Journal of Rural and Community Development

Editorial: Communities and New Development Paths in the Sparsely Populated North

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Citation:
Carson, D. A. , Brouder, P., de la Barre, S. (2017). Communities and new development paths in the sparsely populated North. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development, 12*(2/3), *i-xi.*

Publisher:
Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

Editor:
Dr. Doug Ramsey

ISSN: 1712-8277 © Journal of Rural and Community Development
www.jrcd.ca

Editorial: Communities and New Development Paths in the Sparsely Populated North

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1.0 Introduction

Small and remote communities in the sparsely populated peripheries of the circumpolar north have been affected by significant economic, social-cultural, and environmental change; presenting new opportunities and challenges (Southcott, 2013). Economic restructuring leading to loss of local employment, increased outmigration and population ageing, and a decline in local services due to pressures of urbanisation have been at the forefront of local concerns about future development prospects (Almstedt et al., 2014; Hedlund & Lundholm, 2015). In addition, high vulnerability linked to volatile 'boom and bust' resource industries, dependence on external economic and political decision-makers, the gradual replacement of long-term resident community members with increasingly temporary and mobile populations, and a glaring gap between the 'haves and the have nots' have continued to plague many small and remote villages and towns in the circumpolar north (Barnes et al., 2001; Storey, 2010; Taylor et al., 2011). There has thus been growing interest among both academics and policy-makers in how peripheral communities can cope with, adapt to and, more significantly, thrive under the numerous challenges and pressures facing these regions. Moreover, a range of research streams has emerged on the heels of 'buzzword' concepts (e.g., neo-endogenous development, new path creation, innovation, resilience, transformation, adaptability, sustainability) that aim to better understand the processes, challenges and facilitators of reconceptualized socio-economic development that will sustain northern communities and environments into the future.

ISSN: 1712-8277 © Journal of Rural and Community Development
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This special issue presents a collection of *research snapshots* from a geographically broad and thematically diverse selection of northern peripheries. Together, they address diverse issues under the theme of 'new development paths for communities in the sparsely populated north' from a variety of disciplines and employ different theoretical frameworks and research methodologies. Initial impetus for this special issue came from discussions between the special issue editors and authors during the 2015 conference of the Canadian Association of Geographers in Vancouver, British Columbia. What started off as a relatively narrow discussion of the role of tourism in stimulating new community development in the sparsely populated north, gradually broadened in scope to consider—amongst other things—more general processes of economic diversification and 'post-staples' development, local innovation dynamics, institutional change, and the importance of creative capital, translocal networks, social entrepreneurship, and changing population mobilities, as well as the need to support the inclusion of marginalized (e.g., gender and Indigenous) perspectives for new socio-economic development. This eventually resulted in the present volume of 14 papers, made up of conceptual contributions aimed at advancing a pan-polar discussion of the issues, and specific case studies from northern Canada (Nunavut, British Columbia, Québec, and Newfoundland/Labrador), Iceland (Vatnajökull, Skagaströnd), Norway (Finnmark), Sweden (Västerbotten; Jämtland), and Finland (Finnish Lapland).

The research sites featured in the collection vary in terms of population size, community scale (from single villages or settlements to local government regions), and degrees of remoteness and 'northernness'. This locational diversity reflects the somewhat vague and problematic (or perhaps non-existent) definition of what it means to be a 'community' in the 'sparsely populated north.' Concepts and interpretations of 'community', 'remoteness' and 'north' inevitably vary across (and even within) different countries and jurisdictions. During the process of creating this special issue, we guest editors often found ourselves involved in heated discussions about which papers to include or whether particular case studies were actually 'truly north.' This partly reflected our own individual experiences from living and working in various remote and northern parts of Canada, Sweden, Ireland and Australia over the years, which have undeniably shaped our very own conceptualisations of what are 'northern communities.' At times, we co-editors enjoyed competitive email and skype debates about whose north is *more* remote, peripheral, frontier, isolated, sparsely populated, marginal, exotic, and—well let's face it—simply 'north.' Putting the final touches on this special issue, we can confidently assert that we have not solved the debate, nor contributed definitional assurances. Moreover, we realize together—as others have before us (Müller, 2013; Keskitalo, 2004)—that comparisons across countries and different demographic, political and economic contexts may not make sense – or at least such definitional comparisons are not the most useful in moving us all forward.

