in the carving industry, and because (as outlined in the previous chapter) the markets they must sell in favour stereotypical carving themes, they have little choice but to produce and cater to themes and styles they know will sell. With few other ways to earn money it becomes imperative to carve what the local store managers and individuals are buying. What is evident is the complex way in which market demands occurring in wider spheres are structured into local buying markets and how these in turn connect with, and in some ways are exploitive of, the marginalized economic position of young carvers. In the face of chronic unemployment and striving to find an economic and socially fulfilling space in the community, they do not have the security to produce carvings that differ from tastes and desires firmly rooted in the industry.

A manager of the Co-op during several discussions mentioned that he often tells young carvers to take their time with carvings, to explore different ideas and expressions, and that above all they must be patient and wait until the markets (ie. galleries and the buying public) are familiar with their work. This can take many months. However, without dependable employment alternatives to support themselves while waiting for their carvings to become 'known' and because of their relative exclusion from the top earning markets of the Co-op and Northern, the majority of young carvers must concern themselves, at all times, with creating carvings that they know will sell immediately. Furthermore, because they must sell to the local markets with the weakest prices quantity of carvings sold rather than their artistic quality is most important. Theoretical discussions about the quality and quantity of youth carvings must be understood in light of Kingait's economy and how youth interact with the circumstances of the economy as they attempt to find meaningful and secure places in it.

### **5.3.1 Where is culture? Where is tradition?**

The preceding discussion makes clear the economic importance of carving in the lives of youth. It could be inferred from this that carving is largely equated with the ability to earn money; devoid of artistic and cultural meaning. In this perspective carvings are in effect a form of currency. During the interviews I asked youth how they felt carving was important to their community and culture? In many cases, as described above, they would discuss economic considerations related to carving. The young people seldom elaborated on how tradition and culture might be contained in and communicated by carvings. Indeed, some writers (Swinton, 1972; Carpenter, 1983; Myers, 1984) have commented that a significant amount of the northern carving produced does little to

portray or express Inuit culture. Such a conclusion is not warranted as it misses more profound processes working below the surface.

The generation of carvers I worked with, unlike their parents, has grown up in a community where carving has not been a 'new' or 'introduced' feature. It has been from the earliest moments of their childhood a defining and fundamental part of community life. On numerous occasions when talking about carving young people simply stated– "*It is the Inuk's way*"; "*It is part of our culture*"; "*It is our culture*" (Interview n; Interview k; Interview d). For youth these statements need no elaboration for they cut to the core of a sentiment that sees carving, and has always seen carving, as an intrinsic and sustaining part of everyday community life. This suggests that it is carving as *process*, as *lived experience* in its entirety, that signifies an activity that is culturally meaningful. It is the entire process of carving– travelling for soapstone, carving the rock, watching others for help, helping a family member with sanding and polishing, thinking through what carving is in the shape of the stone– that signifies for youth something that is culturally unique to Inuit life. It is not simply the carved object that embodies cultural meaning. It is the multiple acts and relationships surrounding carving that are loaded with cultural and social significance. In this way it is seen how carving is intimately ingrained in the cultural and social lives of youth.

This conceptualization can offer important context to theoretical ideas discussing the connection between art, culture, and identity. Most of these theoretical discussions, as mentioned in chapter two, take as their point of departure the carved object (Svennsson, 1987; Lipton, 1987; Hoffman; 1993). Ethnic identity, cultural values, and traditional knowledge are transmitted, both to outsider and insider, by the visual content and presence of the sculpture. As Routledge and Hessel (1990: 12) explain, it is the presence of the sculpture that ". . . aims to convey some truth or reality about Inuit

culture”. However, because so much focus is placed on the physical object itself what becomes lost is how the process of carving is also the vehicle conveying culturally meaningful ideas. As the comments of the youth explain, it is the entirety of the carving process and not just the final carved object that can embody culturally and socially significant values and ideas. Linger (1994: 293) asserts that, “The social world . . . is not, however, a set of boxes within boxes with a treasure (of perhaps, only more boxes) at the centre. It is people doing things . . . It cannot be boiled down to a key, a set of meaning ‘conveyed’ or ‘embodied in’ symbols”. By considering how youth identify with, and absorb carving into their everyday lives, a more holistic and locally sensitive view is gained as to how carving relates and contributes to the cultural and social fabric of Kinngait.

The words of young people add critical commentary to theories discussing art, ethnic identity, and culture. They demonstrate that theory must accommodate the myriad, everyday experiences that surround and give meaning to the carved object. By clearing such a space in the theoretical terrain a more complete appreciation is gained of the interactions between carving, culture, community, and individual. This idea will be expanded on in the next sections of the chapter. The study will explore how the community carving industry is infused by social networks that support carving production and that affirm relationships important to social and cultural aspects of community life.

#### **5.4 Carving and social networks in Kinngait**

The discussions with youth make clear the many relationships between young people,

family, and elders that are established and strengthened through carving. The act of carving is supported by, and in turn supports, social networks throughout the community that enhance relations between kinship and generations.

Young people, like almost all carvers in the community, carve by themselves. However, the carving industry is supported by communication networks that link young carvers with family members and with other elder carvers in the community. Young carvers' relations in the community are fluid, constantly moving between the solitude of carving and the interaction they sometimes seek from their elders and peers.

Interaction between youth and elders seems to be most intense when a person is just beginning to carve. During interviews the respondents were asked how they had learned to carve. Of the 26 carvers interviewed, 21 stated that they had learned to carve from an older family member. This learning process, as they explained, involved watching their relative carve, asking questions throughout the carving of a piece, and possibly helping with tasks such as filing or sanding. A young carver explains that while learning to carve family members would, “. . . tell me— *'think about what you're going to do before you carve. Look at the soapstone before you carve it.'* That's what they tell me, mostly my uncle” (Interview b). By watching the carving emerge beginners gradually learn the basic techniques. Some of the youth interviewed said that without the presence of an older family member to guide their learning they would not be carving today. That the majority of those interviewed learned how to carve from an elder family member indicates the functional importance of kinship in carving. Indeed, it is reasonable to say that the industry is maintained by these apprenticeship relationships. The appreciation of this process is significant as it demonstrates that the carving industry perpetuates and is renewed by relationships between youth and their elder family members.

