

Committee: 13 - Anthropology and archaeology  
Applicant Name: Alexander Oehler  
Application Number: 435-2022-1046  
Assessor Number: 6

### Insight Grants

#### External Assessment Form

##### Assessment

**Instructions:** Evaluations by external assessors are intended to assist the committee in its deliberations. SSHRC is extremely grateful for your expertise as well as your time and effort.

Given the competitive nature of the adjudication process, constructive criticism and/or suggestions for improvement, if appropriate, may be helpful to the applicant.

As your assessment will be made available to the applicant, please do not include any personal identifying information. If such information appears in your document, the Council reserves the right to remove it.

##### Declarations on confidentiality and conflict of interest

- 1) The information provided in the applications is protected by Canada's *Privacy Act* and is made available to external assessors for reviewing purposes only. I therefore agree to treat as strictly confidential all the material from the above-mentioned file which has been submitted to me by the Council. After responding, be it positively or negatively, I will ensure the destruction of the said material.

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| Agree | X |
|-------|---|

- 2) I attest that I am not in a conflict of interest with the applicant(s).

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| Agree | X |
|-------|---|

Using the guidelines in the attached document, evaluate each sub-criteria below and check the appropriate box. Briefly explain your response.

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**Part 1: Challenge – The aim and importance of the endeavour**

| Sub-criteria (No specific weighting assigned to each sub-criterion)  | N/A | Unsatisfactory | Good | Very Good | Excellent |
|--|-----|----------------|------|-----------|-----------|
| Originality, significance and expected contribution to knowledge   |     |                |      |           | X         |
| Appropriateness of the literature review   |     |                | X    |           |           |
| Appropriateness of the theoretical approach or framework   |     |                |      | X         |           |
| Appropriateness of the methods/approach  |     |                |      | X         |           |
| Quality of training and mentoring to be provided to students, emerging scholars and other highly qualified personnel, and opportunities for them to contribute |     |                |      |           | X         |
| Potential for the project results to have influence and impact within and/or beyond the social sciences and humanities research community                      |     |                |      |           | X         |

**Briefly describe the proposal's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the above criteria:**

This is a remarkable proposal with an excellent team gathering some of the best specialists of interspecies relationship among indigenous peoples of the North. The project is ambitious, it is part of a current reflection in social anthropology on the forms of communication and cooperation between humans and other living species. The project will bring new data of great interest from regions of the world where the team members are already experts. The novelty of the project is to use methods that are not traditional in social anthropology, such as the observation of the behavior of animals like reindeer and wolves and the GPS recording of herd movements.

The weaknesses is that the integration of ethology, botany and social anthropology during the fieldwork is not very clear. A study of wolf behavior is proposed with wolf collaring and game cameras near hunting traps to document cultural transmission among wolves. However ethological literature on wolf behavior and social organisation is lacking and it is not clear who will conduct this research on the field. Mark Brigham, CL (Canada) is a senior biologist and animal ecologist, but he will participate as a "remote consultant".

The theoretical framework is very philosophical and lacks analytical tools in anthropology and communication sciences. It is surprising not to find Bateson and Tomasello in the references on the relationship between human communication and non-human animal communication. The social context of interspecies sensory communication and cooperation should not be dismissed. In particular the aim of interactions with animals and plants in Northern communities is often economic exploitation, which implies killing them. The project presents a philosophical and artistic bias that seems to set aside technical and economic issues and violence. This raises the following question: If the study deals with hunting and trapping, how will the team build "respectful and mutually beneficial relationships (...) between humans and nonhumans"?

The methodology could be strengthened. Cross-species pidgin study should be specified by including statistical observation of livestock responses, as team member Natasha Fijn has done in Mongolia.

The methodology of recording traditional ecological knowledge, ethnobotany and

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ethnoecology is not used enough. While animals study is described in details, the plant survey is almost absent in the methodology. What are the goals of the announced ethnobotanical survey? Will herbaria be created? Will the team study the taxonomy, the pharmacological properties of plants? The state of the intergenerational transmission of knowledge? Sarah Abbott, CA, is specialist in human-plants relations, however her contribution in the project is not clear.

**Part 2: Feasibility – The plan to achieve excellence**

| Sub-criteria (No specific weighting assigned to each sub-criterion)   | N/A | Unsatisfactory | Good | Very Good | Excellent |
|---|-----|----------------|------|-----------|-----------|
| Appropriateness of the proposed timeline, and probability that the objectives will be met   |     |                |      |           | X         |
| Expertise of the applicant or team in relation to the proposed research   |     |                |      | X         |           |
| Appropriateness of the requested budget, justification of proposed costs, and, where applicable, other cash and/or in-kind contributions  |     |                |      |           | X         |
| Quality and appropriateness of knowledge mobilization plans, including effective dissemination, exchange and engagement with stakeholders within and/or beyond the research community, where applicable |     |                |      |           | X         |

**Briefly describe the proposal’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to the above criteria:**

The work plan, the organization of the team and its management are excellent. The student training plan is precise and convincing. Funding requests are fully justified. The results will be disseminated and discussed with indigenous communities.

**Part 3: Capability – The expertise to succeed**

In the case of a research team, evaluate each team member’s research achievements (do not include collaborators).

In your evaluation, address the following criteria while considering the applicant’s and/or team members’ stage of career:

| Sub-criteria (No specific weight assigned to each sub-criterion) | N/A | Unsatisfactory | Good | Very Good | Excellent |
|--|-----|----------------|------|-----------|-----------|
|--|-----|----------------|------|-----------|-----------|

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| Sub-criteria (No specific weight assigned to each sub-criterion)  | N/A | Unsatisfactory | Good | Very Good | Excellent |
|---|-----|----------------|------|-----------|-----------|
| Quality, quantity and significance of past experience and published and/or creative outputs of the applicant and any co-applicants, relative to their roles in the project and to the stage of their career   |     |                |      |           | X         |
| Evidence of past knowledge mobilization activities (e.g. films, performances, commissioned reports, knowledge syntheses, experience in collaboration/other interactions with stakeholders, contributions to public debate and media), and of impacts on professional practice, social services and policies, etc. |     |                |      |           | X         |
| Quality and quantity of past contributions to the development of training and mentoring of students, postdoctoral researchers and other highly qualified personnel  |     |                |      |           | X         |

**Briefly describe the proposal's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the above criteria:**

The PI and the members of the team are experienced researchers, well integrated into international research networks. They are the authors of numerous articles and works which are recognized in the field of the anthropology of the peoples of the north. Alexander Oehler has published works that show his expertise in the field of North Asia and interspecies relationships. He has all the capacity to lead this project and to train the students involved.

**Part 4: Additional Comments**

If you have comments regarding the budget or other aspects of the proposal, please include them here: