

## SETTLEMENT TYPES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN NORTHERN CANADA

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**T**HIS paper summarizes some results of field work undertaken from June 1961 to June 1962 to determine what kinds of settlements are emerging in the Northwest Territories since World War II as a result of the Canadian program of northern development. The research was carried out as part of the program of studies of northern communities of the Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre of the Canada Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. The writer is deeply indebted to Mr. V. Valentine of the Centre for his invaluable help. However, the results and views expressed are strictly those of the writer. All settlements mentioned in the paper were visited and all data presented were gathered during the field work.

The research was designed not only to identify the variety of types of settlements found in the Arctic and Subarctic, but also to analyse the type of social organization and population that characterize each kind of settlement. Because the survey was of a broad nature, it was necessary to develop a classification system. The main part of this paper discusses the criteria used to develop the classification of northern settlements and gives the resulting seven types in an annotated list. Some of the more important findings about the social processes in northern settlements are reported in the concluding section. It is hoped that this broad survey will serve as a starting point for further research by placing in the hands of prospective researchers a tool for choosing the best setting for the study of specific problems of community organization, culture contact, and adaptation to the northern environment.

Three criteria have been used to classify these settlements: (1) the degree of planning going into community organization, (2) the identification of the task or tasks that provide the grounds for the existence of the settlement, and (3) the nature of the social organization.

(1) **Degree of planning in determining the nature and structure of the community.** New northern settlements, much more so than were the traditional fur-trading, mission, and mining settlements, are to some extent planned, though they range from the fully planned technical and military bases to the spottily and partly planned administrative outpost settlements

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where Eskimo communities are being formed. This factor of planning is significant because it means that the basic decisions as to how men are going to live in these northern settlements are made by planners in the *south* and are not necessarily locally or independently made by those living in the settlement. The culture of new northern settlements then is not necessarily locally derived by experience and does not reflect a historical process of adaptation by settlers.

The large DEW Line technical station provides an example of planning in the nearly total sense. It contains a small isolated group of men whose only business it is to tend machines. Carefully designed, compact multi-purpose buildings house the men and their machines. Within the walls of these austere functional structures food, shelter, recreation, and work space are provided so that there is no need to draw on the outside physical environment for any of these necessities. The base is designed to be self-sufficient. The men occupy a very restricted living and work environment, which they must accept and to which they must adapt themselves because they cannot change it: they are mere employees and not true settlers. They own nothing but their personal effects. Their tour of duty is measured in months, not in years. This kind of community is an example of the complex, specialized working unit of that variety that the next centuries will see developed further in isolated regions and perhaps in outer space.

Most other settlements, on the other hand, show a fascinating mixture of planning and improvisation. Obviously in matters of supply, housing, clothing, and so forth, a certain amount of planning by "experts" based in the south had to be done. However, unlike a technical station or military base, the ordinary settlement can be influenced by accumulating experience and has greater possibilities for improvisation. As an example can be taken the outpost settlements where large bodies of Eskimos have been drawn in to receive the benefits of government help in education, health, and welfare provided by local white specialists. Although the goals of health and welfare are clear enough, the means of carrying out these tasks cannot be fully planned since local conditions are so variable. For example, some settlements are more physically isolated than others, some natives are in a more advanced state of acculturation than others, even in the same settlement, and the talents, energies, and temperament of individual white administrators, teachers, or welfare officers vary considerably. Finally, the economic prospects of these settlements are at present uncertain.

On the other hand there is the apparent order and symmetry of the carefully planned settlement, Inuvik. This is located in the Mackenzie Delta and rises abruptly out of a swath cut into the empty bushland to assert a sharply defined insistence that a *southern* standard of living is possible if the technology and wealth necessary to build and run it are available.

In this early stage of community development there is a marked lack of innovation because there has not been time to develop the slow and intimate exchange between man and his environment and so create a local culture or style.