In some cases family members see carving as the best way for a younger relative to be economically productive and thus motivate them to learn. Some respondents explained how an older family member had told them that carving would be the only way to support themselves in the future. To encourage their success family members had advised them to carve the styles and themes most regularly purchased by local buyers. As one youth explains:

*My father makes polar bear a lot, that's what I like. He said to me once– 'the animals are the most expensive'. The most expensive one he ever made was the polar bear. He told me and I started to try and make polar bears.*  
(Interview s)

Another comments:

*My carvings, dancing bears, I tried to make them interesting to buy, and I did the same dancing bear all the time because my mother used to tell me– 'if you do this kind of bears that you like, then people will start to buy it'. That's what she used to say.*  
(Interview w)

Kinship relations therefore, not only work to teach young carvers the technical skills of carving, but also function to advise them about the marketplace and the selling of carvings. How some youth make sense of and understand the industry is guided by immediate family members. These relations become a support mechanism by which information is communicated to them in the hope that it will increase their chances of success in carving. The fact that both youth and their elders see this support as valuable to a person's success in carving attests to the importance placed on this relationship by both generations. It further demonstrates how many elders pass along their skill, knowledge, and insight to younger relatives.

This close relationship between beginner carvers and elders during the learning process seems to lessen once a person can carve on his/her own. This does not signify a

complete break in relations but is an inevitable response of youth wishing more independence. Throughout the discussions youth frequently explained how, when needing help or advice, they would seek out those family members they had originally learned from or another elder carver who could be of help. Though they prefer to carve on their own, there is a reliable and constantly used informal network of communication between young and elder carvers in the community. As a carver explains about receiving help from elders:

*I ask them . . . how do you carve better ways or something like that? I started to ask them about their carvings, because there are a lot of people doing different carvings and soapstone, [and] a lot of people I see doing carvings. Most times I watch [name of elder carver], my friends. I watch them.*

(Interview c)

Youth who have been working for many years will often watch elders carve pieces or styles that they are trying to learn. A young carver comments about visiting an area of the community where many carvers live, “. . . *sometimes when I see somebody carving from over there, I tried to look at the carving, how they make it, so I can do it alone. I do that sometimes*” (Interview m). Similarly, another described (Interview o) his frequent visits to an elder who carves in a style that he finds inspiring and is trying to learn. He considered the visits and discussions to be extremely important to his carving. This informal, tutoring relationship allows youth to connect with elders who can pass on carving skills and advice needed for their development. As one carver comments, “. . . *I always ask them [elders]- ‘how does he carve?’ Or ‘teach me anything.’ I do everything on my own, but they help because those are the only guys that you can use when you’re growing up . . . That’s why I’m trying to keep the old way. Trying to do it*” (Interview s). The guidance of elders is a form of support that many young people understand as valuable to their success as carvers.

The relationships connecting young and elder carvers also serve to link young carvers to each other. In much the same way that beginners will learn carving from an older family member, some had been taught by a close friend. Of those interviewed, 5 stated they had learned how to carve from friends. Furthermore, in the same way that young carvers will seek help from elder carvers in the community, they will often call on other youth for advice. An experienced young carver describes the many beginners that come by for help:

*Beginners usually ask questions, they ask a lot . . . Some people come by all the time and say— 'how do you do this? How do you do that? I wish I could do that,' they tell me. 'Don't think too much when you're trying to carve, just think about what you're trying to make, not to worry too much. Don't stop, just keep trying'. That's what I tell them. 'Just keep trying and you will get better and better and you'll feel more comfortable.'"*  
(Interview t)

Information about carving flows from elders to novice carvers and between youth.

#### **5.4.1 Carving and youth-elder communication**

The connection that many youth have with elders because of carving is a relationship that some discussed as being important for their personal well-being . As one young carver states, when describing the importance of elders to youth, *"I think it's important, so that they [youth] can learn and start on with their life a little bit better"* (Interview o). Another mentioned the time he had spent carving and out on the land with his *"best elder"*. Not only did the elder share carving ideas with him, but taught him, *" . . . so many names in the landscape. . ."*, where the soapstone is and how to get it, and where the *"fish paths"* and skidoo trails are (Interview v). Significantly one youth, when asked about the connection between young and old, stated that they *" . . . have to get more stories from*

*elders before they die*” (Interview b). He believed a close relationship between youth and elders was a necessity in that it allowed for the communication of cultural ideas across generations. However, he felt that the communication between youth and elders was weak so that they were not, in fact, hearing enough stories. Many young people see their relationships with older carvers as personally fulfilling as it is through these relationships that they are given the chance to connect with the history, geography, and culture of their community.

The processes discussed above frame both the positive and problematic aspects of contemporary relations between youth and elders. A local manager of the Co-op explained that the communication between young and old is of great concern to him. In many respects he feels that the relationship between the generations may be weakening. According to him, at an elders conference held the previous summer in Kinngait for people throughout Nunavut, a main point raised by those in attendance was that youth must not stop visiting with their elders. The transmission of language, culture and traditional knowledge depends on this. It is to these concerns that the youths’ discussions about their relations with family members and elders as a result of carving are of importance.

The discussions show how the carving industry is supported and permeated by intergenerational social networks. Learning how to carve, for many youth, requires the cooperation of older family members. Elders are thus able to pass on to their younger relatives skills and knowledge that are highly valuable both economically and socially. Furthermore, while young people are indeed independently orientated, this process of learning from older carvers is maintained by social networks in the community that link youth to elders when help is needed. I think it justifiable to state that the functioning of the contemporary carving industry is maintained by these informal kinship and

intergenerational relationships. They ensure that skill, knowledge, and technique is spread through the community. Consequently, the carving industry offers youth the chance to maintain meaningful and productive relationships with family members and elders.

The illumination of the social networks in the community carving industry that form cooperative relationships between youth, kinship, and elders lends perspective to theories examining the interaction between northern carving and global marketplaces. As presented in the second chapter, theoretical discussion tends to polarise around two positions: first, commercialization as a process that denigrates cultural expression by influencing the themes and styles produced by local carvers; and second, commercialization as a process supporting ethnicity by communicating and strengthening culturally unique symbols in global marketplaces.

Lost between the two theoretical positions is how the global processes of commercialization might be absorbed and filtered by the social matrices of local space. In Kinngait the diffuse social networks functioning within the industry illustrate the dynamic merging of social structures supportive of Inuit communities with the commercialization process. The cooperative kinship and social relationships that historically maintained northern life mediate the movement of the global marketplace into community life today. This is not to negate the effects that external market forces can have, rather it indicates the persistence of local social structures that orientate their functions in response to activities associated with global economies. The perspectives of young carvers contribute a more nuanced view of the meeting ground between local art production and global marketplaces. Here it is seen how local social networks may infuse an introduced activity, permeating it with cooperative relationships meaningful and typical of traditional life, and charging the activity with social and cultural significance.

