Photo by Jacquelin Chapman, Postdoctoral Fellow in SPPA.

Supporting Canadian Heritage Out of Traditional knowledge and Tenacity

By Benjamin Faveri, student in the Master of Public Policy and Administration program

Stephan Schott is an Associate Professor in the School of Public Policy and Administration.

This article is going to tell you a bit about him, what his long-term goals are, what drives him to keep going, and how each contribute to his current research project.

In 1991 Stephan immigrated from Germany to Canada, where he completed his undergraduate, masters, a PhD in environmental and natural resource economics (U of Guelph) and a post doc in experimental and behavioral economics (McMaster). Throughout his studies he remained intrigued with how we could better appreciate, value and manage the environment and natural resources. He was originally motivated by the collapse of the Northern cod fishery off the Atlantic coast of Canada.

This intrigue is based on the idea that only things that are measured influence policy and decision making, and if we do not properly measure or capture the value of the environment and natural resources, we will make uninformed and incorrect decisions. During his Masters research he explored the valuation of back-country canoeing in provincial parks in Ontario. Later in his PhD thesis' and post doctoral work he examined fishery management and the centralized and decentralized governance of common pool resources such as fisheries, wildlife and water resources. After his post doc he began working at Carleton University, where for the next 15-20 years, his research interests turned to even more interdisciplinary approaches; branching into other disciplines like engineering, anthropology, biology and political science. His research projects focussed on alternative energy and sustainable development in the Arctic, the economic impacts of mining on local communities and local business development, food security and Arctic commercial fishery development, wildlife management, the governance of common pool resources and knowledge co-evolution.

With each passing year, project, and new discipline, his research has kept with his original intrigue and long-term goals.

Three Long-Term Goals:
Firstly, that most of his research will make a significant contribution to the literature and a better understanding of the researched issues.
Secondly, is his desire to make a difference on the ground for communities and end-users of resources. He aims to rebalance the power of co-management by giving more authority, responsibility and power to local Indigenous communities by involving them in the decision-making process. Making sure the research benefits the communities and end-users first, is important to him for two reasons; one, because he fundamentally believes that resource management needs to be more decentralized, and two, that these communities and end-users are often marginalized and

not afforded the same opportunities as other, more affluent communities and government institutions.

Thirdly, is to contribute to reconciliation by bringing original knowledge holders and settler representatives together, by bringing back Indigenous peoples' power to self-determination and inquiring about Canada's identity. As an immigrant, Stephan sees that Canada has much to offer, but "most Canadians do not have a good understanding of what Canada's heritage is and the complexity of its rich indigenous cultural diversity."

These goals become closer to realization after each subsequent project, but no goal can be completed without proper motivation.

Motivating Drive:
When I asked Stephan what drives him to complete his goals he had three answers.
The first he described as "some sort of calling", a need to learn. Not just from his own discipline but any discipline that was intertwined with his research interests and projects.
Second, is a fascination for learning from traditional knowledge holders, and how this knowledge can be used to improve the living conditions in the North, to better understand Northern culture and living standards, and to improve a North-South dialogue.
Third, is to get students involved in the issues by exposing them to the living conditions, ideas, and ways of looking at Canada and its issues in the North and remote communities. He believes that it is important for students to create a capacity to understand Indigenous living and knowledge, self-governance, land claims, and Canada's identity and heritage.

Current Research Project:
Starting this year, Stephan will begin to work on his second Genome Canada project with a collective grant of $14.4 million with many collaborators and other Universities (particularly Université Laval and Concordia University) over the course of 4 years. The project will develop and apply genomic approaches and link scientific findings with traditional ecological knowledge to address critical challenges and opportunities related to food security and commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries of Northern Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This will support the co-generation of knowledge to foster the development and co-management of sustainable fisheries, increased food security, enhanced social well-being, and cultural continuity.

Each aspect of the project will contribute to relationship-building, knowledge creation and sharing, and to provide a better understanding of issues faced in the North. He hopes that this will make a difference on the ground to indigenous peoples and end-users of fisheries, and bring settlers a little closer to understanding what Canada has to offer and the challenges in providing equitable living standards and improving food security for Northern indigenous peoples. All being driven by his interest in perpetual learning, fascination with the richness of traditional knowledge, and interest in involving students in Northern research and interdisciplinary field work. Returning to what initially intrigued Stephan during the early stages of his academic career, how to better value and appreciate the environment and natural resources and how that information can lead to well informed policy decision making and improvements to the people that rely on a healthy environment, bringing his research full circle.

Left to right: Jamie Desautels (MPPA), Jacqueline Chapman (Postdoctoral Fellow), Benjamin Faveri (MPPA), and Stephan Schott.