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G rard Duhaime^a & Roberson  douard^b

^a Department of Sociology, Canada Research Chair on Comparative Aboriginal Conditions, Universit  Laval, Qu bec, Canada

^b Faculty of Social Science, Centre interuniversitaire d' tudes et de recherches autochtones (Interuniversity Centre for Aboriginal Studies and Research), Universit  Laval, Qu bec, Canada

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Social stratification through the capabilities approach: the case of the Inuit of Nunavik

GÉRARD DUHAIME^{a*} and ROBERSON ÉDOUARD^b

^a*Department of Sociology, Canada Research Chair on Comparative Aboriginal Conditions, Université Laval, Québec, Canada;*

^b*Faculty of Social Science, Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (Interuniversity Centre for Aboriginal Studies and Research), Université Laval, Québec, Canada*

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Based on the capabilities approach, this study investigates the Qanuippitaa survey concerning the health of the Inuit of Nunavik (Canada). The goal was to examine the mutual influences among essential capabilities that affect Inuit adults in their efforts to achieve their aspirations. As shown by our analysis, most essential capabilities (e.g. education, health, employment, income) appear to be limited to certain demographic categories, such as women and older adults; they are at higher risk than others to be exposed to poverty, food insecurity, and violence. However, poor housing conditions and exposure to violence are not discriminant, since they are generalized. The study demonstrates that Nunavik is socially stratified, since all Inuit adults do not enjoy the same capabilities to face contemporary challenges.

Freedom does not consist merely in having rights recorded on paper; it requires a material situation that makes it possible to exercise these rights. This entails having resources at one's disposal. (Nussbaum 1999, p. 252 [our translation])

Introduction

The Inuit of Nunavik, or Nunavimiut, in the Canadian Arctic are currently grappling with a number of major challenges. Their way of life has undergone upheaval as a result of a combination of trends, including an acceleration in large-scale mineral resource development, an increase in the consumption of imported goods, the reconfiguration of communities, and disturbances to the natural environment (e.g. pollution and climate change), to cite just a few examples. What are the social conditions in which Nunavik Inuit live in, and they may use, in order to influence the development of contemporary Arctic society? The present study seeks to provide an answer to these questions. It draws on data contained in the Qanuippitaa survey on the health of the Inuit of Nunavik (Canada), which are analyzed using the capability approach. This approach represents an alternative to the 'traditional' approach to

*Corresponding author. Email: Gerard.Duhaime@soc.ulaval.ca. This work was supported by ArcticNet.

development that appears in a variety of forms (e.g. economism, utilitarianism, theories of distributive justice). Initially conceived in the field of welfare economics by Amartya Sen (1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1993, 2001, 2005), the capability approach postulates that assessments of the status of individuals in society must go beyond utility, income, rights, and other resources, in order to focus on individuals' freedoms and their opportunities to be and to function in ways that are rightfully important to them.

Growth, utility, and distributive justice

Until recently, when measuring a nation's development, the traditional economic approach nearly always made do with measuring the volume of created wealth (i.e. gross domestic product (GDP)). The traditional economic perspective largely or entirely ignored both the unequal social distribution of this wealth and variations in needs, that depend on such factors as the type of family, the age of family members, the type of home, etc. (Nussbaum 1999). Measured this way, development was viewed as being one and the same as growth. Sometime later, this focus on economic growth factors (e.g. growth in GDP, economic and financial stabilization, the opening of economies) came to be supplemented by the notion of sustainable development (e.g. environmental protection, progress of the Human Development Index or HDI), as well as by the progress of universal rights (e.g. the right of life, plus rights to health, education, decent housing, democracy, justice, and so on). These performance criteria have subsequently undergone an axiological transformation, becoming goals of development in their own right.

This 'traditional' conception of development has come in for considerable criticism. For several decades now, numerous studies have argued that development is intrinsically related to the social dimensions of accumulation processes (Bret 2006; Salama and Poulin 1998; Sen 1987, 1993; Wagstaff 2002; WHO 1998, 2002). This work afforded new perspectives for analyzing development by examining, for example, the impacts of market liberalization and its associated political reforms on the evolution of the labor market (CEPALC 2004; Kingdon *et al.* 2005; Van der Hoeven 2000) or on the evolution of inequalities and poverty (Chen and Ravallion 2004; Ferreira and Walton 2005; Paugam 1991; World Bank 2000); and by examining as well the role of governments in the area of development policy (Campbell 1996; Hibou 1999; Iglesias 2006), social policy (Beatie 2000; Bourguignon *et al.* 2000; CEPALC 2006; Esping-Andersen 1990, 1996; Rawlings 2005; Rosanvallon 1981), good governance, and corruption (Tanzi 1998; Theobald 1999; Transparency International 2007). Along with the most recent works such as Stiglitz *et al.* (2009) and O'Donnel *et al.* (2014), these perspectives do converge in repudiating the limits of a narrow-minded economism. However, alternative measurements to the traditional ones are still to be discussed.