### 5.4.2 Carving equipment and social networks in Kinngait

Discussions about the trading and sharing of carving equipment among carvers further illustrate the cooperative relationships enacted in the community carving industry. This section considers the social networks in the community that support the distribution of carving equipment.

Electric power tools such as grinders and drills are commonplace equipment in the contemporary carving industry. The purchase and repair of electric tools can be costly making it difficult for beginner carvers to own equipment. To help compensate for this problem there is a continual sharing of tools between carvers in Kinngait. The social networks underpinning the carving industry examined earlier in this chapter are also important for the trading and sharing of tools between carvers. An electric grinder, for example, costs between \$200 and \$250 without the blade. The diamond blade, depending on the size, can cost upwards of \$200. Since beginner carvers can rarely afford to purchase new equipment they must borrow tools from other carvers, particularly family members and friends. This reliance on family and friends' equipment can continue indefinitely once a youth can carve competently. Some of those interviewed who had been carving for many years still relied on borrowed tools. Cooperation between family members and elders needed to pass on skill, technique, and knowledge to young carvers also helps to make carving equipment available to youth.

Equipment failure and repair also makes the sharing of tools important. Both the Co-op and Northern service broken carving equipment. Repairs on electric tools though, can sometimes take weeks making it necessary to borrow equipment. As one youth explains, *"My grinder, it's at the Co-op right now. It got all fucked-up. I had to bring it to the Co-op and they send it to, I don't know where, to get it fixed. . . It's been down*

*there for a long time now; a couple of weeks*" (Interview m). These repairs can also be expensive. At times it is cheaper to buy a new grinder rather than fix it. A carver (Interview e) explained that repair costs for her broken grinder exceeded the price for a new one. Since she didn't have the money she was now without a grinder. A young person discusses a similar circumstance:

A: *My grinder just broke, and I got so many stones I can't do anything with.*

Q: *Do you think you'll be able to fix your grinder soon?*

A: *I'm going to try and borrow some [tools] tonight so I can carve. Maybe make a big one, wait until Monday to sell my carving and buy a grinder.*

Q: *Are you going to buy a new grinder or fix . . . ?*

A: *Buy a new one, because it can't be fixed, it's [the break] along the carving brush; it usually breaks down there and the stores don't have any replacements for it. You have to buy a new grinder . . . Some of the grinders are not very good. They break easily.*

(Interview r)

For many youth the repair and purchase of equipment can be difficult and at times impossible. For this reason the ability to borrow equipment whether from family members, friends, or elders in the community is essential when trying to remain productive. A youth explains that, "*. . . some guys we share the grinder. Like when he wants to carve, he carves. Next day I carve, he files*" (Interview b). This particular grinder is shared among friends who cannot afford to individually purchase a grinder. In this way, the group is able to maintain their carving by sharing a grinder among themselves.

The trading of tools between carvers is a common theme in the discussions and a process of significant value to youth for the support it offers their carving. This further illuminates the multiple networks of communication and support enacted in the community carving industry.

### 5.4.3 Soapstone

Like the distribution of carving equipment that is supported by social networks in the community, the mining of soapstone is an activity dependent on cooperative relationships. While the mining of soapstone to supply the community carving industry with raw material is supported by and perpetuates cooperation between carvers, it is also an activity that can jeopardize the safety of those involved. This section will consider these two issues surrounding soapstone in Kinngait.

Most of the soapstone used in the local industry comes from a quarry, named *Kangisukutaak*, approximately 120 miles from Kinngait and accessible only by boat or snowmobile. The time it takes to reach the quarry by water depends on the size and speed of the boat. The time of the trip can take anywhere between four hours and a full day. Soapstone that is mined at the quarry is used for personal use, or sold to the Polar store or Co-op who in turn sell it to people in the community. Soapstone is mined during the summer and fall months. Gas powered jack hammers, picks, and sledge hammers are used to mine the rock. Reserve caches of stone are piled at the site to be picked up throughout the winter using snowmobile and sled. During the summer and early fall groups go by boat to the quarry for three or four days at a time to mine, store, and bring stone back to the community.

Groups journeying out to the quarry normally include relatives of the boat's owner and various friends. People who have been asked to go to the mine usually must help purchase gas for the trip and provide some food for camping. The owner of the boat, in exchange for the labour provided, gives each person of the work party soapstone once back in the community.

Of the carvers interviewed, those most frequently going to the quarry were people whose father or immediate relatives (ie. uncle, grandfather) were carvers and who owned boats capable of travelling to the mine. By accompanying family and elders to the quarry young people are able to learn skills valuable for their future success as carvers. In particular, they learn the skills and techniques necessary for mining soapstone. The skills passed onto them ensure that, if necessary, they will be able to mine the stone themselves in the future. Furthermore, because the groups are out on the land for several days they will often take time to hunt and fish. Youth therefore, are able to participate with elders and relatives in subsistence activities. Some of the young carvers interviewed who frequently travelled out to the quarry discussed the benefits of camping at the mine with relatives and elders who could offer knowledge about the land.

Not all young carvers have equal access to the mine. Some of the young people interviewed rarely, sometimes never, have the chance to join a boat leaving for the quarry. Therefore, they must buy most of their soapstone from the stores. As a young person who buys most of his carving stone explains, “. . . *but all the time I'm buying from the Polar supplies, Co-op, and it's \$2 a pound from Co-op, and \$1.75 from Polar*” (Interview c). Indeed, some carvers mentioned that at times they were unable to carve as they did not have stone nor the money to purchase any. Youth who can regularly access family boats leaving for the quarry normally have a reliable supply of soapstone. Even if they do not go on every trip stone is often shared with them by family members. Youth whose family do not own boats to make the trip to the quarry, or who are not carvers, often find their supply of carving stone limited since they cannot always afford to purchase stone from the stores. As a result the supply of soapstone is unevenly distributed among young carvers.

Mining soapstone can be a dangerous activity. Some of the young carvers described situations where individuals had been injured or narrowly escaped injury while mining. The soapstone is quarried at the base of a large cliff-like overhang. Since the mining digs below and downwards under this overhang the stability of the above rock and sand is degraded. A youth describes falling rock he was nearly hit with while mining:

*Sometimes some things start cracking away. Sometimes it's kind of dangerous. Last time we were there I almost got hit. Two big rocks were coming down and [name of elder carver] said 'watch out.' I started running away and a big rock went down, two of them. Scratched my leg a bit (Interview j).*

He later described how the group has someone constantly watching for falling rocks and sand. Another carver describes a similar situation, “. . . sometimes they do it way down there about 16 feet or something like that. Once my father almost got killed by sand, he got buried, half of his body. A couple of guys had to shovel right away” (Interview t). During another trip he witnessed a similar accident, “Someone got hurt by a rock. They were way down there and a rock came out . . . and hit his head, accidentally . . . He had to come by boat right away because he was cut pretty bad on the head.” A young person (interview i) who travels to the mine regularly with his father commented that rocks seem to be breaking away from the overhang with more frequency. Both his father and brother have been involved in accidents. His father’s leg was pinned down under a pile of stone and sand, and his brother had been hit on the head by falling rock. The descriptions demonstrate the inherent dangers of mining soapstone.

