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REGIONS, RADOMES, AND IGLOOS: SOME PROSPECTS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

"I WISH SOMEONE WOULD TELL ME what community development means. I've asked all around, and nobody gives me a real answer".

These honest words were spoken early in 1966 by an Indian, concerned about conditions among his fellow Indians. Community development has, within the past year in Canada, become the new panacea, the new nostrum for all social and economic ills. The term itself, however, means different things to different people. It was defined in 1955, in the United Nations publication *Social Progress through Community Development*, as "a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative".

Since 1955, a great deal of practical and theoretical work has been done on development, both social and economic. From the case studies of community development, it sometimes seems that the underdeveloped world is strewn with abandoned wells, empty houses, disused latrines, and disintegrating communities—all resulting from community development programmes that aimed at "helping the people to help themselves". The work of social scientists studying the processes of socio-economic development and change—Everett Hagen, Arthur Lewis, Bert Hoselitz, David McClelland, Phillip Hauser, Melvin Tumin, Oscar Lewis, Edward Shils, Robert Lekachman, O. Mannini, Walter Firey, Marion J. Levy, Wilbert Moore, and Neil Smelser among others—has indicated the complexity of the processes of industrialization and urbanization, the two great inter-related movements of our time that are at the basis of many of the world's social, economic, and political problems. Whatever else community development is, it is not a simple, sure-fire recipe for solving the problems of people.

Research on northern development has shown that it is useful to define "development" and "community" separately. Development may be defined as "the use of science and technology to extend man's control over his physical and social environment with the aim of improving social welfare and max-

imizing the choice of the individual in the social, economic, and political spheres”.

“Community” can best be defined in spatial or social terms, either as a particular place on the earth’s surface, such as a village, town, or neighbourhood, or as a group of people sharing a common culture. Community development, in this definition, becomes a fairly specific set of scientific and technological techniques used in a given place or with a group of people to further their interest and make them happier and more secure.

The federal government created a spatial community in the North in 1954, by making one department responsible for administering and co-ordinating all activity “north of sixty”. In 1954, there were at least three major “interest groups” in the North that had little in common with each other—the Eskimos beyond the treeline, the Indians south of it, and white traders, trappers, missionaries, and miners all over the place. To these three interest groups, the federal government added a fourth—the civil servants. Beginning in 1954, civil servants went north in strength, not as isolated individuals as in the early years. They went north with the best of intentions, and the vaguest of ideas about the country and its people. They were in a hurry to develop the area north of sixty, and had neither the time nor the inclination to sit down and discuss the facts of northern life with the residents of the country. As representatives of the central government, they came with power and money, something that had been sadly lacking in the North before their arrival. They set new standards of performance, made new sets of demands on northern residents, and brought new levels of aspiration.

Accelerated urbanization began in the North as houses, schools, hospitals, sewer and water systems, and other services and amenities were installed in the settlements. Before 1954, many of the people in the Northwest Territories were nomadic and they visited the settlements only occasionally for specific purposes. Permanent towns were small, poorly serviced, and few in number. Most of the people have now moved into a number of settlements, and become rooted there. For the majority of northern residents, life in the settlements is safer and more interesting than life on the land. No matter how deplorable this drift to the towns may seem to some people who believe that the Eskimo were better off and somehow nobler in the “old days” of high infant mortality and low life-expectancy, urbanization is a fact of twentieth-century life. The city and the settled way of life are here to stay, and instead of deploring their existence we had better devise ways of making life in our permanent communities comfortable, efficient, and economic.

Eskimos, Indians, old northern whites, and civil servants now live side by side in a series of small settlements scattered over a very large land mass. A new sense of community is developing slowly, in the settlements and throughout the North. The federal government, over the past twelve years, has rescued Indians and Eskimos from starvation, and many northern whites from penury. By means of modern technology, they have overcome the arbitrary forces of nature that kept the native peoples on the edge of starvation. No Eskimo or Indian need worry about being fed, clothed, or housed, although in some places this may be at a minimal level. Someone will look after them. Western society puts a high value on the individual, and this basic humanism (although it has often become inhuman in practice because of sheer ignorance of the facts of northern life) has informed all government activities in the North. It is only necessary to compare Canada's northern development with that in the Soviet Union. There seems to be little doubt that the Soviet Union developed its North with forced labour; the Canadian North was developed with money. The financial costs of northern development in Canada have been frequently frightening, but the human cost has been minimal.