Capabilities and freedoms

The capability approach can be viewed as a broad analytical framework which claims that neither the level of resources nor the level of maximization of individual utility suffice to appropriately assess a person's real situation, insofar as these provide no information about his or her real opportunities for exercising agency. This deficiency can only be overcome by an approach based on the possibility of

real choices – that is, on those things that individuals have the means of accomplishing.

The capability approach postulates that each individual possesses ‘endowments’ (i.e. resources) that provide a person with ‘entitlements’ to the goods necessary to his or her ‘functioning’ and which determine that person’s ‘capabilities’ to be and to act in keeping with his or her aspirations. However, the conversion of resources into capabilities does not depend solely on the individual; it also depends on the social structures in which the person is integrated, as well as the opportunities offered by his or her environment (e.g. social position, rules in force, the social and political environment). Under these conditions, capability becomes the freedom to choose from among all things that are open to accomplishment and from among all things that a person values. Capability exists to the extent that there are genuine opportunities for achieving one’s aspirations. The possibility of actualizing one’s goals takes precedence over whether in fact one actualizes them or not. Hence, the objective of development is the freedom of individuals, for which the expansion of capabilities constitutes the means. Although Armatya Sen, who elaborated the approach, never established a list of fundamental capabilities, Martha Nussbaum (1999) has strived to develop such a list of capabilities essential to what she has termed ‘truly human’ functioning.

Insofar as the Qanuippitaa survey is concerned, the essential capabilities identified by Nussbaum have provided the basis for selecting the set of variables used in the present study. The analyses that follow will seek to present a profile of the capabilities that the Inuit of Nunavik can draw on for meeting the challenges confronting them individually and collectively.

Methodology

Statistical data sources

Few other surveys have measured the variables habitually used in sociological studies in the Arctic. That is the case with the Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic (SLiCA), entrenched into the 2001 and 2006 Aboriginal People Survey in Canada (Duhaime and Lévesque 2014; Édouard and Duhaime 2013; Kruse *et al.* 2008; Morin *et al.* 2010). However, for the purposes of the present study, the unique advantage of the *Nunavik Inuit Health Survey* (Lavoie *et al.* 2007) is that it produces assessments of a population’s health, which Sen considers a fundamental capability. By combining customary variables and health variables into a single database, the Qanuippitaa survey has made it possible to analyze all these measures simultaneously. The present study thus presents a descriptive analysis of the statistical information drawn primarily from the database of the Qanuippitaa survey, but supplements it with data from the 2006 Census of Canada.

The Qanuippitaa survey was conducted at the request of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services for the purpose of improving access to recent data on Inuit health. It provides an overview of the health of the region’s population, describes health-related trends and associated variations over time, confirms existing health problems, and detects emerging health issues.

Completed in 2004, this survey covers the population aged 15 years and over in the 14 communities of Nunavik. The survey plan called for a complex, two-stage stratified random sampling process. The first stage consisted in obtaining a sample

for each village, proportional to the size of its population; the second stage consisted in obtaining a standardized, systematic random sample of households for each of the 14 villages, using home addresses (i.e. street numbers). Of the 2089 Inuit households in Nunavik, a sample of 677 was first predefined. Survey-takers visited this stratified random sample and found 670 household eligible; 521 agreed to take part in the survey, making for a total of 1056 Nunavimiut. The response rates were, respectively, 78% of selected households, 66% of the members of these households, and approximately 50% of the eligible individuals.

Data from the survey were entered into two databases. The first database covered the total sample and is managed by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec. The second database was reserved for a cohort representing about 90% of the sample and was entrusted to the public health research unit of the Centre hospitalier universitaire de Québec (URSP-CHUQ). This study concerns solely the cohort covered by the second database.

Survey instruments

The survey was based on self-administered questionnaires as well as questionnaires filled out by an interviewer. Seven data gathering instruments were developed, namely: (1) an identification chart; (2) a household questionnaire; (3) an individual questionnaire; (4) a confidential questionnaire; (5) a clinical questionnaire; (6) a 24-hour dietary recall questionnaire; and (7) a food frequency questionnaire. Clinical sessions, blood tests, anthropometric measurements, bone density measurements, and other biological tests completed the collected information on the health of the Inuit. In the present study, we examined the identification chart, the household questionnaire, the individual questionnaire, and the confidential questionnaire.