The mining of soapstone is also labour intensive work. Rock must be carried and loaded by hand to and from the boats. At times this can require carrying several thousand pounds of rock. Mining therefore, is demanding not only on personal resources such as boats, engines, snowmobiles, camping gear etc., but also physically demanding.

These points seem to be given little attention in the literature about carving. However, they are important considerations at the local level. What is clear from the discussions is not only the considerable personal and economic resources invested into mining soapstone, but the personal dangers people face while mining. This has relevance I think, to the issues of low and undercut prices faced by many youth and the frustrations they feel because of this. Mining stone requires the investment of considerable personal resources that are not readily apparent in the final carving. For young carvers it is important that the final selling price reflects the totality of efforts put into the carving.

The practical issues surrounding the mining of soapstone are important to appreciate. The potentially positive aspects of the mining process must be considered in light of the inherent effort and dangers involved. Mining can be a dangerous activity and involve a great amount of personal effort. It is important that the practical issues surrounding mining are understood so that the health and welfare of carvers can be properly protected.

### **5.5 Young carvers' understanding of the Inuit carving industry**

The discussion will consider communication carvers have with people inside and outside the community as they try and make sense of the processes and structures of the Inuit carving industry. Because of the limited communication youth have with industry insiders (local buyers, gallery owners, buyers in the south, etc.) they do not have access to information important to understanding how the carving industry functions. While communication networks within the community help to support young carvers, there are few avenues for communicating outside information about the industry to youth. In discussions it was clear that youth want to make sense of how the carving industry is structured and functions. The presence of carvers lists, price limits and buying tastes in

the community influence the day to day experiences of young carvers. Youth want to understand why these features of the carving industry exist. However, the discussions show that they receive little constructive information about the industry.

As an example, after one person had explained that by carving polar bears a person might be added to the Northern's list, I asked him why he thought polar bears were so significant. He explains:

- A: *Because they are the one that they are mostly buying down south or anywhere, because they buy them everywhere. Sometimes I used to ask them- 'why is it only polar bear that get a name?' They couldn't answer me. All they say is 'the polar bear.'*  
 Q: *They don't tell you why?*  
 A: *No. They don't tell me why. They never tell me why. I don't know why.*  
 (Interview t)

The lack of information available to youth was a common theme arising from the interviews. Another young carvers discusses the \$200 limit at the Northern:

- Q: *Did they tell you why they set a limit at \$200?*  
 A: *I don't know. They just keep saying that depends on Toronto. They were saying that they were not selling much of their stock down there.*  
 (Interview q)

As the comments demonstrate, there seems to be little effort made by the store to communicate information that may help youth make better sense of the Inuit carving industry. Even while trying to gain a better understanding of the industry the explanations offered to youth are uninformative and vague.

The Co-op is the only buyer that tries to relay information about the carving industry—its southern market places, the buying public, galleries and businesses, etc.—to the young carvers in the community. A manager described a meeting the previous year arranged by the Co-op's directors in which reading material from southern galleries was distributed and a video showing the Co-op's showroom in Toronto was presented. Outside of the Co-op however, there appears to be little organized effort to discuss with youth the

general workings of the carving industry. Therefore, youths' understanding of how the carving industry functions and is structured is based primarily on their experiences in the community. Since the last three years have seen fundamental changes in the local industry, and because youth have little access to information other than their own experiences to help explain these changes, there is a sense of anxiety and confusion concerning the future. A young person comments:

*Sometimes even my girlfriend helps me to make carvings, and bears instead of the same things that I make. I try and it takes me hours even days to make a really good figure. When I'm done with it I don't know how much it's going to cost. I think about sometimes how the carvings are getting small prices down south . . . My future is nothing with the carving because in the future the carvings won't be bought, not likely . . . The carvings are everywhere in the world now, and they always talk of them [being] overstocked.*  
(Interview w)

Another young carver discusses the future in similar tones:

Q: *What do you think about the future of carving?*  
A: *I don't know. If the person told us to stop carving I don't know what I would do. Maybe look for a job I guess, if they told us to stop carving. That's the only way I would look for a job.*  
Q: *Why would someone tell you to stop carving?*  
A: *Is the carving going to . . . Are they going to stop buying carvings someday? Are they?*  
Q: *I don't know.*  
A: *No? But we want to really know about the truth.*  
(Interview r)

As the youth demonstrate, their understanding of the current state of the Inuit carving industry is based on what has been happening around them—carvers lists being instituted, reduced buying by the stores, comments from managers about high inventories down south, and falling prices for their carvings. With few people making an effort to explain the context or reasons for these changing circumstances many youth feel uncertain about the situation of the industry. A clear schism exists in the flow of information between industry insiders and young people. This not only handicaps them as they try to make

sense of the carving industry but also has consequences for their sense of security and comfort as they face the future.

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the lack of information available to young carvers is the fact that many of them have little idea where their carvings are finally sold. During the interviews carvers were asked where their carvings go after leaving Kinngait. Some responded that they went to Toronto, though where in Toronto or where they might go afterwards they did not know. Some of the young carvers interviewed did not know at all where their carvings went once leaving the community. As one youth discusses:

Q: *Do they tell you where they [Northern] send them?*

A: *No.*

Q: *So you don't know where your carvings go?*

A: *Some kind of gallery they say. But I really don't know which gallery or store.*

(Interview s)

Another person, when asked about the destination of carvings states bluntly, "*I don't even know where they go*" (Interview e). Most of those interviewed had little or no knowledge about where their carvings are sold or displayed. This experience included carvers that produced carvings for the 'fine' and 'souvenir' markets. A few youth that did know where some of their carvings were being sold had found out by accident. One young carver describes:

Q: *Do you ever wonder what happens to them [carvings]?*

A: *Well, in Iqaluit I heard from this friend that he was in Winnipeg and he told me that he saw one of my carvings at a gallery. That's what I heard from him.*

Q: *Have you ever talked to any gallery owners about . . . ?*

A: *No. I haven't talked to any other person who is involved with the galleries . . . It was amazing when he told me that.*

(Interview t)

Another individual (Interview g) related how he had discovered one of his carvings selling at a gallery in Seattle. He came across it in the gallery's advertisement while reading *Inuit Art Quarterly* magazine.

