

Gaps in Historical Research on Natural Resources and Arctic Communities: Priority Areas

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There are literally hundreds of important projects, including site-specific studies, that could be undertaken relative to the development of natural resources in the Canadian Arctic. I would suggest the following as high priority items for ReSDA:

1. There is significant need for an overview history of natural resource development in the Canadian North. The absence of a single volume on the evolution of the mining, oil and gas and related sectors in the region is a serious impediment to developing an understanding of contemporary issues. This study would, of necessity, draw heavily on existing work and available publications. There is sufficient work of that type, however, for a substantial volume that describes the development of the extractive industries, the social and cultural impact on local communities/populations, the development of resource communities, the economic effects on the North and on the country, and the environmental legacy from the various projects.
2. It is important that studies of natural resource development in the North include an examination of the non-Aboriginal communities and resource-dependent societies. While much remains to be done on the Aboriginal side, the non-Aboriginal side needs significant historical attention.
3. It would be helpful to have a detailed examination of the conflict of value systems (Indigenous, Newcomer Populations, Outside Corporations, Governments, Southerners Generally) related to Arctic resource development. While there is a general understanding that these groups have different attitudes toward resource development in the North, the precise nature of the value systems remains substantially unexamined as does the change over time in these values.
4. There is the need for an examination of the operations of wage and employment systems in the natural resource sector, including the role of unions in Arctic development. The reliance, after World War II, on high wages and generous living supports played a major role in shaping Arctic resource development, but the nature and impact of the employment arrangements has not been examined in detail.
4. Winter is one of the most important elements – perhaps the most important – in shaping northern resource development. Very little has been written about the impact of winter (or seasonal variations generally) on the resource sector and it is time that this was rectified. Climate changes makes this theme even more topical.
5. Research is needed on the extent, value, nature and impact of private and public sector investments in infrastructure, focusing particularly on the effect of these investments on Arctic communities.
6. Environmental remediation is, substantially, a post-World War II development. Research is needed on the origins and impact of these practices, including regulations, cost and oversight, as the remediation effort (or lack thereof) has been of considerable importance in shaping the long-term impact.
7. There is need for an extensive historical examination of Indigenous engagement with the resource economy in the Arctic. While portions of the story are known, there is no systematic study as yet of Aboriginal participation or non-participation in regional resource developments.
8. It would be very valuable to have a study of localized Indigenous responses – including protests – to planned and implemented resource development projects in the North.