SPSS and SUDAAN software packages were used for statistical analyses. In order to take into account biases unrelated to the survey as well as survey-taking and sampling errors, estimates were considered valid only when their coefficient of variation was below or equal to 16.5 within a confidence interval of 95%. Figures were designed using Excel software.

Variables and indicators

This study does not cover all the themes figuring in the Qanuippitaa survey; rather, it uses those survey variables that match up with fundamental capabilities as closely as possible. In addition to age and gender, which served as independent variables, a number of additional variables were used: self-evaluation of health status; overcrowding of housing and composition of households; food insecurity; exposure to violence in the village; highest level of education attained; satisfaction with life; and, finally, main occupation, type of employment, main source of income, and total income. These variables can be understood as offering the measurements that, under the circumstances, come closest to the essential functional capabilities identified by Martha Nussbaum (1999). Six of these 10 essential capabilities are documented immediately hereafter (Table 1).

All the selected variables underwent certain transformations. They were adjusted to a (bimodal) categorical scale so as to allow us to contrast, for each variable, the presence or absence of whichever modality had been identified as being conducive to human development. These operations made it possible to assess the effects of

Table 1. Nussbaum's fundamental capabilities, variables, indicators, and modalities.

Number	Fundamental capabilities	Variables	Indicators	Modalities
1	Life	Age	Age group	18–25 years
1	Life	Age	Age group	26–60 years
1	Life	Age	Age group	61 years and over
2	Bodily health	Health status	Good health status	Yes/No
2	Bodily health	Housing status	Overcrowding	Yes/No
2	Bodily health	Food security	Lack of food	Yes/No
3	Bodily integrity	Physical security	Exposure to violence	Yes/No
4	Senses, imagination and thought	Level of education	High school diploma	Yes/No
5	Emotions	Level of education	High school diploma	Yes/No
6	Practical reasons	Level of education	High school diploma	Yes/No
7	Affiliation	Satisfaction	Satisfaction with life	Yes/No
8	Other species	Satisfaction	Satisfaction with life	Yes/No
9	Play	Satisfaction	Satisfaction with life	Yes/No
10	Control over one's environment	Main occupation	Paid employment	Yes/No
10	Control over one's environment	Job status	Permanent	Yes/No
10	Control over one's environment	Main source of income	Wages	Yes/No
10	Control over one's environment	Income	Less than \$20,000	Yes/No

Source: Adapted from Nussbaum (1999, p. 257).

the presence or absence of each of the variable's modalities on the behavior of the other variables being measured. We were thus able, for example, to analyze the impact of having a high school diploma on the other capabilities of the Nunavimut.

Analytical methods

Two analytical methods were used within the framework of this study: (1) the chi-square test, to assess the existence or absence of a statistically significant association between variables; and (2) radar charts produced using the percentage indicating the performance of each modality of the variables examined. The charts are to be interpreted as follows: the closer the values of each pole of the radar (independent variable) are to 100, the better the performance of the dependent category is in terms of capabilities. In other words, the more the plot produced by processing the variables covers the 'radar' area, the better is the overall capacity of subjects to achieve their potential.

One might object that the indicators measured in our study, along with the meaning ascribed to them, amount to nothing more than historically and culturally constructed categories, and that there is no basis for imposing them as transcultural norms; or that such indicators are ill-suited for cultures having different normative

categories. The question nevertheless remains as to whether this kind of radical relativism will stand up to empirical testing using data from the Qanuippitaa survey. Not having a high school diploma, declaring oneself to be in good health, being satisfied with life, not fearing exposure to violence in one's community, not living in an overcrowded dwelling, not experiencing food insecurity, having paid employment as one's main occupation, having a full-time job, earning wages as a main source of income and having total income of \$20,000 or more – do such factors not significantly modify the possibility for the Inuit to achieve other accomplishments and, ultimately, other essential capabilities? What capability appears to overdetermine the others in Nunavik? Do such capabilities not constitute preferences that are broadly shared among the Nunavimut? Even if they are not the only possible capabilities and even if they do not enjoy unanimous support, are they not the object of a general consensus? Be that as it may, Nussbaum (1999) has argued that essential functional capabilities have been the subject of numerous transcultural debates, and that they do allow for variations over time as well as other variations that pertain to the specific embodiment of a particular capability in a given social formation.

Although Nussbaum's list features a set of essential capabilities, it is important to recognize that it is neither exhaustive nor entirely representative of the preferences of regional society, and that the indicators themselves are even more limited. We shall return to these caveats in the conclusion to the present study.

