

Title: "More than just feelings": Qualitative Evaluation Methods for Descendant Archaeology.

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In the summer of 2004 partnerships between the Doukhobor and Saskatchewan archaeological communities created, "The Doukhobor Pit-house Public Archaeology Project", featuring the participation of Doukhobor descendants in the excavation of two Doukhobor sites. Using qualitative data including questionnaires, daily journals and interviews, the project was evaluated to determine the impact the archaeological experience had upon the changing Doukhobor community. While the results of the evaluation demonstrated the successes, failures and benefits of the project for the community, it also provided insight into the contextual nature of public archaeology and the need for project-appropriate evaluation. This paper will focus on the analysis of qualitative data and the formulation of evaluation methods appropriate to the context of a descendant archaeological experience.

## **Introduction**

In 1899, escaping persecution, thousands of Doukhobors made new lives in the province of Saskatchewan in Canada. Like many immigrants to North America, many Doukhobors feel they have become divorced from the history and traditions of their pioneering ancestors and are searching for ways to renew their understanding of their past. In an attempt to re-establish this connection partnerships between the Doukhobor and Saskatchewan archaeological communities created in 2004, "The Doukhobor Pit-house Public Archaeology Project", featuring the participation of Doukhobor descendants in the excavation of two Doukhobor sites. Using qualitative data including questionnaires, daily journals and interviews, the project was evaluated to determine the impact the archaeological experience had upon the changing Doukhobor community. While carrying out the evaluation it was found that the formulation of data gathering techniques in particular were very context driven and involved many considerations given the nature of the project and its descendant participants. While the results of the evaluation demonstrated the successes, failures and benefits of the project for the community and

applications to other communities, it also provided insight into the contextual nature of public archaeology and the need for project-appropriate evaluation.

### **Doukhobor Religion and History**

Before embarking upon discussions of the project and its evaluation a brief introduction to the Doukhobor community themselves will help to make clear some of the context of the project. Doukhobors originated as a reformation movement against the Russian Orthodox Church in the 18th century (Tracie 1996:1). The term Doukhobor meaning spirit wrestler, was originally meant as a derogatory term. However, the group transformed the term to suggest that they were wrestling *for* rather than *against* the holy spirit (Woodcock and Avakumovic 1968:19). Key to the Doukhobor outlook is a belief in a divine spark. Every living thing, human and animal, has a spark of God within them. Violence, eating and even poor treatment toward another living creature was considered the gravest of sins. As a result of these beliefs, the Doukhobors supported an egalitarian, peaceful way of life, opposing many tenets of the Orthodox church and Russian state (Woodcock and Avakumovic 1968: 19-20).

In response to violent persecution the Doukhobors immigrated to Canada in 1899. The Canadian government, desperate to populate its western lands with European farmers, provided financial aid, free rail transportation and special allowance of communal land tenure (Kozakavich 1998:8). Approximately 7400 Doukhobors made their way across Canada, settling in Saskatchewan. Those who settled along the North Saskatchewan river built temporary dugout shelters in the side of ravines and over time built communal villages (Tracie 1996:3).

Beginning in 1907, in response to political changes in Canadian immigration and homesteading policies, the Doukhobor group began to disperse. Those who remained in

Saskatchewan did so as Independent Doukhobors living on their own homesteads according to the Canadian Homestead Act regulations (Woodcock and Avakumovic 1968:198; Kozakavich 1998:10-11). During World War I and II, due to their pacifist beliefs many Doukhobor men were arrested and sent to labour camps for alternative service. This persecution left a legacy of fear within the community, hindering growth and creating large generation gaps that were felt within this project and influenced how it and its evaluation was carried out.

### **Project Background**

The project began and was carried forward through the interest and hard work of a small group of people. Brenda Cheveldayoff, the land owner, had recently lost her father and wanted to commemorate his memory by honouring Doukhobor heritage and the sites which her father had protected. Through her initiative a partnership with the University of Saskatchewan's Department of Archaeology and the Blaine Lake and Saskatoon Doukhobor Societies was created. Financial support from the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation and the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society helped to create the Doukhobor Pit House Public Archaeology Project.

