Chapter 3
The Importance of a Mixed Cash- and Harvest Herding Based Economy to Living in the Arctic – An Analysis on the Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic (SLiCA)

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Abstract “Subsistence” is both a highly disputed theoretical concept within several social sciences’ disciplines, an often used term in international debates and conventions on indigenous peoples’ traditional hunting rights, and an integral part of indigenous peoples’, communities’ and organisations’ campaigns for their rights to maintain traditional lifestyles.

The domestic and cash economies of the north are highly interrelated. As Wolfe and Walker (1987) reported, “a family’s subsistence production is augmented and supported by cash employment of family members. The money generated in the commercial-wage sector of the economy enables families to capitalize in the subsistence sector. The combination of subsistence and commercial-wage activities provides the economic basis for the way of life so highly valued in rural communities.”

The international core questionnaire applied in the Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic, SLiCA, offers opportunities to examine the importance of a mixed cash- and harvest herding based economy to living in the Arctic, relationships between traditional hunting, fishing and herding activities and activities in the market economy sector, the respondents’ satisfaction with the actual composition of the various activities as well as the preferred composition and the relationship to the overall well-being and the individual.

This theme the importance of a mixed cash- and harvest herding based economy to living in the Arctic is one of five international analysis themes suggested by the indigenous peoples’ representatives participating in SLiCA.

The analysis is based on more than 7,000 personal interviews with Inuit adults in Greenland, Canada, Chukotka, and Alaska.
Keywords Arctic, indigenous peoples subsistence, mixed economy, informal economy, living conditions in the Arctic, SLiCA, individual well-being, quality of life, life satisfaction

Subsistence is a highly complex notion that includes vital economic, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions. The harvesting of renewable resources provides Inuit with food, nutrition, clothing, fuel, harvesting equipment and income. Subsistence means much more than mere survival or minimum living standards. It is a way of life that requires special skills, knowledge and resourcefulness. It enriches and sustains Inuit communities in a manner that promotes cohesiveness, pride and sharing. It also provides an essential link to, and communication with, the natural world of which Inuit are an integral part (Inuit Circumpolar Conference, 1992).

Subsistence is at the heart of many discussions among indigenous peoples and Arctic researchers. The discussion has focused on the role of subsistence in modern economies and modern arctic cultures (Kruse et al., 2008). Over the last decades several concepts acknowledging the significance of traditional subsistence activities interwoven with market economic activities have been developed (Poppel, 2006b). Among the concepts developed in response to the new socio-economic realities to Arctic indigenous peoples Wolfe and Walker evolved the concept the ‘mixed economy’ to characterise this emerging mode of production based on both cash employment and hunting, fishing and gathering berries etc.:

[A] family’s subsistence production is augmented and supported by cash employment of family members... The money generated in the commercial-wage sector of the economy enables families to capitalize in the subsistence sector. The combination of subsistence and commercial-wage activities provides the economic basis for the way of life so highly valued in rural communities (Wolfe & Walker, 1987).

In 1997/98 an international group of researchers in a partnership with representatives of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic began formulating broad societal goals and living conditions dimensions that would provide the foundation for an international core questionnaire of the Survey of Living Conditions of the Arctic (SLiCA). The team agreed that an important part of this core would be subsistence activities and the related informal and formal relationships.

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2 The term ‘mixed economy’ had been used earlier (e.g. to characterize economies with elements of market as well as planned economies) but not in analyzing the relations between ‘subsistence’ and ‘market’.

3 The project was initiated by Statistics Greenland in 1997. A further and more thorough presentation of the project can be found in Andersen and Poppel 2002; Andersen et al. 2002; Kruse et al. 2008 and on the project web site: www.arcticlivingconditions.org.

4 From the very beginning, the indigenous peoples, Inuit and Sami have been partners in the steering committee as well as in the projects’ research and focus groups (Poppel 2006a).