Results

To begin with, we will set out the general characteristics of the respondents. We will then systematically examine fundamental differences according to gender and age and the relative influence of each variable in the lives of adult Inuit in Nunavik. Finally, the relative impact of each of these variables on the other measured capabilities of respondents will be highlighted.

The Inuit of Nunavik

Nunavik is part of the province of Quebec (Canada). Located north of the 55th parallel, this region covers a huge area of 507,000 km². In 2006, its population was estimated at 10,800, divided among 14 coastal villages (Figure 1; Statistics Canada 2007). This population is characterized by high growth (in 30 years' time – i.e. from 1971 to 2001 – the population of Nunavik has more than doubled); youthfulness (in 2006, 36% of the population was under the age of 15); and low life expectancy at birth (approximately 63.3 years in 2003, as compared to 79.4 for all of Quebec). Even if all indicators show a clear improvement with regard to the general level of education, the fact remains that, on average, the highest level of education attained by the Nunavimut continues to be below that of Quebecers as a whole. Nunavik is also characterized by strong economic growth. In 2003, its GDP was estimated at some \$290.5 M – i.e. \$28,675 per capita. Between 1998 and 2003, this GDP increased twice as fast as that of Quebec as a whole. However, during the same period, the gap in per capita GDP between Nunavik and Quebec remained unchanged, largely because of demographic growth in the region. In addition, whereas the unemployment rate for all Quebec appears to have declined between 1996 and 2001, it increased in Nunavik. Finally, the representation of the Inuit on



Figure 1. Map of Nunavik. Source: Makivik Corporation, Nunavik Research Center, Cartographic Services.

the labor market is not proportional to their demographic weight. All other things being equal, the Inuit are less likely to obtain regular, full-time jobs than non-Aboriginal people inhabiting the territory (Duhaime and Robichaud 2010).

Taken as a whole, the living conditions of Nunavik's adult Inuit population present a number of contrasts. Half the respondents do not hold a full-time job and earn less than \$20,000 a year. For approximately 40% of respondents, wages are not the primary source of income. A fourth of the respondents experienced food insecurity in the month preceding the survey. A third of them live in multi-family households and a half live in overcrowded housing conditions. Three quarters of the respondents do not feel they are in good health, and more than half either fear or have been exposed to violence. Nevertheless, more than three out of four respondents declared they were satisfied with life in their community – an obvious paradox that will require some elucidating.

Variations according to gender

While some characteristics are relatively similar when analyzed according to the respondent's gender, others clearly distinguish between the situation of female and male adult Inuit (Figure 2). Proportionally speaking, women are more likely than men not to have a paid job as their main occupation or wages as their main source of income. They are more likely to inhabit overcrowded housing, to be afraid of or exposed to violence; and they are more likely to be dissatisfied with life. On the other hand, more women than men earn a total income of \$20,000 or more.



Figure 2. Variations according to gender.

Aside from food insecurity and overcrowding, which affect respondents nearly equally regardless of age, all the other characteristics we examined distinguish respondents according to their age group – namely, young adults (18–25 years), the working-age population (26–60 years), and older adults (61 years and over; Figure 3).

To begin with, young adults (18–25 years) find themselves midway between the working-age population and older adults with regard to their chances of earning a high school diploma. Fewer of them live in multi-family households, and they are less fearful of violence and more likely than the other age groups to say they are in very good health. A fourth of young adults have paid employment as their main occupation and wages as their main source of income. Nevertheless, in comparison with the other respondents, most young adults have a total income of less than \$20,000 and report being dissatisfied with life.

The working-age population (26–60 years) stands out primarily on account of its economic conditions. They clearly outnumber the others with respect to holding a job (especially a permanent job), receiving wages as their main source of income, and earning a total income of \$20,000 or more. Compared to the elderly, more of them have earned a high school diploma, are less likely to live in a multi-family household, report being in better health, have been less exposed to violence in their community, and claim to be more satisfied with life.

Finally, among all respondents, the older adults seem to live in the least favorable conditions. They have the lowest high-school graduation rate, the lowest proportion of jobs, and wages as their main source of income, and their total income is the lowest of all the age groups. They appear to have been exposed to violence more