The North is a tough country, cold, harsh, severe, savage. The climate, terrain, and vastness set stringent limits for operations of every sort from the seal hunt to the multi-million-dollar mine. The North is no place for the unenlightened amateur, however well-intentioned he may be. Its very severity, remoteness, and isolation require a high level of science and technology to protect people and to enable them to live and work in reasonable comfort. Unless we plan with care, this very technology may trip us up, by rendering obsolete most of the population of the North. Community development can be successful in the North only if it focuses on the residents of the country and enables them to enter the modern world at their own pace and in their own way. In parts of the North, an attempt has been made to cram two thousand years of technological civilization into a dozen years. Although the social costs have been high in places, the residents, all things considered, have stood up remarkably well to the strain.

But where do we go from here?

Only two aspects of community development can be covered in this paper, and these in outline only. One concerns the large-scale approach needed for successful socio-economic development, and the other the requirements at the individual level.

Although he has read about, witnessed, and participated in a series of projects and programmes designed to meet northern needs, real or imagined,

the present writer's reading has not, to this date, provided any explicit statement of what the Government of Canada is doing in the North, or any plan or co-ordinated programme for northern development. There is need now for a definite statement on northern development, a statement on the future of the North, using the techniques and terminology of regional planning. Goals must be set, some sort of timetable laid out, concrete programmes presented and discussed at the local level, a total approach outlined that will tell the Canadian taxpayer what is being done with his money in the North, and inform all northern residents where they are going, and what part they will be expected to play in northern development.

In the Northwest Territories, there is an obvious need to split the vast, unwieldy land mass into reasonably homogeneous regions that can be developed in different ways and at different paces in line with the available resources, and the needs and aspirations of local people. The Carrothers Commission has already recommended this. Such regionalization, based on similar *genres de vie* and a fairly high degree of geographical uniformity and socio-economic conditions should replace the present administrative regions set up by the different government departments. The land and the people create a uniformity that was frequently ignored by government departments when they created their regions for their own special purposes. Each region should have a regional centre that would serve as a focus for activity. In this centre, government functions that can best be run from a central place should be located; these settlements will serve as growth centres for the region, developing with the regions through such planning devices as regional budgeting. Such settlements must be well organized, efficient, clean, healthy, pleasant places to live in. In the North, in the isolated settlements, the health of every person is the health of the sickest person in the community. The economic as well as the social costs of poor health in northern communities are very high. The skilled technologists needed to develop the North will not bring their wives and families to live in dirty, disorganized, segregated communities.

Each regional capital should be connected by direct telecommunication links to Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories, and through the capital with Ottawa. For a long time to come, the major costs of developing the Territories will be borne by the federal government and the taxpayers of Canada. They have a right to remain informed about what is being done with their money. With modern methods of telecommunication, the presence of the federal government need not be heavy-handed or oppressive. In

each regional centre, an information centre should be created. This would be a central room or building where all data and information on the region are gathered and stored by electronic means. This information would be gathered, stored, and simultaneously transmitted to the territorial capital and to Ottawa. The settlement information centres should be places where everyone—local residents, mining men, government officials—could come to examine the same basic information on the region. Information on the whole of the Territories and the rest of Canada, of interest to the local people, could be fed into the information centre from the territorial and the national capital, and made available for examination. Accurate information, available freely to everyone, is the necessary prerequisite for modern planning and community development. It is at present almost totally lacking in the North.

With the use of available methods of information storage and transmission, it is possible for an administrator in Ottawa to sit at a console and display before himself the relevant documents on any settlement or programme in the North. The same documents could be displayed simultaneously before a regional administrator, with the interested territorial officials also seeing the same documents and taking part in a discussion of them by telephone. It is possible, using the same means, for socio-economic programmes and projects to be shown and discussed before the local people to determine their views, get their reaction, and, by so doing, to involve them in the decision-making process. Although such a system would be expensive to instal, it is a necessary prerequisite to northern development. Such a system will be cheaper in the long run than the present system with its delays and frustrations brought about by the tedious and time-consuming pushing of paper back and forth between Ottawa and the field. It would also save a great deal of wear and tear on those vital agents of northern development, the administrators, both in the field and in Ottawa.

Using expensive electronic equipment will be pointless, however, without drawing up a specific, long-term northern development programme based on the resources, needs, and requirements of the regions, the Territories and the whole of Canada. The modern electronic media permit instant data gathering, processing, storage, retrieval, and transmission, instantaneous feedback, and the possibilities of discussing any particular programme or project with everyone interested. The North demands the highest possible level of science and technology simply because of its size and its problems; the land itself sets the limits.

The level of technology needed, although high, will mean little, how-

ever, unless a high level of social science and social technology accompanies it. Unless discussion and dialogue between everyone interested in the North is encouraged, and unless local interest and participation in northern development are stimulated, the high degree of control possible through the use of electronic media may merely result in an authoritarian structure.

