

Preview of Gap Analysis
“The Impacts of Resource Development on Northern Communities”
(Peter Schweitzer & Team)
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The following paragraphs are based on our draft gap analysis and on discussions with Cecilie Ebsen and Gertrude Eilmsteiner-Saxinger, both of whom are contributing to the gap analysis.

Before I get to the 3 main themes, I want to mention 2 issues that we consider critical, although they do not necessarily fall into the purview of our gap analysis.

1. We need a better handle on the legal/political/regulatory frameworks that guide resource developments (RD) in the North and elsewhere. These frameworks are often structured along national boundaries, although provincial and territorial boundaries as well. Comparability of our case studies hinges on a good understanding of these frameworks. We suggest that someone within ReSDA compiles this basic information and distributes it to all project members.
2. Impact assessments (IA) are typically done before any developments happen. These documents are full with scenarios and predictions but we rarely get a sense of what really happened. Thus, we strongly advise to build a case study along information obtained x years after the commencement of RD. Ideally, actual impacts can be identified and isolated, and compared to the predictions of the IA.

The 3 main themes resulting from our gap analysis can be called “human mobility,” “formal and informal economic impacts,” and “subsistence and cultural values”.

Human Mobility

Resource development has obvious impacts on the mobility and immobility of stakeholders (local communities, other residents of the region, outside workers, etc.). Strangely enough, most IAs do not pay a lot of attention to the issues at hand or downplay the impact of RD on (im)mobility. Future work needs to look more closely at changing mobility patterns: who moves where, when (and for how long), by which means, etc. In posing these questions we must avoid the bias of the agricultural mind-set that mobility is bad (and the post-industrial attitude that mobility is success). The impacts, costs, and benefits of mobility need to be gleaned from detailed community-based research that keeps incorporates regional/national/global perspectives.

Long-distance commuting (LDC) and fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) are becoming more and more prevalent in most parts of the Arctic and, thus, need more scholarly attention. LDC and FIFO do not only result in particular mobility patterns but also signify a certain form of labor organization. This leads us from mobility to economics.

Formal and Informal Economic Impacts

Certain aspects of the formal economy (e.g., number of jobs created, average salaries, local tax revenue) have received the bulk of attention in research devoted to the impacts of RD. However, even standard economic parameters often fail to express the unequal distributions of employment opportunities, salaries, etc.

The informal economy, including subsistence, is often ignored in IAs. While it is typical for local residents in public meetings to voice concerns about changes to lands and animals, the published impact statements rarely pay much attention to these concerns. Since there is an obvious link between subsistence and nutrition, changes in subsistence practices can impact the formal economy in turn.

Subsistence and Cultural Values

Changes in subsistence have not only economic and nutritional consequences but impact the entire system of cultural values. This system ranges from spirituality and worldview to language and sharing ideologies. Most of these categories are entirely absent from IAs and similar exercises.

While the realm of cultural values constitutes a clear gap in the study of RD impacts, it is one that isn't easy to overcome. Given that cultural change is happening due to a variety of factors, it is very difficult to ascertain that a drop in language retention, to name just one example, is due to RD (that doesn't mean that other impacts can be attributed easily to RD). Likewise, while economic change can bring positive results, it is unclear if and how cultural change can be interpreted as positive. No matter how challenging the matter is, cultural change deserves to receive more research attention.