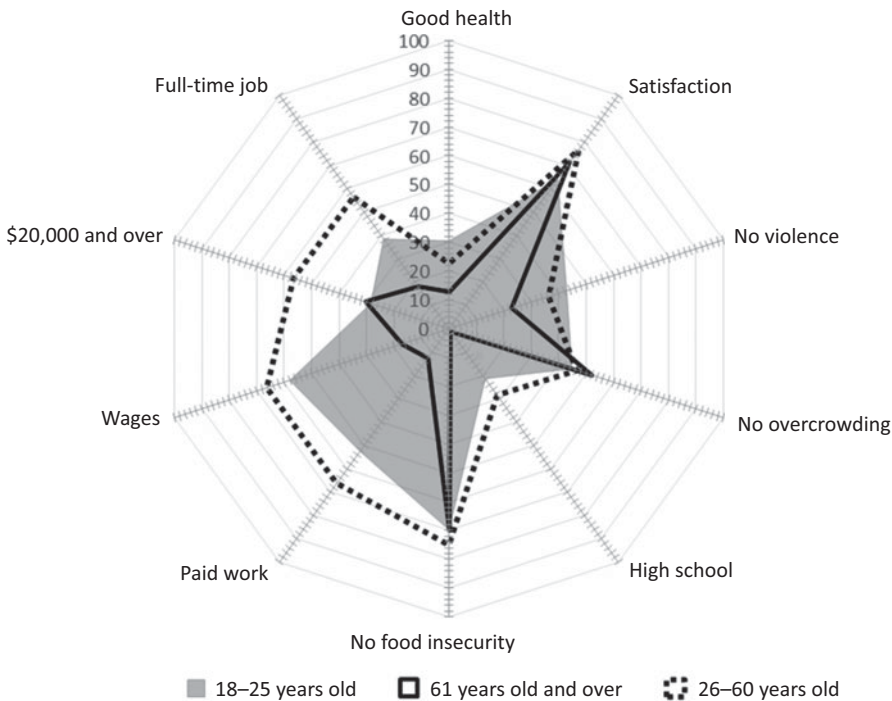


Figure 3. Variations according to age.

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often than the others and report being in less good health than the other groups. At the same time, however, they are more likely to live in multi-family households and claim to be satisfied with life in the highest proportion of all three age groups.

Economic conditions

Aside from status variables, some material conditions stand out as determinants of the likelihood of certain other conditions among our respondents (Figures 4 and 5). For example, whereas most of their perception-related characteristics (self-assessment of health, satisfaction with life, exposure to violence, etc.) held steady regardless of changes in the principal type of occupation, almost all the economic variables (with the exception of food insecurity, for which the difference was not significant) vary significantly depending on whether the main occupation of an Inuit adult is paid employment. Proportionally speaking, wage earners are not only more likely to have a high school diploma; they are also more likely to hold a regular job (permanent or full-time), have wages as their main source of income, and earn a total income of \$20,000 or more. However, they are practically as likely as everyone else to inhabit a multi-family household or live in overcrowded housing.

The situation is nearly identical insofar as full-time employment is concerned. Respondents in this category are more likely to have earned a high school diploma, to have a job as their primary occupation, receive wages as their main source of income and earn a total income of \$20,000 or more. They are also less likely to have experienced food insecurity during the two months prior to the survey.

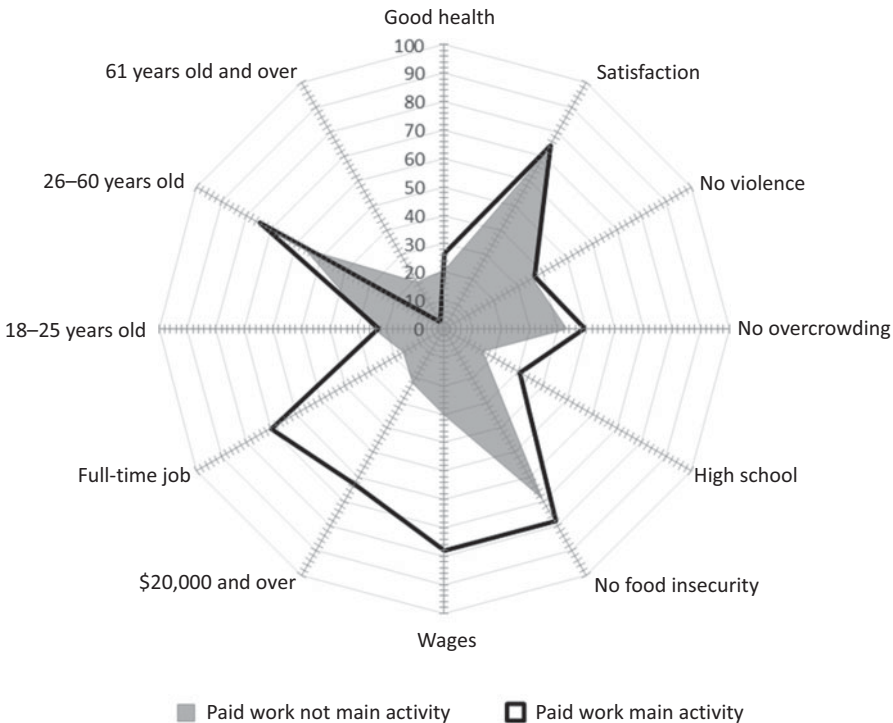


Figure 4. Variations according to main activity.