What we do agree on, however, is that being situated in the north or a remote area is both a relative and subjective term, and depends on a

community's position in relation to what is commonly considered to be the dominant political and economic core centres 'down south', as well as on the subjective perceptions of people living, working and playing in those communities (Carson et al., 2011). Hence, while formal definitions and indicators of remoteness and 'the north', for instance, in terms of population size and density, distance between settlements, access to infrastructure and services, and land use, may vary across countries or their regions, the perceptions and lived experiences of those involved with different northern communities may share a number of similarities. Given the scope and complexity of these locational attributes, we settled into a pragmatic approach for the selection of case studies for this special issue. In so doing, we suggest that the communities in this collection can all be considered remote and northern within their respective jurisdictions, depending on their specific geographic, political-institutional, and socio-economic contexts, and the relational and subjective perceptions of local people.

Notwithstanding the importance of geographic diversity, the contributions in this special issue offer investigations into a variety of types of communities. The cases presented range from communities with a long history of dependence on traditional 'extractive' resource industries (e.g., mining, forestry, fishing), to those that rely on nature protection (e.g., nature-based tourism), to those finding new ways of 'doing business' (e.g., network innovation) and utilising other 'attractive' lifestyle mobilities (e.g., creative sector and cultural tourism), and finally to those Indigenous communities whose resistance to colonization processes and structures, combined with increased self-governance and cultural empowerment, provide the means to challenge entrenched structural socio-economic disadvantages and welfare dependence. Indeed, our use of the term 'community' in this special issue aims to capture the diversity of population and interest groups that co-locate in, and identify with, a particular settlement or population cluster, for instance, a remote village, town or local government area, at a specific point in time. We assume that communities are not homogenous and static entities and that they involve multiple perspectives, aspirations, and identities. Our use of community includes 'permanent residents' (residing on a long-term basis), who share strong and durable relationships with those settlements, as well as those residents who are mobile and whose interests, temporal presence, and extent of engagement and association with the settlement can vary over time (Carson et al., 2016).

2.0 Understanding new Community Development Paths in the Sparsely populated North

Reflecting on the diversity found in the case studies, the special issue contributions are based on different disciplinary foundations, theoretical approaches, and conceptual frameworks. This emphasizes the need to incorporate multiple lenses and perspectives to advance comprehensive and nuanced understandings of the underlying processes shaping local development trajectories across different peripheries and their unique and shared challenges. The following paper summaries provide an overview

of this special issue and highlight the significance of understanding contemporary development paths in the light of past analyses and theoretical tools that have deepened our knowledge of the northern hemisphere and its resource dependent development context.

The ongoing tension between traditional path dependence (e.g., resource extraction) and novel path creation (e.g., tourism or knowledge industries) is examined through an evolutionary lens in several papers in this special issue.

Halseth, Markey, Ryser, Hanlon and Skinner depart from staples theory (Innis, 1956) and explore the institutional change over a period of time in a formerly resource-based town in northern British Columbia, Canada. Their case analysis presents the stark reality of communities that increasingly lack support and find themselves on their own as a result of neoliberal neglect. Resource towns face 'rigidities' related to financial and production realities, which in boom towns support global resource extraction production networks that enhance their ability to be nimble and economically efficient. However, these same rigidities create truncated economic planning which tends towards ad-hoc mitigation of the negative social effects of unemployment once the boom goes bust. The case study by Halseth and colleagues examines how different local key stakeholders (including civil, civic, and economic actors) negotiate such rigidities and generate new development pathways in response to 'regional economic waves' and successive fluctuations in the traditional resource sector. Their research shows that common interpretations around path dependence and negative lock-in (i.e., the staples trap) may be too narrow, as they do not fully grasp small-scale local learning processes that gradually embed new socio-economic development pathways which persist even as traditional industries recover and enter a new phase of the resource boom.

