Establishing a National Park, Re-establishing Indigenous Territory: Political Re-configurations of Coast Salish Cultural Landscapes

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Indigenous people asserting authority over their lands and seas have sought to overcome the obstacle of the states’ dogmatic insistence on a jurisdictional monopoly. In spite of decades of negotiations over land claims and self-government, recognition of truly shared decision-making authority remains elusive. Today, the old language of co-management and self-government has in many ways shifted to shared decision-making and co-governance, seeking to accommodate greater indigenous political leverage in territorial governance. Indigenous people have developed powerful collaborative relationships as a key means to wield power in territorial decision-making. The on-the-ground impact of these strategies in collaboration have been profound, with indigenous people working through collaborative processes being increasingly effective and powerful in influencing major decision-making outcomes.

In BC, several Coast Salish communities have negotiated cooperative management and consultation agreements that have put them at the centre of decision-making for the planning, management, and use of the lands and waters of the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. Key Coast Salish jurisdictional objectives – including respect and avoidance of ancestral sites, re-invigoration of exclusive traditional food harvesting opportunities, re-configuration of popular and bureaucratic discourses about Coast Salish cultures and place, revitalization of indigenous language use, and establishing a stable long-term forum for taking shared responsibility in the land and resources – are being addressed within this Parks Canada collaboration. With agreements that establish surprisingly effective collaborative and cooperative communications that respect constitutional obligations for consultation and accommodation, Dr. Thom will discuss how this small part of Coast Salish territories is being reconfigured in culturally distinct and important ways.