(2) **The identification of the task or tasks that are carried out in the settlement.** Since all settlements dealt with in this paper have come into being to satisfy some special need or purpose of southern Canadian civilization, the identification of the range of special jobs to be performed by each settlement is of great significance. The settlements serve as bases for specialized personnel who carry out *military, technical, communication, administration, and culture contact* tasks that are meant to speed up the development of the Canadian North and draw it into the economic and political orbit of the nation. Therefore, northern settlements in this phase have the look and feel of specialized bases composed of "taskforce" white personnel, rather than of a frontier town of settlers made up of white *entrepreneurs* and native peoples. The natives are being drawn into permanent residency in these settlements in search of wage employment and to receive the benefits of the government programs in education, health, and welfare.

(3) **The nature of the social organization in the settlements.** Four examples will be used to demonstrate the range of complexity from the simple structure of the technical station to the more complicated order of the multi-purpose settlement.

(a) *The technical station.* The simplest social situation is that of the isolated weather station of the Department of Transport. It is manned by a small working force of single male technicians who are rotated each year or half year. Food, shelter, and recreation are provided by the station in a standardized form. There is no necessity, and certainly very restricted opportunity, for the men to manipulate creatively the organization of the station. Most of them make no attempts to become acquainted with the physical environment, especially in winter. The social order is characterized by informal relations and the interpersonal climate is balmy or stormy depending on personality factors. Only the work shift and duties are clearly specified and as long as these duties are carried out, little or nothing else is required of the men.

(b) *Outpost service settlements.* These are of a more complicated social structure. Examples are Sugluk, Dorset, and Povungnituk (Fig. 1). In its research reports the Northern Co-ordination Centre has published valuable community studies of this kind of settlement and culture-contact situation (see list of references). In these settlements live between 200 and 400 Eskimos and only from 10 to 15 white professionals, administrators, trading personnel, and missionaries. Government bureaucracy, the Civil Service, provides the basis of order, leadership, and responsibility for the white personnel. Whereas the technical station contains only an aggregate of single males, the social environment of settlement outposts is enriched by the presence of some nuclear families in addition to single men and women. Nevertheless the social environment for whites is severely limited as to kinship and range of persons with whom to interact. The specialists, teachers, nurses, and administrators derive their orientation and interest in life

from their jobs. If they fail to attain or maintain such interest they risk living for long periods as isolated as displaced persons in an alien and restrictive environment. The individual personalities of the white personnel determine the nature of the social life, its friendliness, cohesion, and intensity. Maladjusted personalities can easily disrupt social relations.

The Eskimos, on the other hand, still maintain a rich social organization, based on kinship ties and local group affiliations. Each kinship group is made up of a series of related families; each is functionally autonomous from other kinship clusters. The Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources through its agents supplies the co-ordination and leadership on the community level.

(c) *The complex multi-purpose settlement.* Here two examples will be used: Churchill and Inuvik.

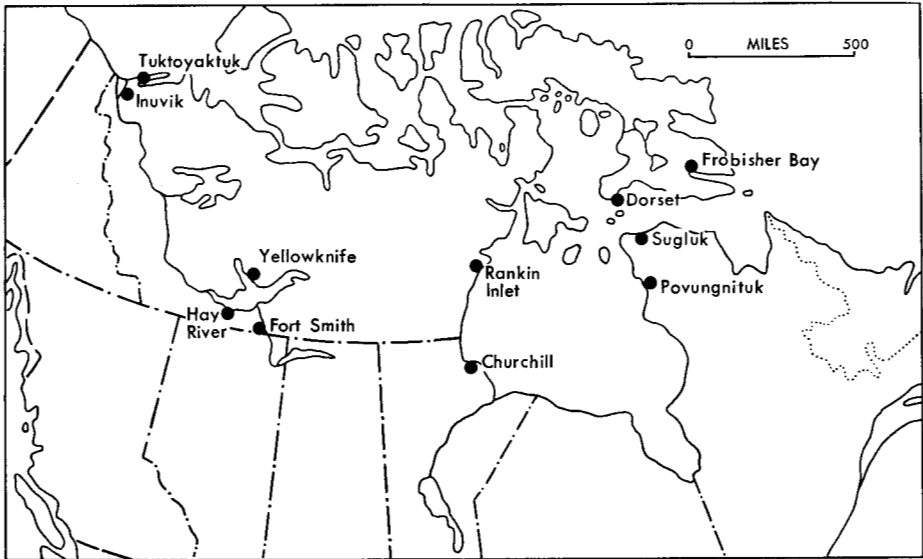


Fig. 1. Locations of settlements cited.