To move from the large scale to the small scale, it is now necessary to see the individual in the North and his problems, and to suggest something that will make his life more meaningful. The old Eskimo way is passing in the North. In a few years, many Eskimos have gone through the strenuous, painful process of social and cultural change from traditional man to industrial man, a process that took westerners a couple of centuries. Along the DEW line, two structures frequently stand almost side by side—the radar dome and the igloo. Basically these two structures use the same principle in their construction. The dome is the most economic, efficient, and structurally sound building form for a severe climate. Modern technology produced the radar dome. The ingenuity of the Eskimo, countless years ago, devised the snow house. And, in this matter, who will say who has been the more intelligent and the more advanced?

Community development implies that the people involved in the processes of social and economic change contribute to the process of development. But what can the Eskimo contribute? In the North, as elsewhere in the developing world, we have tended to equate knowledge and intelligence with the length of time spent in the formal conventional system of education. If we persist in this way of thinking, we may well designate ninety-nine per cent of the world's population as technologically obsolete—and act accordingly. We tend to forget that man can never be obsolete. Within the castle of his skull, he houses the most advanced, sophisticated, delicate, sensitive computer ever designed. It has taken a long time for man to develop this brain, and the evidence indicates that if the brain is not used, then it does not work. The brain of the Eskimo is basically the same as that of every other human being; only his culture is different.

The Eskimo, and this includes every Eskimo and not just a select élite, must be integrated into society at the local, regional, territorial, national, and world level—for his survival and our own. The Eskimo can no longer be seen as a happy fur-clad savage or as a drunken bum; both images do an injustice to his basic individualism and to his humanity. The Eskimo must be seen as an equal partner in development who can give as well as receive;

nothing stultifies development as much as constant client relationship between administrator and administered. Except in menial roles, the Canadian Eskimo has never been given the opportunity to contribute to the process of development.

The contribution that the Eskimo can make to northern and Canadian development can best be appreciated if we reverse the picture of illiterate Eskimos and knowledgeable whites in the North. For are not the majority of Canadians illiterate in relation to their knowledge of the Eskimo and of the processes of social and economic development? And are we not, through our educational system, with its stereotyped Eskimos, perpetuating many myths and much nonsense about the Eskimo and the North? Why should the young in Canada learn from books when they can see, hear, and talk with real Eskimos? Through slides, recordings, personal visits, and a re-creation of the Eskimos' world from the most traditional to the most modern aspect, it should be possible to present the real North to our children, its problems as well as its promise. All the complex processes of social and economic change are going on in the North today. The whole history of man from the Stone Age to the Age of Cybernetics is unfolding there before our very eyes. Through the electronic media and by other means, any student, anywhere in Canada (or in the rest of the world for that matter) can hear the songs of the old Eskimo and watch them hunt seal. They can talk with an Eskimo who literally stepped from kayak to bulldozer. They can understand and appreciate, and learn from the sight, sound, and feel of the vast and complex processes of change. We can afford to re-create the Arctic in every schoolroom (by displays of rocks, wild flowers, and plants, and by the presentation of slides, films, filmstrips, the recordings of arctic sounds, and so on so that each schoolroom becomes a living museum where the Eskimo teaches us what he has had to learn in order to survive both in traditional times and in the modern world.

Meaningful community development in the North at the individual level will only come about when government authorities stop ordering about the northern residents, and especially the Eskimos and the Indians, and begin instead to listen to them and to learn from them. The main aim of community-development techniques is to ease the strain involved in moving people through the processes of change in the modern world. These techniques attempt to prevent suffering as traditional peoples and isolated communities break up and their members enter urbanized, industrialized society. In doing so, the community-development process also attempts to re-integrate modern,

urbanized, industrialized man into his society and to foster a sense of human community that transcends the narrow bounds of space and time.

The gaps in space and time can be bridged by electronic equipment which only an affluent society can afford. And new types of community development that bridge the gap between the governors and the governed may be possible with the use of such equipment and with people firmly in the forefront of development. There is an opportunity in the North to put into practice some of the ideas of Marshall McLuhan—ideas which, far from being wild, visionary, and futuristic, may well prove to be the most efficient and quickest way, economically and socially, of bringing about community development in the Northwest Territories.

CONSUMER DEMAND

Stanley Cooperman

Old men
never start wars: they
provide them. For
where the wars
begin,
go to the young
lovers
with flags
tattooed on their skin.

For where the wars
start,
go to the young lovers
and the pure
in heart.