Some expressed anger over this lack of information they receive concerning their carvings. As one youth stated, “*They should tell us. I would like to know where they go sometimes. Do they go to the same place or different places? That’s what I want to know*” (Interview c). More poignantly when discussing the fact that none of the buyers tell him where his carvings are sold, a carver stated– “*I should have the right to know about it*” (Interview n). That hundreds of carvings leave the community to support and sustain the profits of galleries and businesses both nationally and globally, and about which they receive little information or feedback, demonstrates to youth a lack of support and respect for their work. This seems indicative of their marginalized position in the carving industry. Youth are alienated from more secure local markets while also separated from important sources of information.

Certainly there exist informal networks within the community and throughout the north in general that inform young people about the Inuit carving industry. However, because there are few formal mechanisms complementing these informal networks– meetings or workshops convened in the community, direct input to youth from galleries in the south, and feedback to them about carving distribution– young carvers are denied a broader understanding of current and changing industry conditions. Without such an understanding many youth feel anxious about an industry they want to participate in but about which they have little knowledge.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusions: Youth Carving Experience and Community Planning in Kinngait**

In this chapter the issues and ideas raised by youth in the course of this research are presented in the context of planning for Kinngait's carving industry. The chapter then examines the research in the perspective of regional planning processes in the north. The relevance of youth discourse in an international context is then summarized. The final section of the chapter considers areas for future research as suggested by the work in this study.

#### **6.1 Young carvers in Kinngait**

The discussions with young carvers presented in the previous two chapters illuminate the various relationships between young people, carving, and community life. Their observations help detail the place of young people in the community carving industry and the connection between carving and Kinngait's society. This section reviews the issues raised in their discussions.

As young people explained, the local industry is differentiated by several markets that each relate differently with young carvers. The appreciation of the heterogeneous nature of Kinngait's carving industry is critical to capture. It contributes to an understanding of the community that is sensitive to the daily and practical realities unique to the life of a

young carver. It is precisely this understanding that has, for the most part, been missed by previous work examining Inuit carving.

By appreciating the multiple ways in which carvers interact with the community carving industry on a day to day basis, it can be seen how the structure of the industry can constrain and frustrate individuals in their artistic endeavours. What becomes apparent is that most young people are alienated from the most secure and progressive markets– the Co-op and the Northern’s unlimited price list– where freedom of artistic expression is encouraged and rewarded. They are left to negotiate with local markets that work, in sometimes overt ways, to restrict personal freedom over artistic expression and control over pricing. Furthermore, the markets in which the majority of young carvers sell offer the lowest prices in the community.

Kinngait’s economy further exacerbates these constraining features of the marketplace. The lack of economic opportunities outside of the community carving industry make it extremely difficult for young carvers to develop styles and themes not demanded by the market. Youth must carve what they know will sell. If not, they undermine what for many is one of the few ways to earn an income.

Many young people regularly carve without a mask. This is a dangerous feature of the community carving industry for the personal safety of carvers. The present and future health of youth is being seriously jeopardized in Kinngait’s carving industry.

The present structure of the community carving industry does little to support and nurture young people’s artistic development. Young carvers in the community are also not provided information important to their understanding of local and external markets. The issue of the quality of youth carving, introduced in the first chapter, must therefore be considered in the light of current industry processes and how these processes either promote or frustrate artistic development among young people.

The negative features of the carving industry in Kinngait with respect to youth participation can be summarized as follows:

- Marginalization of youth from most supportive local markets: the Co-op and the ‘premier’ carvers list at the Northern store.
- Imposition of styles and themes in young people’s carvings.
- Prices for youth carvings lowest in community.
- Little information passed on to youth concerning industry workings and markets.
- Health dangers from exposure to soapstone dust.

The combined effect of these processes means that many young people receive little, if any, formal support as they mature as carvers and artists.

While there are several aspects of the community carving industry that negatively impact upon young carvers there are also, as they explain, numerous positive contributions that carving makes to the life of the community and its youth. Carving builds on and contributes to the economic, social, environmental, and cultural life of Kinngait.

As young people explain, carving offers much needed income in a community with few employment opportunities. Given the limitations of the local economy, carving allows many young people to participate productively in the life of the community. Youth can also engage national and international markets through carving.

The discussions with young people demonstrate how the community carving industry is permeated by diffuse social networks linking people in cooperative and mentoring relationships. The instruction, tutelage, and guidance of carving is often passed on to young carvers through intergenerational and familial ties. By carving, many youth affirm and strengthen relationships with kin and elders.

The interviews also demonstrate that carving supports and inspires personal relationships between youth and the land. The artistic expression of many individuals is enhanced by their time on the land. Several young people also explained that they prefer carving outside of the community while camping. Thus, for people in Kinngait, carving assumes a central role in connecting land and community.

Finally, the discussions with youth highlight the link between carving and culture. Carving in its entire process embodies an activity central to Inuit culture. It motivates relations and activities supportive of Inuit culture and identity. The functional and personal relationships enacted with kinship, elders, and the environment through carving help affirm and sustain cultural attributes important to northern life.

The positive contributions that carving makes to young people and community life may be summarized as follows:

- Important source of income for youth and carvers in general.
- Enhances cooperative relationships between youth, their family and their elders.
- Culturally meaningful for young people.
- Links young people to the environment.
- Allows many youth to be socially and economically productive in a community with few other options.
- Allows for some form of participation with national and global marketplaces.

As these points demonstrate, carving is thoroughly integrated into community life. It should therefore be understood as being central to Kinngait's economic, social, cultural, and environmental fabric.

### **6.1.1 Youth discourse and community planning efforts in Kinngait**

Community planning efforts in Kinngait should recognize that most youth, because of their place in the community carving industry and the local economy, do not have the economic nor social security to develop or experiment with innovative ideas. It seems that a basic yet promising goal for community planning to work towards is the creation of a supportive environment that facilitates youth imagination and dedication. This will help mitigate the way in which youth carving is influenced by stereotyped market demands firmly structured in some of the local markets. The sustainability of the carving industry in Kinngait rests upon the vibrant development of young artists and the visions they contribute to northern carving. However, given the tenuous and unsupportive nature of the community markets, both in terms of freedom of artistic expression and price that most youth must produce in, it is extremely difficult for them to securely develop and nurture their artistic development. To strengthen the sustainability of the community carving industry in Kinngait planning efforts need to address the experiences and circumstances of young carvers and how their artistic development can be facilitated through projects and initiatives targeting carving. A consideration of projects that would help support the artistic development of young carvers is provided in Appendix 4. The inclusion of these planning projects reflects a demand I heard often during fieldwork that information from academic research should complement local work dealing with community concerns.