Similarly, **Dubois and Carson** remind us that the widely held views about truncated local capacities for innovation and economic diversification in declining resource peripheries need to be questioned as they may overlook important processes of small-scale neo-endogenous development that may emerge as a result of previous externally controlled staples development. Their examination of a geoscience cluster in northern Sweden describes how the local system managed to evolve from initial dependence on mining to a successful 'mature or post staple' economy that continued to thrive as a globally relevant knowledge hub after the collapse of local mining. The case study applies a framework (ARTE) that emphasizes the importance of network opportunities tied to agglomeration (the cluster of local public and private actors), regionalisation (opportunities within the broader region), translocalisation (opportunities beyond the region), and Europeanisation (global networks, in this case facilitated by the European Union). Neo-endogenous development beyond the dominant staples economy can, therefore, emerge from the interplay of multiple local, regional and external network relations, allowing actors to be based locally while operating on a global scale.

The theme of local businesses being able to exert their economic agency and establish more flexible business and market networks that can emerge independently from the dominant industrial players is also picked up by **Kulusjärvi** in her study on alternative tourism pathways in a single-industry winter tourism resort in northern Finland. Tourism resort towns in remote areas have previously been described as following similar development trajectories as single-industry resource towns (e.g., mining or forestry towns), as they predominantly serve a large-scale and growth-driven export industry, are highly dependent on external investors and decision-makers and are similarly vulnerable to exogenous shocks and 'boom and bust' cycles (Schmallegger & Carson, 2010). Kulusjärvi departs from the literature on evolutionary economic geography (EEG) and tourism (Brouder et al., 2017) and argues that alternative path creation can occur through mindful deviation and intentional human agency as entrepreneurs at the micro-scale have the ability to self-reflect and thus resist or depart from dominant path-dependent processes. Alternative tourism paths in her case study focus on less growth-oriented forms of tourism, providing opportunities to not only diversify tourism away from a construction intensive to a more environmentally friendly industry, but to contribute to the development of more sustainable communities where different values, ideals and knowledge are able to co-exist.

A central theme in many of the papers in this special issue concerns the need for innovation, economic renewal, and the need to break from previous resource-based path dependence. Despite the recognised need for such innovation in resource-dependent peripheries, the challenges for innovation to occur at a more systematic level (of a community or regional economy) have been well documented in the literature. Sparse populations, a dispersed private sector, a lack of critical mass of actors, and relatively 'thin' networks for knowledge exchange and collaboration are among the major structural weaknesses hindering innovation dynamics in peripheral regions (Doloreux & Dionne, 2008; Wolfe & Gertler, 2004). This is often exacerbated by a lingering dependence on large-scale externally-driven investment and employment, weak institutional and knowledge infrastructures, and a limited culture of local entrepreneurship (Müller & Brouder, 2014) able to recognise and capitalise on the value of new knowledge. Much of this is evidenced in **Kokorsch**'s case of a coastal community in northern Iceland which has gone from having an expectant future as a potential regional capital to experiencing significant outmigration in more recent times. The changing resource and regulatory environments make new path development a necessity. Kokorsch's case study applies a social resilience framework based on multiple parameters (including physical, economic, demographic, social and institutional) to understand the potentials and challenges that different community stakeholders have encountered in trying to shift from extractive industries towards creative and knowledge-based industries. **Carter and Vodden** focus on how struggling resource-dependent regions can transform themselves into more innovative 'learning regions' or 'innovation systems' that are able to foster interactions, knowledge exchange and ultimately learning between key economic, political, and institutional actors in a region. In their case study

of the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland and Labrador they examine how well territorial innovation models, such as the concepts of regional innovation systems and the 'quadruple helix' (collaboration between industry, government, university, and community for the purpose of stimulating innovation), apply in resource-dependent peripheral regions. Their results suggest that such models clearly have a number of limitations in this particular geographic context, including well-known issues of weak and dispersed private sectors and lack of resources at local government level. Yet, they also show that there is value in fostering increased public-private network activities, as well as knowledge exchange with post-secondary institutions, to stimulate learning in a peripheral context.