The main goals of the project were to include Doukhobor voices and interpretations in the archaeological process, creating a community relevant study. Determining the success, benefits and failures of the project through participant feedback would examine how public archaeology projects can benefit communities. As a result, active participation by descendants and descendant empowerment were features of public archaeology that were important to incorporate into the project.

### **Excavation**

The original intent of the excavation was to examine the visible remains of a dugout or pit house, described below, as this was the emotional focus for the local Doukhobor community. However, due to the small size and awkward location of the structure, excavation was limited and another site was added to the project. The Ospennia village, a quarter of a mile from the dugout site was built and inhabited by the same group. This site was easier to access with more excavation options to accommodate the needs of the volunteers. The addition of this site to the project also provided more material for an analysis of public archaeology. The research design also included an examination of the spatial organization of the dugout. It was hoped that the sampling of both sites would contribute to current and future information about Doukhobor villages in Saskatchewan.

Excavation at both the Dugout and Ospennia Sites ran for six weeks in the summer of 2004, supervised by myself. An important first step of the project was an opening day ceremony, featuring hymns and prayers performed by the local Doukhobor Church. This defined the project's commitment to giving the Doukhobor community an active voice in the archaeology of their past.

In total, thirty-six public volunteers were involved in the excavation of one or both of the sites. Volunteers were almost exclusively of Doukhobor descent, both practising and non practising. A small number of participants were spouses of descendants and members of the local community. To provide quality supervision and excavation, only six volunteers were scheduled per day. To give everyone the best opportunity to volunteer, the week was split up between the two sites. Volunteers worked individually or with another volunteer, excavating, screening and writing their own notes, while supervised and aided by myself.

## **Qualitative Data and Evaluation**

While the archaeology of this project did prove fascinating to the researcher and volunteers, its true significance lies within the opportunity to use qualitative data analysis in order to carry out an evaluation. A complete introduction to the sociological theories that gave birth to the sub-discipline of evaluation is beyond the scope of this paper, however, a brief definition and discussion is necessary to demonstrate the key influences in the evaluation of this particular project. Patton, one of the early sociologists responsible for legitimizing evaluation, described evaluation as involving,

“the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs, personnel and products for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness and make decisions with regard to what those programs, personnel or products are doing and affecting.” (1982: 15)

Although the methods for doing evaluation have been refined, the definition has not changed very much since 1982. Similar to cultural resource management within archaeology, evaluation is almost always initiated by an outside client for the purposes of dealing with one or more areas of a specific program, for the use of the client and program users, while still contributing to the wider sociological discipline. In 1981 the Joint Committee on Standards for Education Evaluation, representing twelve professional associations, developed a list of standards and guidelines for evaluations. Although based upon the evaluation of education programs, the standards were utilized by the entire field to update evaluation practice. In particular the guidelines focussed upon four critical areas of evaluation: utility, feasibility; propriety and accuracy (Greene 1998:382-3). These have become some of the criteria evaluations and

qualitative research are judged by and greatly influenced how I analysed my data (Patton 2000:425).

Qualitative data has a huge role to play within the evaluation of any project or program. Although archaeologists deal with qualitative data frequently, such data are rarely singled out for analysis and their value are often misunderstood. Qualitative data provide information about the meanings found behind language, actions and materials (Dey 1993:10). Within the social sciences these data come from interviews, written documents, photos, drawings, observations and any other medium which demonstrates specific or multiple meanings concerning a specific context of society or culture (Dey 1993:14; Denzin and Lincoln 1998b:3). Similar to the archaeological process, qualitative data must be analysed rigorously and this methodology accurately recorded in order to look beyond the researcher's assumptions (Patton 2002:434). For a project such as this, qualitative data is a necessity. They can elucidate patterns and themes of the project that have not been apparent from archaeological notes and volunteer demographics.

