

Introduction: Political and Economic Change in Canada's Provincial North

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It is Canada's Forgotten North, the vast Subarctic band of territory that stretches from Labrador to British Columbia. The Provincial North (or Norths, as each provincial area operates separate from the others) is one of this country's most important regions. The population of the area is fifteen times that of the Territorial North—Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. The economic activity in the region—from Voisey's Bay in Labrador to natural gas and hydroelectric development in Northern British Columbia, with northern Ontario's Ring of Fire and northern Alberta's oil sands sandwiched in between—figures prominently in Canada's present and future prosperity. The Arctic gets a great deal of attention, but in many ways the Provincial North is even more important.

The region faces significant challenges. Many parts of the Provincial North are among the poorest in Canada. Davis Inlet, Kamsachewan, and Attawapiskat have attracted national attention for their difficult social conditions. Northern Manitoba and Northern Saskatchewan are two of the poorest areas in Canada, particularly among the Aboriginal population, despite producing substantial resource wealth. The Provincial North also hosts the boom towns of Timmins, Ontario; Fort McMurray, Alberta; and Fort St. John, British Columbia. The Provincial Norths lack political autonomy—although there have been promising initiatives in Labrador and Northern Quebec—and, as a consequence, struggle to gain the attention of provincial and federal authorities.

The International Centre for Northern Governance and Development, established in 2008 at the University of Saskatchewan, was created to address, in close collaboration with the people and communities of the region, the challenges facing Northern Saskatchewan. The Centre's Masters of Northern Governance and Development trains northern-based students seeking to contribute to the North's future. Collaborations with other

northern institutions—from the University of Northern British Columbia to Northeastern Federal University in Russia and with an extensive set of partnerships with the UiT The Arctic University of Norway and Luleå University of Technology in Sweden—have helped northern residents place their challenges and opportunities in circumpolar perspective.

In June 2012, ICNGD invited scholars from across the Provincial North to gather in Saskatoon to discuss the political, social, and economic realities of the Provincial North in a flexible, interdisciplinary, and workshop format. The contributions proved to be truly impressive, as academics brought a variety of professional and academic perspectives to bear on the challenges facing the region. As is often the case with such sessions, the informal conversations and exchanges were as important as the formal presentations. We realized, as the various scholars addressed the meeting, that we had witnessed a unique event. Having academics from a variety of disciplines and institutions, each offering a different means of understanding the Provincial North, rarely happens in Canada. We saw similarities and differences in equal measure. We learned of new and exciting policy initiatives, fascinating community responses, disturbing developments, and worrisome forecasts about the future. Everyone in attendance acknowledged that this was a conversation that had to continue and that had to be shared more broadly.

Over the past two years, we worked with participants to develop the collection of essays that you now have before you. The articles included in this special issue of the *Northern Review* do not represent all of the work presented at the conference, but do illustrate the richness, breadth, and depth of the analytical work underway on the northern parts of the provinces. The collaborations are continuing and will continue well into the future. The Provincial North finds itself in a situation much like that of the Territorial North in the 1960s: politically marginalized, lacking regional levers of power, confronting challenges in socio-economic terms, and largely ignored by the country as a whole. But, like the Territorial North in the 1960s, there are many signs of a regional awakening: emerging policy initiatives tied to regional economic and social strategies, a generation of Aboriginal and northern leaders who imagine a new and more exciting future for their homelands, pressures for rapid economic development, and emerging Aboriginal business and development corporations that stand to capture a greater share of northern wealth and opportunity for the region.

The Provincial North deserves greater attention, just as the Circumpolar Subarctic needs more political and scholarly work. To a degree that few Canadians and Circumpolar politicians appreciate, the Subarctic holds the key to the prosperity of many countries and yet is extremely vulnerable to

the economic, social, climatic, and political changes that are reshaping the planet. This volume is a small but important contribution to what we expect will be an international conversation about the present and future role of the Subarctic and, in Canada, the Provincial Norths.

The conference itself was organized by Dr. Heather Exner-Pirot, at that time the International Officer for ICNGD and now Strategist for Outreach and Indigenous Engagement for the College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan. The staff at ICNGD, particularly Manager of Research, Paola Chiste, played valuable roles in bringing this volume to fruition. We greatly appreciate the willingness of the *Northern Review* to produce the collective papers from our workshop on the Provincial North.

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