Figure 5. Variations according to job duration.

Whereas having wages as the main source of income behaves the same way as the principal type of occupation, earning an income of \$20,000 or more appears to significantly influence all the other characteristics measured in this study. Those who earn this level of total income are more likely to have a high school diploma and a regular wage-paying job. They are also less likely to inhabit an overcrowded dwelling and to have experienced food insecurity. Compared to the less well-off, the self-assessment of their health and their level of satisfaction with life appears to be more positive, even if the gap for these variables is not very significant.

Finally, living without having enough to eat is clearly a marker of economic hardship. Indeed, all things being equal, food insecurity appears to be significantly associated only with economic variables and the respondent's level of education. Those who have been deprived of having enough to eat at home are proportionally less likely than the others to have a high school diploma, hold a regular job, have wages as their main income source and earn a total income of \$20,000 or more. However, regardless of whether they experienced food insecurity in the two months preceding the survey, similar proportions of adult Inuit do not feel they are in good health and are relatively apprehensive about violence in their village. That being said, they report being satisfied with their lives in equal proportions.

Education

The economic profile of our respondents appears to be closely related to their schooling (Figure 6). High school graduates are proportionally more likely than the others to have a regular job as their primary occupation, wages as their main source

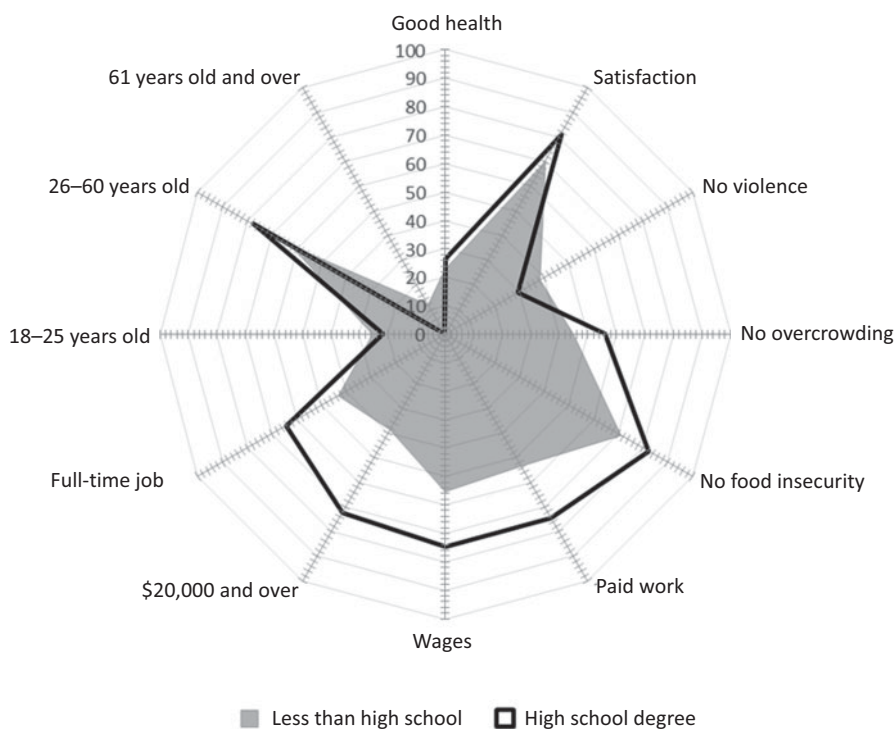


Figure 6. Variations according to educational attainment.

of income, and a total income of \$20,000 or more. They are less likely to have experienced food insecurity or to live in overcrowded housing. In addition, while the self-assessment of health does not appear to be strongly correlated to level of education, the fact remains that the more respondents hold a diploma, the more they report being satisfied with life.

Housing

In contrast, housing conditions do not faithfully mirror our respondents' economic conditions. Although the composition of households does appear to significantly affect the likelihood of overcrowding in respondents' dwellings – it occurs in more than three-quarters of multi-family units as opposed to less than half of single-family units – household composition does not seem to be a good predictor of respondents' standard of living. Indeed, aside from their situation relative to the total income threshold of \$20,000, this variable does not appear to affect the respondents' other living conditions.