Another prominent theme in the special issue focuses on the potential benefits of mobile and temporary populations in stimulating new development in the sparsely populated north. Remote communities have long been sites of increased population mobility, with seasonal or non-resident workers, second home owners, temporary migrants, or various groups of transient visitors and tourists being common examples of mobile populations interacting with remote communities on a regular basis. Such populations tend to be 'invisible' from official statistics and are more often than not considered as presenting local communities with a range of problems, for example, when it comes to the consumption of scarce local resources, conflicts of interest between visitors and hosts, or perceived negative impacts on local economies and resident populations (Müller, 2011; Storey, 2010). Yet, there has also been increasing interest in how such mobile populations may interact with local communities in ways that trigger new development outcomes, for example through new investment, knowledge exchange, and network connections (Carson et al., 2016; Kilpatrick et al., 2011; Robertsson & Marjavaara, 2014).

Pitkänen, Sireni, Rannikko, Tuulentie and Hiltunen present case studies from northern Finland to study the economic and socio-cultural impacts of temporary population mobilities on previously resource-dependent communities. Their mobilities of interest include both 'consumptive' mobilities, such as tourists, recreationists, and second home owners, and 'productive' mobilities in the form of seasonal workers. Their case studies highlight in particular the need to stop and stay, as well as the circular long-term pattern of returning, when trying to understand the potential positive contributions of temporary mobilities to new rural development. This suggests that groups that were able to establish stronger relationships with the places and communities they visited over time had more positive economic and socio-cultural impacts. While this may not sound surprising at first sight, it does emphasise the need for communities to embrace temporary populations and provide them with opportunities and platforms to build such relationships while they are temporarily present.

Eimermann, Agnidakis, Åkerlund and Woube further explore the value of 'consumptive' mobilities (i.e., people driven to rural areas to consume particular rural amenities and lifestyles) for rural community development from a local government perspective. Through an

exploratory case study of two municipalities in northern Sweden, they study the place-marketing strategies employed by the municipalities in an effort to stimulate new economic and demographic development. Their research identified a variety of strategies, ranging from pro-active recruitment of international lifestyle migrants through rural migration expos, the attraction of tourists and second home owners through heavy investment in tourism infrastructure, to the targeting of young families and return migrants by fostering more attractive and affordable living conditions. Such strategies differed considerably between 'amenity-rich' areas (those offering natural scenic amenities, well-developed tourist infrastructure, and a multitude of cultural and outdoor activities that enhance quality of life) and 'amenity-poor' areas (those lacking outstanding scenic, natural, cultural, infrastructure and service amenities), emphasising the need to distinguish between different types of rural communities not just based on their economic identities but their geographic amenity contexts (Moss & Glorioso, 2014; Vuin et al., 2016). The case study by Eimermann and colleagues further highlights the need to consider how the 'production side' of migration and mobility (e.g., involving municipalities and firms seeking to attract new residents) needs to better understand the expectations, experiences and practices of the 'performance side' (the various types of migrants and temporary movers). In addition, the impacts of external structural forces on people's mobility dynamics need to be better understood in order to design suitable and more effective place-marketing strategies.

Drawing largely on Petrov's work over the last decade (Petrov, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2014 and Petrov & Cavin, 2013), **Petrov and Cavin** engage with creative capital in northern peripheries. They highlight the lack of appropriate methodologies for assessing the role of creative capital on economic development in non-metropolitan areas. They propose that some communities may rise to be new 'regional reinvention' centres that raise both (individual community) opportunities and (regional equity) challenges as a result of future creative economy development in the north. They point to the need for further empirical enquiry where peripheral particularities are concerned, for instance, the elevated role of individual inventors and of social capital. Their work insinuates a methodological toolkit that has implications that reach beyond the context of peripherality. **Pierre** adds another angle to these discussions by highlighting the role of social capital, and also of individuals vis-à-vis the state. As the two cases from northern Sweden demonstrate, success can occur without an overabundance of state-society synergies. Interestingly, Pierre finds the lack of vertical alignment (upwards towards the municipality) can act as a catalyst for horizontal enhancement of social capital.