Planned projects targeting young carvers in Kinngait and other communities in Nunavut require political and financial support from various governments. Understandably, this may seem an unpopular idea in a climate of fiscal restraint and especially when large amounts of money and time are already being invested in

Nunavut's new government. However, community planning efforts are needed now for the northern carving industry. The sustainability of the carving industry into the future depends on the artistic and technical development of young carvers. Left unsupported in the carving industry it is clear that young people receive little support in their artistic development from most local markets and businesses.

During research for this study Terry Ryan commented that the future of the industry is in question as a result of the declining artistic accomplishments of youth. What would the loss of the carving industry mean for Kinngait? The economic costs for the community are obvious. Gone would be an industry that provides one quarter of Kinngait's total personal income (GNWT, 1995a) and absorbs 31% of the potential labour force (NIC, 1995b). It would also signal the loss of an industry that generates twice as much money as social assistance payments to the community. In purely economic terms a failing carving industry would represent the loss of a fundamental and sustaining part of the local economy.

Equally important are the social implications for community life without carving. The social and cultural dislocations caused by the loss of carving would be severe. Carving gives many young people the chance to be economically and socially productive in a community with little employment opportunities. It allows many the chance to occupy the day engaging their talents and imagination in an activity that is seen as socially and culturally significant. Despite the many difficulties associated with being a young carver, it nevertheless can provide an outlet where a person can invest his/her physical and mental energies in a vocation that is meaningful to person and community. There are simply so few opportunities outside of the carving industry that could compensate for the loss of this vocation.

## 6.2 Youth experience and regional development planning in Nunavut

Planning initiatives developed for Kinngait's carving industry complement current approaches to development in the north. Recent writings concerning Arctic development have argued the need of following a northern sustainable community development approach (ICC 1992; Elias 1995; Chaturvedi, 1996). The connection of carving to local economic, social, cultural, and environmental structures makes it well suited to advance the aims of this development outlook.

In the past, development in the north was normally formed around top-down approaches, planned with little consultation from within communities and favouring large scale resource extraction projects (Berkes and Fast, 1996). Policy formation from the 1960s to the early 1980s largely ignored issues of culture, society, and environment and how these relate to community well-being (RCAP, 1996).

Recent policy has attempted to remedy these past failures. Current planning processes recognize that "The failure of many of the past policies has, in effect, forced an assessment of development alternatives that are more sustainable environmentally, culturally, and economically" (ibid: 255). An alternative northern development process endorses initiatives that are compatible with, and supportive of, the values and sentiments that shape community living (ICC, 1992; Elias, 1995, Young, 1995; Graham, 1997). Chaturvedi (1996: 233) presents the defining features of sustainable development in the north:

Broadly speaking, therefore, the objectives of community-based development in the Arctic are: (i) to operate within the limits of the biosphere and local ecosystems; (ii) to address basic local needs, strengthen shared commitments to the common well-being and encourage local initiative and self-reliance; (iii) benefit indigenous and other northern peoples and improve their quality of life consistent with obligations to future generations; and (iv) to encourage the use of local

technologies and indigenous knowledge for promoting culturally appropriate development.

This approach argues for a sensitivity to the unique features of local society and environment so that they may shape and define the planning process.

Of course no one has more resolutely defended the conviction that community orientated development offers the best alternative for northern planning than Inuit themselves. Martha Flaherty, a past president of the Inuit Women's Association of Canada, confirms that:

The overall health and well-being of our people are intrinsically tied to the social, political and economic development of our communities. We can no longer afford to pay the price of dividing issues into manageable portfolios, programs and services. A holistic, integrated approach is necessary at every level and in relation to every issue or problem. (quoted in RCAP, 1996: 398).

As Inuit explain, development planning in communities should embrace the social, cultural, and environmental systems supportive of northern life.

By considering the comments of young carvers in light of wider discussions examining the future frameworks for northern planning, it is clear that the Inuit carving industry embodies the objectives of sustainable community development. Carving infuses the economic, social, cultural, and environmental life of communities. It is thus well situated to advance the aims of sustainable planning processes. The remarks of young people demonstrate how a local carving industry represents a dynamic vehicle by which to pursue the objectives of sustainable development in the north. The information from the study thus contributes to planning processes outside of Kinngait. Community level concerns find parallel expression in regional planning debates. In this way the voices of Kinngait's youth contribute to the thinking of how sustainable development processes can be effectively integrated into northern planning.

### 6.2.1 Kinngait's youth and international development studies

This study with Kinngait carvers has implications for development issues internationally. In particular, this work is pertinent to development studies exploring the relationship between community planning and art and craft production.

Many indigenous communities worldwide actively support their economic, social, and cultural aspirations partly through artistic production (Graburn, 1976; Cole and Aniakor, 1984; Brett, 1986; Stephen, 1991; Swain, 1993; Kleymeyer, 1994; Tice, 1995; Guyette, 1996). Artists and artisans around the world share similar experiences, aspirations, and frustrations as a result of creating arts and crafts for sale to outside markets (Alderete, Pacaldo, Huerta and Whitesell, 1992; Lucie- Smith, 1994; Myers, 1995).

Communication between communities can thus be an important part of sharing insights and successes from similar experiences.

The Inuit, like other indigenous groups, actively pursue international forums to exchange ideas and experiences. The preamble to the *Principles and Elements for a Comprehensive Arctic Policy* developed by the ICC states "That Inuit are committed to contributing their traditional and other forms of knowledge, skills, efforts, and expertise for the betterment of humanity, the common security of all peoples and states, and world peace" (ICC, 1992: 4). There exists therefore, an implicit desire on the part of Inuit to forge and broaden links with communities globally. It is because of this outlook that ideas and experiences formed in northern art and craft industries can have relevance to other indigenous communities looking to tap and share knowledge about local art and craft production. In this way, processes encountered in Arctic communities are meaningful to that part of development studies examining the interface of art and craft

and community planning. Local experiences have relevance to global realities, framing ideas and knowledge valuable when traded between communities internationally.

Already, many indigenous communities worldwide are focusing attention on processes unfolding in Nunavut. The creation of Nunavut is being closely watched by different indigenous groups, some of whom are attempting to negotiate similar political and territorial agreements in their respective nation states (Young, 1995; Chaturvedi, 1996). As a result of this attention, community development processes involving Inuit art and craft may be seen as increasingly relevant to other indigenous groups who are already closely following Nunavut's political evolution.

This study, undertaken with young carvers in Kinngait, contributes information useful to development and planning in international settings. The thoughts of Kinngait's youth are valuable in a diversity of locations and to a diversity of indigenous artists and artisans.