Subjective variables

Contrary to most material conditions, the respondents' self-representations do not appear to be discriminant in determining their standard of living. For example, the situation of respondents who feared or had actually been exposed to violence in their village was fairly similar to the conditions of those who had not. Whether or

not they were so exposed, respondents are almost equally likely to have left high school before earning a diploma, inhabit an overcrowded dwelling, and present the same economic profile. In addition, aside from exposure to violence and satisfaction with life – on this count, respondents who reported being in good health stood out significantly from the others – the characteristics measured in this study do not appear to be influenced by self-assessments of health. Finally, in certain areas – e.g. housing conditions, food insecurity and employment – there are practically as many respondents who are satisfied with their life as those who are not. On the other hand, satisfaction with life was reported in considerably higher numbers among people who had a high school diploma, held a regular job, earned a total income of \$20,000 or more, had not been exposed to violence in their village, and felt they were in good health.

Discussion

From among the analyses performed to this point, what elements consistently stand out? What do these elements allow us to say about the general social conditions framing Inuit efforts to meet the current challenges in Nunavik?

Gender and age

First of all, differences in gender appear to point to gaps in capabilities. Women, who proportionally are less likely to be active in the labor market, are more likely to be exposed to overcrowding and violence. From this point of view, women may well constitute a more vulnerable segment of the population. On the other hand, women who are active in the labor market earn incomes higher than those of men. Taken together, these observations suggest that the reality of women in Nunavik is complex and in the process of changing. In less than a decade, some women have managed to convert some of their endowments (e.g. education, status) into capabilities (e.g. stable jobs, higher incomes, food security).

Differences between age groups also appear to clearly characterize gaps in capabilities. Education levels do seem to correlate with age. Indeed, schooling has only recently become a widespread practice to which the older generations have been less exposed than today's adults. Among young adults, the lower level of education compared to that of working-age adults could be due to a combination of factors, such as late high school graduation, large numbers of dropouts, the de facto depreciation of education as the result of poor housing conditions that are not conducive to schoolwork, early job-taking, or early motherhood.

School success

The schooling of Nunavik's Inuit population is clearly an essential resource that serves as a ladder to regular, well-paying jobs. It also appears to prevent the risk of food insecurity to a certain extent. Hence, there is more at issue here than the number of schools that are available or improved access to education; rather, what is at stake is the level of education that people actually attain. There are a wide range of policies and programs which in theory aim to guarantee that all Canadian citizens are able to obtain a high school diploma. And yet in Nunavik, it is the fact of having a diploma that appears to be decisive in determining the living standards

of adults. Thus, all things being equal, adults with more education appear to enjoy better living conditions than those with less. Schooling clearly seems to act as a factor in converting resources into accomplishments, providing access to the labor market, permanent jobs, and higher incomes. It even appears to help reduce gender-based inequalities in the labor market. The women of Nunavik are educated at levels comparable to that of men and consequently hold an equivalent share of regular jobs and even account for a greater share of higher total incomes.

The weight of schooling suggests that there is a segment of the Inuit population that is faring better today – i.e. the group of adults with higher levels of education and a higher income, who are less exposed to food insecurity and who have a positive perception of their health and life. Indeed, the economic conditions of adults in Nunavik correlate strongly, and mutually, with one another. These conditions seem to induce a certain well-being, characterized in our time by consumption and satisfaction. The jobs held by this segment of the population enable people to earn higher incomes and thus appear to protect them from the risk of food insecurity. Taken together, these factors seem to have had a positive impact on the material living conditions of Inuit adults. However, they do not offer any guarantees regarding health, non-exposure to violence, or even satisfaction with life in the community. Other social determinants – e.g. gender, age, marital status, the composition and type of household, public policies, culture, economic development, lifestyles – would appear to exert a structuring effect on these issues. Thus, single-parent households, multi-family households, and households in which the family head is divorced or unemployed or has a substance abuse problem all appear to be at greater risk of physical, food, or health insecurity (Brunelle *et al.* 2009; Che and Chen 2001; Lavoie *et al.* 2007). On the other hand, an adult Inuit's chances are clearly better if he or she has a regular job, earns a wage, and has a substantial total income. Each of these capabilities increases his or her opportunities for accomplishment.

Overcrowded housing

Two riddling questions remain: the non-discriminant character of overcrowding and variations in levels of satisfaction.

Overcrowding is a widespread condition with clear historical origins. The sedentarization of the Inuit is a recent phenomenon. The governments of Canada and Quebec decided to provide the Inuit with low-cost housing when the region had not yet become sedentarized and the economy had not become monetized. At the time, moreover, health and social conditions had triggered a major demographic upheaval, and both levels of governments had formulated strategic aims regarding the territory and its resources.