### **Contextual Selection of Qualitative Data Sources**

Sometimes researchers make the mistake of thinking that evaluations can be quickly and easily carried out at the end of a project with little prior planning. I found that this was impossible and that many issues had to be taken under consideration before the project itself began in order to carry out the evaluation. How the evaluation was going to fit into the project was one consideration that required some planning and was extremely context driven. For example, had I been guaranteed the same group of people day in day out for the entire project, doing nearly all my data gathering for the evaluation at the end of the project would have been

simpler. However, given the rotating schedule of volunteers, it was clear that I would not have access to all participants at the end of the project, nor would their ability to be able to reflect on the project be the same. This meant that a large part of the data gathering for the evaluation had to be done while the project itself was still continuing. Therefore the selection of data sources had to be thought out prior to the project and remain flexible to deal with any changes.

In selecting the data sources an understanding of the participants in the project was important. Trying to establish methods of gathering information that do not match the situation, abilities of, religious beliefs, or concerns of your participants will be counter intuitive to the descendant archaeology project itself and certainly not help you carry out an accurate evaluation. In formulating the three data sets used (questionnaires, interviews and journal entries) I kept these things in mind in order to gather the most accurate data I could without creating further tension or concerns in the community.

### *Questionnaires*

The anonymous questionnaire was one of the most obvious and simplest data gathering techniques to formulate and analyse but also one with hidden problems. The questionnaire asked nine questions relating to research objectives concerning the experience of the project, leaving the tenth for extra comments. The questionnaires were included in an information booklet about archaeology and the sites, which was given to the volunteers on their first day of participation. Volunteers were asked to fill it out and return it at the end of their participation in the project. This dealt with the problem of the large and rotating schedule of volunteers, also allowing the participants to fill out the questionnaires while their experiences with the project were still fresh

in their minds. It also allowed participants to mail the questionnaire from home in the event that they had to cancel their last excavation day.

The questionnaires were designed as standardized but open-ended in order to allow volunteers the opportunity to provide full responses to the questions. This allowed them to display a variety of attitudes, experiences and knowledge beyond the restrictions of a closed multiple choice format. As my participants would be literate, it was reasonable to expect the participants to be able to fill in responses. However, I had not considered that just because someone is literate does not mean they are comfortable or able to write their thoughts and feelings down on paper. The participants were largely of an older, rural generation, and given that they would have been growing up in homes where English was not the first language for their parents, it is possible that they were not comfortable expressing themselves in a written format. Similarly, the vocabulary used in the questions, while not too complicated may have also been difficult for a small number of participants. I believe that this was one of the reasons why only 72% of the total participants handed in questionnaires and why some questionnaires only had one word answers (“yes” “no”) or questions not filled out. Also the fear and mistrust of establishment figures still felt by the older members of the community may have hindered them from wanting to write too much in an official questionnaire. I had anticipated this and went to great lengths to explain the anonymity of the questionnaires and how they would be used in order to make people more comfortable filling them out.

The questions on the questionnaire were created to address some of the issues and ideas surrounding this particular project and public archaeology projects in general. Issues such as motivation, benefits and the archaeologist and public relationship fuelled the nine specific



questions, leaving the tenth open for extra comments. In creating the questionnaire I was careful to not ask questions that may cause emotional discomfort to the participant, such as focussing upon any religious or political issues within the community or regarding their ancestors. Fortunately the Doukhobor faith does not have many taboo areas which would be touched upon in the questionnaire.

### **Participant Questionnaire Questions**

1. How did you find out about the project and why were you interested?
2. Did you find this project personally beneficial and why?
3. Do you think you have a better understanding of Archaeology, of Doukhobor history?
4. Who (i.e.: Doukhobors, Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan, Archaeologists) do you think the project benefited most and why ?
5. What did you enjoy most about the project and why?
6. Were there any problems with the project and how could they have been fixed?
7. Would you take part in another public archaeology program and why or why not?
8. What would you like to see done with the site and any artifacts found and why?
9. Was there sufficient guidance from the supervisor on site and why or why not?
10. Any extra comments, suggestions?