### **6.3 Future research**

This thesis has demonstrated why it is important for development processes in the north to consider the thoughts and insights of youth. Whether discussing their experiences as young people growing up in a northern community, or as carvers trying to succeed in the Inuit art world, young people contribute valuable information to the planning process. Youth discourse provides an important sense of context by which to appreciate the practical, everyday experiences they live through and that intimately affect their lives as carvers.

To strengthen and support the industry into the future requires a focus on the younger generation carvers. The future of the industry rests on the flourishing of their technique,

talent, and ambition. A concern for the future of the industry requires a dedicated effort to explore ways in which these various talents and ambitions can be supported and vitalized.

The information from this study suggests areas for future research to explore. An obvious, but important area for research, concerns youth experience in other community carving industries throughout Nunavut. By talking with young carvers in other towns a more comprehensive appreciation can be gained as to the place of young people in the Inuit carving industry. In this way planning may take into account a broader range of experiences and processes that impact upon the lives of young carvers and the art and craft they create. Community and regional planning may therefore better approach the task of putting together practical projects sensitive to the various nuances of youth life.

Projects and initiatives to assist young carvers also require research if they are to be successful. It seems important that research examine the more practical issues involved in the actual conception, design, and implementation of community projects. Any research that involves working with young carvers in the design of community projects would need to be participatory and empowering in practice. Participatory in the sense that young people are active in the thinking of how planning might best support them, and empowering in the sense that they have a central part in shaping the actual design and purpose of any local projects.

The focus of this study on young carvers and the practical, local circumstances surrounding their art and craft work is relevant globally. The many indigenous communities who pursue art and craft work as a sustaining part of community development demonstrate why such a focus is important internationally. The future of community art and craft industries, like that of Kinngait's carving industry, resides in the artistry and dedication of young people. In this light, I would suggest that the topic—

youth in local art and craft industries— is an important area for research in development studies. As communities move into the future, more and more of the responsibility for sustaining local art and craft industries will pass from elders to their younger generation peers. Therefore, research looking at the experiences of young artists and artisans is integral to that part of international development working to support and strengthen local art and craft industries.

Academic perspectives on indigenous art also stand to benefit from the critical input of young artists. Theoretical efforts examining such aspects as the art and craft-development nexus, the construction and communication of cultural identities, and the commoditization of indigenous art and craft work must take into account the ideas of youth. To talk with young people demands an attention to the here and now. In this respect, youth voice can sharpen theoretical ideas that at times seem disconnected from the complexity and dynamism of local space. This implies the need for flexible theoretical and methodological approaches. This adaptability ensures that research may work well in the dense and invigorating site of colliding and competing cultural, social, and economic processes marking youth life.

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**Appendix 1**  
**Research licence**

**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH LICENCE**

LICENCE # 0102197N-A

ISSUED TO: James Moxon  
Dept. of International Development Studies  
St. Mary's University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3H 3C3 Canada  
902/420/5786

**TEAM MEMBERS:**

AFFILIATION: St. Mary's University

TITLE: Youth And The Inuit Art Industry In Cape Dorset

**OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH:**

The study will examine some of the current aspects of young artists in the art industry of Cape Dorset. The goal of the research is to draw a meaningful portrait of the relationship existing between young artists and the art industry. It is anticipated that the research will contribute information relating youth perceptions and feelings of the art industry and their place in it. The data from the research will be used to complete a Master's Thesis in International Development Studies at Saint Mary's University.

**TERMS & CONDITIONS:**

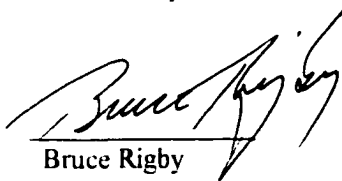
**DATA COLLECTION IN THE NWT:**

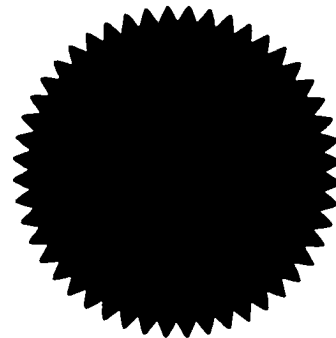
DATES: September 01, 1997-November 07, 1997

LOCATION: Cape Dorset (64°14'N, 76°32'W), (00°00'N, 00°00'W), (00°00'N, 00°00'W),  
(00°00'N, 00°00'W).

Scientific Research Licence 0102197N-A expires on December 31, 1997.

Issued at Iqaluit, NT on July 31, 1997.

  
Bruce Rigby  
Science Advisor



## **Appendix 2**

### **Participant consent form**

**Project Title:** Youth and the Art Industry in Kinngait

**Researcher:** James Moxon  
Master's student- International Development Studies  
Saint Mary's University, Halifax NS, B3H 3C3  
Tel: (902) 420- 5768  
Fax: (902) 420- 5181  
email: j\_moxon@bass.stmarys.ca

**Project Description:**

The study is examining some of the current aspects of young artists in the art industry of Kinngait. The goal of the research is to draw a meaningful portrait of the relationship existing between young artists and the art industry. It is anticipated that the research will contribute information relating youth perceptions and feelings of the art industry and their place in it. The data from the research will be used to complete a Master's thesis in International Development Studies at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This research is being conducted with the knowledge and approval of the Hamlet council.

**Statement of Informed Rights:**

"I have been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. I understand these objectives and consent to being interviewed for the project. I understand that steps will be undertaken to ensure that this interview will remain confidential unless I consent to being identified. I also understand that, if I wish to withdraw from the study, I may do so without any repercussions. Any and all data that I provide may be withdrawn at my request."

**Medium of Interview:** Face to face interview- audio taped.

**Printed Name of Participant:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Witness Signature:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 3**

**Copy of research summary report in Inuktitut**

**ፌዴራላዊ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ**

**ወጪ ስራ ስርዓት ስርዓት**

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ክልሉ ሲሆን

ሪፖርት ለፌዴራል ወጪ ስራ ስርዓት ስርዓት

Saint. Mary's ሪፖርት

ወጪ ስራ ስርዓት

B3H 3C3



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V.  $\Delta/\Delta\sigma^2$ :  $\Delta\Delta^2\Delta^2$ ,  $\Delta\Delta^2\Delta^2\Delta^2$ ,  $\Delta^2\Delta^2$   $\Delta^2\Delta^2\Delta^2$

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## **Appendix 4**

### **Consideration of community development projects to support young carers in Kinngait**

This appendix presents seven areas where planned projects would support and enhance the artistic and personal development of young carvers in Kinngait. The purpose of outlining these areas is to connect the research with youth to community planning. During fieldwork in Kinngait it was continually impressed upon me by various individuals that research in the community must have relevance to local issues and concerns surrounding carving. People wanted to know how the research would contribute to community planning aimed at supporting and helping young carvers.