These trends and phenomena have only intensified with time. Government pledges have been reiterated in treaties, which were subsequently enshrined in the Constitution of Canada at the time of repatriation in 1982. As health and social conditions improved following the establishment of permanent villages and the upgrading of technical supply networks and public services (in particular, health services, which resulted in a sharp drop in perinatal, post-neonatal and infantile mortality), the Inuit experienced very rapid demographic growth. On the other hand, public housing policies have not received adequate funding, have focused on short-term considerations, and have become embroiled in jurisdictional quarrels

between the different levels of government. For these reasons, the problem of overcrowded housing in Nunavik has yet to find a solution. Consequently, overcrowding as such does not serve to characterize certain segments of the population: generally speaking, this phenomenon affects the Inuit of both genders and all ages and social strata.

If the Inuit did have access to adequate housing, this might well enable them to acquire other capabilities. Instead of promoting the transmission of infectious diseases or overcrowding, adequate housing would foster a better home environment conducive to good health and learning and offer the room required for harmonious relationships. Currently, however, the housing situation represents an 'incapability' and is thus a hindrance to the potential for emancipation and the accomplishment of the individual's main needs. This incapacity derives from limited resources – for example, a family income that is insufficient for the construction of a permanent dwelling. It is also related to historically rooted social and political structures that impose themselves on individuals.

Variations in satisfaction

Variations in satisfaction levels appear at first glance to be an enigma. The relative dissatisfaction among young adults seems understandable, despite the fact that they view themselves as being in better health and less exposed to violence than the other age groups. Judging by all the economic indicators analyzed, the young seem to experience the greatest difficulty earning their own livelihood – or, in other words, achieving their capability potential by entering the labor market. Paradoxically, they find themselves at a time in their lives when their life aspirations are greatest; and yet the social resources required for achieving them are not always present. This might explain the emergence of such behavior as withdrawal and resignation – or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, criminality (Chombard de Lauwe 1971; Merton 1949). In contrast, the elderly, who are disadvantaged from practically every point of view, exhibit as much satisfaction as working-age adults, perhaps because their aspirations are lower (Sarkisian *et al.* 2002).

Finally, it is difficult to comprehend why women are generally less satisfied with life than men, particularly in view of the complex reality of women's lives in Nunavik. Are the least satisfied women those who are most exposed to overcrowding and violence? Or are they the wage earners earning higher incomes but whose aspirations remain unfulfilled? This situation brings to mind the motivations underlying the migratory behavior of women in outlying regions, who leave the small villages in greater numbers than men. A more in-depth analysis is required in order to adequately explore these hypotheses (Hamilton and Otterstad 1998; Hamilton *et al.* 1997).

Conclusion

This study has attempted to describe, analyze, and comprehend the configuration of general social conditions on the basis of which the Inuit of Nunavik are currently pursuing their development. The capabilities approach has enabled us to structure the investigation of data from the Qanuippitaa survey. However, the contents of that survey do not provide a basis for identifying all the essential capabilities.

Capabilities related to emotions, practical reason, play, and relations with nature were not explored. The use of other databases, such as the SLiCA, not only in Arctic Canada but also in other regions covered since the beginning of SLiCA, could serve to enrich our exploration (Kruse *et al.* 2008; Poppel and Kruse 2009) and broaden the perspectives.

Our study has shown that essential capabilities of certain people and certain groups are limited in Nunavik. A large number of people have a low level of education and income and a high degree of exposure to food insecurity and violence. In addition, our analysis has helped to identify a small number of variables that are particularly important in explaining interrelations occurring among all the variables – i.e. education, employment, and income. On the other hand, another of these variables, housing, does not appear to explain any difference in interrelations.

Another of our major conclusions concerns the existence of statistical correlations between practically all the variables examined – in other words, the existence of interactions between variables. As such, this appears to confirm one of the basic postulates of the capabilities approach, showing that education, employment, income, and perceived health are all interrelated. In the case of the Inuit of Nunavik, as is true elsewhere, the consistency of these interrelations is validated as much when the indicators are favorable to the conversion of capabilities and to an increase in freedom as when they are not.

What do these results mean? What do they reveal about the capabilities of the Inuit of Nunavik to be and to act in keeping with their aspirations? Our study reveals a differentiated society in which the actual occurrence of certain capabilities trumps the mere availability of these capabilities in terms of expanding individual freedoms. In certain areas, it is tangible capability and not the mere potential for achievement that makes all the difference in what an individual manages to accomplish from among the universe of opportunities and constraints in which he or she lives. As Nussbaum has asserted, freedom of choice thus depends on certain prior material conditions; in their absence, such freedoms are no more than a formality.

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