Moisan De Serres, Gélinas and Marcotte critically reflect the development of non-timber forest products (NTFP) as a strategy for economic diversification in rural environments in the Côte-Nord region, of northern Québec. Specifically, they turn their attention to 'recreotourism' businesses whose activities depend on NTFP, and the unrealized benefits of these products. Among them, the authors propose

that NTFP activities can contribute to economic diversification of forest dependent regions. The study also points to benefits that could be gained by the Essipit Innu First Nation; NTFP can support promoting and revitalizing culture and through this association, distinguish the Essipit Innu touristic experience. This case complements the findings in the neighbouring case from Newfoundland and Labrador where **Butters, Okusipe, Eledi and Vodden** find heritage-related development in response to the regional crisis in the traditional staple industry (the cod moratorium of 1992). The case communities successfully leveraged their local capital (natural, social, human, economic) to lead to community development and ultimately a more resilient local economy. The authors strike a cautiously optimistic note by calling for continued policy support to secure this emergent place-based social economy.

Turning their attention to tourism impacts, **Kristjánsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir and Ragnarsdóttir** claim that Iceland's peripheral communities are likely to experience increased and complex environmental, social and economic impacts of tourism in the near future. Focusing on Vatnajökull National Park and its adjacent communities, the authors propose a systemic approach to sustainability indicators and suggest that these can facilitate the identification of important sustainability issues, and can be particularly useful in those communities where tourism is not a prioritized development path in policies, despite being recognized as economically significant. Such a systematic approach might be welcomed in other northern areas too. **Johnston, Carlson and Dawson** examine tourism planning documents for Nunavut, Canada, finding that much of the planning is at the 'big picture', visioning stage and lacks a locally relevant focus. However, the potential is there for tourism to play a central role in local community development and nation-building as long as the locals are empowered and have the tools necessary to follow their own path.

Johnston et al.'s study reminds us that, forging new development paths in the northern periphery requires that we examine who is developing what for whom. This view is also shared by **Kvidal-Røvik**, who examines gendered aspects of industrial restructuring processes in Finnmark, the northernmost part of Norway, using media studies and discourse analysis, and critical feminist analysis. Her findings suggest there is an imbalance of men's and women's voices in the discourses of industry development. Consequently, gender is symbolically understood as irrelevant, and the understanding of Northern Norway as a place where men are a better fit for industry developments than women is (re)produced.

The *research snapshots* in this special issue are thematically diverse and geographically broad. They showcase places that are rich in natural, social, and cultural capital and where the responses to development challenges are diverse and multi-dimensional. In addition, the various institutional and historical contexts lead us to caution against any generalised conclusions and universal 'lessons to be learned.' Rather, we conclude by noting the multitude of perspectives that can be added to our collective toolkit.

These include evolutionary perspectives including careful reappraisal of common notions of path dependence and path creation in these peripheral settings; institutional and network perspectives with an emphasis on communities as integral parts of wider systems and not just remote cogs in core-centred wheels; mobility perspectives highlighting the dynamic and often fluid communities who have a stake in remote places and who can be a vital local resource in places often in need of resources; and last but certainly not least, alternative voices (as opposed to the dominant discourses and development paradigms) with important perspectives from indigenous, gender, and other local community members needed in order to bring previously marginalised values and capabilities to the fore.

Each of these adds a useful layer to understandings of how northern communities 'function'; as such the special issue has added to the 'inventory' of useful lenses and tools with which to examine new development paths in different parts of the circumpolar north. We hope that future research and collections like this will continue to assemble different perspectives from different norths in order to further open discussions on our shared future.

Acknowledgements

The special issue co-editors would like to thank all contributing authors for working so hard with us on this special issue. We would like to thank the journal editorial team for their work in bringing this special issue to fruition. Thanks also to all anonymous peer reviewers, many of whom assisted us at short notice and provided great comments and feedback. The guest editors were able to work on this volume thanks to the support provided by our universities (Umeå University, University of Johannesburg, and Vancouver Island University), and funding from the Swedish Research Council FORMAS ("Mobilising the rural: Post-productivism and the new economy"; "Modelling the Demographic Future of Small Villages in Sparsely Populated Areas") which supported part of the editorial work for the special issue.

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