

Ko'wey Net “Biodiversity”¹

By Tuma Young²

Unama'kik:³ Aklasi'e'iktuk Tan Teliwi'timiek Na “Biodiversity” na L'nuwiktuk Teliwi'su'wa'tasik Msit Mimajuaqn.⁴ In order to understand the concept of biodiversity from the L'nu⁵ perspective we first need to see it from that perspective. This can be a bit of difficult and challenging for what usually happens is that folks tend to expect that the L'nu perspective is reduced to a simplistic or animistic view of the world. That contemporary science does not really play a part in the L'nu conceptualization of biodiversity.

This outdated approach is changing but there are still challenges in the changing that confront L'nu allies, environmentalists and scientists. Often, despite evidence being presented that the L'nu people have a huge foundational scientific knowledge about biodiversity within Mi'kma'kik, it can be difficult for non-L'nu to accept this L'nu knowledge as equally valid as other disciplines.

What usually happens is the L'nu knowledge is given surface accommodation or tokenism but not really used as a factually knowledge base to bring biodiversity concerns to the conversation. The primary hurdle seems to be the misunderstanding of how the L'nuwi'tasimk⁶ about biodiversity is expressed and the question is really how non-L'nuk can locate it in order to fully use it.

The short answer is this is that L'nuwita'simk is located in the language, the stories, the ceremonies, the rituals and the teachings associated with it are embedded in all of these various expressions of L'nuwita'simk. These teachings have been passed down from countless generations to us.

The primary expression or location of L'nuwita'simk is in the language which is currently in danger of becoming extinct in Mi'kma'kik⁷. Once the language becomes extinct, the vast biodiversity knowledge that can be found within it will be also become extinct. Thus, protection and conversation of biodiversity needs to include the protection and promotion of L'nuwi'simk.⁸

In addition to the language, L'nuk tell stories: stories about life, daily living, struggles, keen observances what is happening in the world around them, about the fishes, the birds, the trees, the animals and other life forces. These stories, are for the most part, can be classified as teaching stories. They teach about how to live and how to interact with the other life forces that share the same ecological spaces as the

¹ What is Biodiversity?

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³ Land of the fog and refers to Cape Breton.

⁴ In English, what is called Biodiversity is what the L'nu (Mi'kmaq) refer to as all forms of life.

⁵ I use this term as this is the traditional name for my people, the Mi'kmaq. It means people of the same tongue. The addition of a “k” at the end denotes plural.

⁶ Thinking like a L'nu or the L'nu way of thinking.

⁷ The name for the traditional territory of the L'nuk.

⁸ To speak L'nu or to speak Mi'kmaq

L'nu. The stories carry and teach the laws of proper behaviour while you are in another life force's Wi'kwom⁹. One must pay particular attention to the special areas where these Wikwomk intersect or where you enter or exit.

The life forces in each Wikwom share space with other life forces, thus it is necessary to create respectful relationships with each other. L'nu share the Wikwom with plants, animals, fishes and other life forces just as plants and animals share their Wikwomk with fungi and bacteria. Air interconnects all of these Wikwomk and energizes all life forms. All of these life forms and forces are constantly seeking relationships and alliances with each other.

For example, often a large tree is seen as the entrance/exit to several different Wikwoms or the connection between them. A large kuow¹⁰ or a snawey¹¹ can be seen as connecting the Wsitqamuk¹² Wikwom with the Musikisk¹³ Wikwom. Along the route you can still find Apsi'kuomk¹⁴ where other life forms live. You can locate iketu (fungi), musikn (moss) and juji'ji'jk (insects) in these Apsi'kuomk, along with other smaller life forms.

Thus, when thinking about the question of what is biodiversity from the L'nu perspective, the first step is to think of it in terms of relationship among life forms and how they all connect with each other, including our own lives, as humans. You can find the rules, protocols, the rules, the guiding principles that govern our interactions with other life forms in L'nuwita'simk. These foundational principles show us how to find, establish, maintain and renew these alliances and relationships with the other life forms within all of the various Wikwomk in Mi'kma'kik.

⁹ Meaning a lodge or a traditional dwelling. The plural is Wikwomk.

¹⁰ Pinus strobus or white pine.

¹¹ Acer saccharum or Sugar Maple.

¹² The Earth.

¹³ The Sky.

¹⁴ Meaning small lodges or smallll wikwomk.