The inclusion of the seven planning concepts reflects a demand that information from academic research complement local work dealing with community concerns.

Furthermore, the research proposal submitted for the licencing of this research explained that an objective of the thesis was to contribute to community planning for the carving industry. Therefore, the planning proposals outlined below help fulfill an aim of the study to consider how academic research may practically complement local development practices. The proposed projects offered here have relevance for a variety of individuals inside and outside of the community– municipal government officials, local business people in the carving industry, government officials in the Nunavut government, and federal government people whose work involves northern development planning.

The following concepts derive from the insights of young people in Kinngait. They reflect the youths' considerations of aspects of the carving industry that both constrain and support them as carvers. The initiatives restate information provided by youth in the study in a planning context.

## **1. Youth- Elder carver contact**

Projects to increase and support youth and elder carver contact would benefit the

industry. Such initiatives would help ensure that the skill, talent, and artistry from older carvers is passed on to young people. The access to the experience and ideas of older carvers can help build a strong technical and artistic base upon which youth can experiment with their own ideas and talent. Contact with elder carvers is something that many youth discussed as being important to their development as artists. Therefore, young people would see programs that facilitate contact between themselves and elder carvers as beneficial and constructive. Indeed such a program, though not specifically focused on youth, was offered in Iqaluit during the summer of 1998 (Bourgeois, 1998). A local elder carver was funded to provide instruction to 10 carvers over a six week period. Such a program specifically targeting younger carvers would seem to hold promising possibilities for assisting youth.

## **2. Carving and the land**

The preference expressed by many of the young people interviewed for carving on the land suggests that an outpost camp setting for carving would be attractive to young people and beneficial to their work. It would also provide a good place for young and old to meet and share ideas about carving, life, and the land. The concept for such a project is based on the many comments by youth describing their attraction to carving while on the land. Certainly, there already exist many opportunities for young people to access the land with family and friends travelling to outpost camps. However, initiatives that would help fund the equipment for an outpost camp specifically designed for carving would ensure that those people not normally able to travel out of the community would have an opportunity to do so.

### **3. Youth and carving masks**

Programs assisting carvers with the purchase and maintenance of carving masks are critically needed at this time. Many young people regularly carve without a mask thereby seriously risking their immediate and future health. It seems reasonable to suggest that any initiatives should try and combine the support from local business, government, and southern businesses. All of these groups profit from the work of local carvers. They should therefore play a part in ensuring health standards in the industry. Work to strengthen the carving industry cannot reasonably take place without an effort to ensure that the immediate and future health of carvers is protected.

Part of any program addressing the use of carving masks among youth should involve an educational component. Using a carving mask is ultimately an individual's choice. Providing information about the health risks from soapstone dust would help ensure that youth are aware of the dangers involved when carving without a mask. Carvers should work in an industry that provides them with comprehensive information as to how their personal choices within the industry impact upon their present and future health.

### **4. Economic instabilities of young people**

Another area important for planning concerns the economic instabilities of youth life. It is difficult for many young carvers to experiment with personal ideas since they lack the economic security to carve pieces that they are not sure will sell. Mechanisms that would help support the financial stability of promising young carvers would help address this problem. This proposal is probably the most contentious of the planning initiatives presented here. It would seem to contradict the fact that the carving industry already

injects a relatively large amount of money into the community. However, an important consideration nevertheless is the extent to which young people share in this income. It seems reasonable to raise the notion of economic instabilities among young carvers since they are, for the most part, excluded from the top earning markets in the community. In this sense, mechanisms helping to support the financial security of young carvers addresses the reality that many young people have difficulty in accessing the income generated by the carving industry.

## **5. Market development and promotion**

Planning for the industry should also consider initiatives that promote northern carving on national and international markets. Certainly there has been extensive promotion of Inuit carving in national and international markets. However, robust marketplaces will make planning at the local level more effective. Marketing strategies by governments and other agencies that help maintain or increase present demand would complement work at the community level trying to encourage the artistic efforts of young carvers.

This supports recommendations raised in the 1997 Canadian International Business Strategy prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT, 1997). The strategy singles out the Inuit art industry as a sector to be addressed by a 'North of 60 team' for future trade and market development. The work in this thesis demonstrates why such a recommendation should be followed. The local industry is closely integrated with wider marketplaces. Strengthening these markets can therefore make more effective any projects assisting local carvers and the works they create. This is a proposal that implicates governments outside of Kinngait who would target national

and international markets in an effort to support community art and craft industries throughout the north.

## **6. Information to carvers**

The discussions with youth demonstrate that many carvers are missing basic information concerning the industry and its marketplaces. This is an area that needs attention. Methods should be developed to ensure that local carvers are informed about the functioning of the industry and the nature of the markets they produce for. If young carvers are expected to meet the standards of the 'fine' art market then they must be assisted in their understanding of this market. The Inuit Art Foundation<sup>1</sup> has recently published the Artists' Workbook (IAF, 1997). The workbook, developed for carvers and other artists, contains information and instruction concerning record keeping, artist promotion, bookkeeping, and market make-up. This certainly provides useful help for beginner and more experienced carvers. However, such information needs to be supported by more hands on instruction and tutelage by persons familiar with the particular context of young carvers and the particular, everyday circumstances they live through.

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<sup>1</sup> The Inuit Art Foundation, based in Ottawa, is a registered charitable organization that supports and promotes Inuit artists and their work. It assists Inuit artists through workshops, publication of educational material, and scholarships. The foundation also works to promote and market Inuit art through exhibits, films and publications. Its quarterly magazine, *The Inuit Art Quarterly* provides information about northern art, artists, and exhibits.

## **7. Community display of carving and other artwork**

Kinngait presently does not have a space where carvings or other art work created in the community can be displayed. A manager at the Co-op explained that for the past eight years various community members have been trying to raise funds for the construction of an art centre where local artwork can be collected and displayed. The absence of such a centre means that local carvers have little exposure to some of the best art being created around them. Certainly, they see many carvings being created throughout the community on a daily basis. However, without a space that collects some of these carvings together, there is no opportunity for prolonged and more constructive exposure to Kinngait's artwork. This is especially relevant to younger carvers whose artistic development depends on their exposure to the different styles, techniques, and mediums being used by their peers. A community art centre would therefore be invaluable for young artists. It would facilitate the communication of ideas and techniques between carvers and between young people and their elders.