(i) Churchill, a large centre in northern Manitoba (Fig. 1), is really a complex of communities, the two main ones being Fort Churchill and Churchill proper. Fort Churchill is a military base, its social organization is formally that of any military establishment elsewhere in Canada, but its specific functions are peculiarly extended to include scientific, air transportation, and communication activities. Churchill proper is a service and commercial community in some ways like other small towns that mushroom beside military bases, and in some ways like a northern frontier town. Its peculiarities arise out of its dependence on the existence of the military base on the one hand, and an active grain shipping port on the other. Both these activities create large concentrations of transient males. The railway

makes it possible for native and white "end-of-the-line" drifters to wander into Churchill, contributing to the polyglot nature of the population. Social organization in Churchill proper is, naturally, quite amorphous. Community and neighbourhood cohesion is poorly developed. Transiency of the population is a basic disruptive factor. Churchill is still not a place that people feel to be their "permanent residence".

Finally, Churchill has two attached *native enclaves* — Akudlik, formerly "Camp 20", for Eskimos, and "Camp 10" for Chipewyan Indians. The Eskimos and Indians are housed, serviced, and cared for by the government. Each enclave is a small "neighbourhood" set off from the rest of Churchill. Akudlik is actually an experiment in adjusting natives to a wage earning economy. In terms of social organization, however, it is still dominated by kinship and family ties and identity stems from place of origin. The Eskimos are a very mixed group brought to Churchill from places scattered all over the Arctic. Direction and co-ordination of community affairs at Akudlik is supplied by officials of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. These two camps represent miniature social worlds of natives, protected by government officials and, except for the economic activities of wage employment, are only weakly related to the other white social worlds of the town and the military base.

(ii) Inuvik, in the Mackenzie Delta, is an example of a large administrative government centre (Fig. 1). Its organizational core is composed of a whole series of virtually autonomous working agencies, each charged with carrying out its highly specific tasks: the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources — administration and culture contact; the Department of Transport — communication; the Northern Canada Power Commission — utilities, light, and power; the Department of National Defence — defence role, etc. Such government personnel are not so much settlers as transient clusters of job holders, each aligned to its own agency and each reporting to a different outside headquarters.

In addition there are the satellite communities, one made up of white northern residents drawn into Inuvik by jobs, or business opportunities, and another composed of Eskimos and Indians who have recently given up their hunting and trapping economy for wage earning. The social distance between these three types of population, civil servants, independent whites, and natives, is very great. The autonomy of the different government agencies seems to create some barriers for social contacts between members of different agencies. The government whites are separated from the non-government independent whites by work organization and the concentration of government personnel in a special housing area. All sections of the white community are separated socially from natives by deeply felt cultural distinctions, even when the economic capacity of some natives is not markedly inferior to that of some whites. The grouping of the natives at the opposite end of the town from the government housing zone has further reduced the possibility of social contacts. On the native side cleavages appear

between the older generation of former hunters and trappers and the younger men and women who are all looking for wage employment and groping for a new style of life.

Thus in this early phase of Inuvik, physical town planning has produced a novel design for northern living, but the people making up the population, are divided into three distinct social worlds.

Now that the criteria have been outlined a classification of these settlements can be suggested. It must be kept in mind that the larger settlements are in fact composites of more than one type though the structure of each is still sharply defined.