### ***Journal Entries***

The use of journal entries provided a lesson in the need to stay flexible during an evaluation and to always look for new areas of qualitative data beyond what had been planned. During the project I explained to the volunteers what should be written in the journals; a record

of the day, describing the archaeology and the events which occurred. It was also explained that this was an opportunity for them to record any ideas or opinions about the archaeology and artifacts they were finding. The fifty-seven journals were intended to be used as support for the archaeological analysis and not included in the qualitative data analysis. However, it was later recognized that the journals could demonstrate the volunteers' changing knowledge and perspectives about archaeology and Doukhobor heritage, as well as demonstrate more specific opinions about successful and unsuccessful aspects of the project. In order to maintain anonymity similar to the questionnaires, the journal entries were transcribed for analysis with all personal identification removed by a third party. I believe that with the pressure of a formal questionnaire removed and being given more of a free reign to write what they wanted I received more insights from some people than I did in the questionnaires. Had I not kept an open mind about data sources I would have missed this goldmine of information and the evaluation of the project would have been incomplete.

### *Interviews*

The interviews for analysis were carried out toward the end of the project with three individuals, chosen for their heavy involvement in the project. In order to help me conduct the interviews I made and followed an 'interview guide'. This guide listed a variety of open-ended questions regarding historical and cultural knowledge as well as opinions, feelings and ideas about the project and the interviewee's experience (Patton 1987:111). Using the guide instead of following a strict list of identical questions ensured that I covered basic issues, while allowing the flexibility for further discussion. Although each of the interviews followed the same pattern,

they were tailored to fit the level and nature of the individual's involvement in the project and their community.

The decision to only interview three people was one that was made with difficulty. I would have liked very much to interview many more participants if not all of them. This would have provided more information than could be gained from the questionnaires and journal entries. However it was simply not practical. As mentioned before the problem of rotating volunteers with as little as one day of participation made organizing interviews very difficult. Also the format of the interviews demanded that I not only know how much participation they had with the project but also have basic knowledge about their place in the community, their level of religious observance and knowledge about their history and heritage. Within the scope of this project it was simply not possible for me alone to do this. A completely standardized interview may have been able to accomplish this, however there are two potential problems with this. First, the interview guide was used to allow for the most complete interview I could manage to really understand the participant's experiences. A standardized interview would have sacrificed some of this. Secondly, given the sensitivity in the community towards university researchers and any sort of establishment, I had no wish to alienate or create further tension in the community by appearing to conduct any type of official interviews with a large numbers of people, instead I wanted the interviews to have a more conversational tone to put people at ease. This would have been more difficult with a standardized interview with people about whom I knew little.

The selection of the individual participants to interview was also context driven by the project. I wanted to get a cross section of the emotional ranges and stages of the project, a better

understanding of perceived benefits and failures over the long term as well as perspectives from different levels of community involvement. Understanding that the community was by no means uniform in its feelings towards religious observance, future expectations for the community or interpretations of the past was key to continuing with the project and the evaluation. Therefore I chose the first person because they were very active in the religious, political and cultural Doukhobor community. The second person had moved away from the community in terms of religious observance but was still culturally and emotionally involved in their heritage and community. The third person was more culturally (and physically) removed from the community than the other two participants but still had many emotional connections to Doukhobor heritage. All three participants had been involved in the project from the beginning to the end. Each of these people brought different expectations, experiences and biases to the project and these were able to be discussed and examined through the interviews, providing a large amount of qualitative information to be included in the evaluation.

## **Conclusion**

Using an analysis method of identifying what I termed “contextual keywords” classifications of categories and types of responses were able to be gleaned from the data sets and compared within and between the data sets. As the interviews were more individually focussed, contextual keyword counting was broadened to examine overarching meanings through the interviews. Through further analysis of the classification, patterns and themes were determined and recommendations for the future made. These classifications and themes were examined and re-examined by myself, members of the Doukhobor community and other researchers before a final

draft was created. The evaluation of the project was able to clearly demonstrate what was successful, what failed, what the benefits of the project were, as well as providing information to what the community would like to see done with the sites and artifacts in the future. This project and in part the evaluation helped to create an open air museum dedicated to the archaeology sites and Doukhobor heritage that will go a long way to helping the community reconnect with the past and each other. Without qualitative data gathered through project appropriate methods that took into consideration the concerns of the community, the comfort of the participants as well as practical matters the final evaluation would not have been very accurate or useful and may in fact have been damaging to the project and its community during its undertaking.