- (1) *Isolated technical station*: weather stations and DEW Line stations.
- (2) *Military base*: (usually found in association with other community forms listed below), e.g., Churchill, Frobisher Bay.
- (3) *Outpost service settlement*: composed of a native community serviced by a small complement of government agents. It is the modern successor to the older mission and fur-trading outpost, e.g., Sugluk, Dorset, and Povungnituk.
- (4) *Serviced native enclave*: small native groups, Eskimo or Indian, closely, (symbiotically) attached to a larger, white-dominated community and still mainly dependent on special government agents who give supervision and assistance, e.g., Apex Hill at Frobisher Bay, Akudlik at Churchill.
- (5) *Regional administrative centre*: a base of operation for a series of government agencies containing beside its core of civil servants, satellite communities of independent whites and natives. Examples are Fort Smith and Inuvik. In a place like Frobisher Bay, a separate military base is joined to the regional administrative centre and its native enclave.
- (6) *Frontier town*: this type has not been covered in the discussion above as it cannot be found in its traditional "pure" form. Here the term is used to signify a settlement that has grown out of the amorphous accumulation of individual efforts rather than through the planning and resources of some large agency, such as the Federal Government or a mining company. Churchill proper is a good representative of this type of open-ended, poorly organized, amorphous settlement. Some sections of Hay River and the old-town section of Yellowknife have frontier-town characteristics, even though in both other parts of the settlements are products of recent government induced activity.
- (7) *Mining settlement*: there are two types of interest in the North. The company mining camp, an isolate of working males located far out in the hinterland, and the mining town that develops when the mineral production is constant over a long period. There is no example in this survey of a classic mature company mining town. Yellowknife is a unique hybrid of a governmental administrative centre joined to a mining community.

### **Findings and suggestions for further research**

It is hoped that this paper has established a picture of the variety of communities that are emerging in the Canadian North. How these communities function and the nature of the interpersonal relations within and between different groups of white and native populations can only be covered in a large comprehensive report, which unfortunately will require considerable time to prepare. Most of the results of the research have been incorporated in a report submitted to the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, but this report is not yet in a form suitable for publication. All that can be done here is to indicate some of the more interesting findings.

In the more complex and dynamic new centres three general classes of population can be distinguished, the government civil service, a very heterogeneous population of white transients and settlers, and a population of Eskimos, Indians, and Metis, who are rapidly becoming bound to life in settlements.

The white settlers seem to be separable according to three adaptive poses: (a) close social merging with the dominant civil service group; (b) maintaining separate old-timer ingroups; and (c) merging with the native and Metis social world.

The natives, similarly, show a variety of responses to life in settlements. The more conservative groups still maintain much of their older kinship organization, language, and behaviour patterns, even though their economy is based on wage labour and not on trapping. The younger group shows a special form of marginal subcultural adaptation that is neither aboriginal native nor white in style.

Because of the great importance of the government sector in these settlements special attention was given to its social organization. Since the new administrative centres are dominated by specialized agencies, their social organization is that of an occupational community. Position in the social hierarchy of the settlement is basically determined by a person's rank in a bureaucratic organization. Thus the work world and the social world merge into each other. Unhappy family or inter-family relations can sap morale on the job, and disappointment with, or frustration in the job disturbs home or community social life. The "job" takes on special importance as the central focus of identity of persons gathered together in new settlements who have no other ties of family, kinship, or locality. One hypothesis worth testing is that persons coming from richer social environments in the south are more apt to feel severely isolated and find the inbred nature of small agency-centred society more distressing than persons who come from small prairie towns or the Maritime Provinces.

As for the native populations, the Eskimos and the Indians are rapidly entering an intermediate stage of cultural transition. They are, however, also rapidly becoming indistinguishable from the Metis population that has been formed in the past by contacts with the fur traders and miners, the

earlier agents of culture contacts. The danger is that this new group of persons in transition will likewise not be absorbed into the social fabric of white society and yet be profoundly tied economically to the new settlements. An unhappy possibility exists that they will become stranded as a marginal subgroup, that is, a group in a state of arrested transition. There is evidence that northern white settlers tend to enter the growing settlements and rapidly fill the better job and commercial opportunities before the native population have the culture contact experience necessary for them to compete successfully for these positions. The Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources is aware of these problems and through education programs and research is attempting to counteract this trend.

The field for research in community development and culture change in the Canadian North is both vast and important. The numbers of workers dedicated to social scientific research in the North are few indeed, and there is a great need to attract attention to these rich opportunities. It is hoped that this paper will help to fill the need.

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