

# **Convergence or Divergence Comparing Current Economic Development Policies in the Russian and Canadian North**

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## **Introduction**

The demise of the 20<sup>th</sup> century development regimes brought the Canadian and Russian North to a strategic crossroad, where they inevitably face a drastic reformulation of development policies. Are the new development policies in the Canadian and Russian North converging? It may seem likely since both countries went through a period of neo-liberal reforms that replaced the state-dominated systems of planning and negotiating economic growth (whether Fordist or Soviet) with more flexible and less invasive development frameworks. In addition, many of the socio-economic problems in the North are strikingly similar, as well as are the challenges posed by globalization and a looming climate change. On the other hand, however, political and economic environments in Russia and Canada remain very distinct, and the institutional inheritance of the past epochs is profoundly different.

This paper critically analyses and compares contemporary policies of regional economic development in the Russian and Canadian North, and discusses their viability. I consider these policies in the context of past development doctrines and on-going economic and political realities. I conclude by pointing to the lack of meaningful convergence (and limited exchanges on the policy front), while arguing that development regimes across the Arctic Ocean have shared and still share more in common than is usually acknowledged.

## **Economic Development in the North: Understanding the Failure**

Has the 20<sup>th</sup> century's attempt to "develop" the North been fundamentally flawed? The colonial "developmentalist project" in the North (both Canadian and Russian) was unsuccessful in a sense that it was unsuccessful in mitigating marginality and delivering sustainability to northern regions. Modernist development policies in many cases exacerbated levels of marginality and worsened dependency and vulnerability of northern economies. The development in the North failed much like their counterparts in the Third World (Watts, 1993; Escobar, 1995; Scott, 1998).

The fundamental reason for an “impasse” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century development projects has been, perhaps, best described by the ‘postdevelopment’ scholarship: the modernist normative premises of development (and of “high modernism” in economic planning), upon which the western development project conducted in the ‘developing’ world brought this effort to a devastating collapse (Escobar, 1995). Already forty years ago, a Canadian remote area development policy study warned that the “inadequacy of western-style industrialization” will result in economic inadequacies in “underdeveloped pockets of developed nations,” including the Canadian North, just as it did in the Third World (Freeman, 1969). However, these policies remained in place until the 1980s.

Another fundamental problem, associated with both Soviet and Canadian development regimes in the North is that the “plan-and-bargain” regulation was responsible for creating hegemonic inequities between the North and South and among northern regions (see Petrov, 2008). This not only undermined the development of regional economic sovereignty and political power, exacerbated uncertainty and deepened dependency of the North, but also placed northern communities in the midst of the conflict between various levels of government, different ministries and corporations. Arguably, such circumstances made impossible any type of comprehensive development. State and corporate dependency greatly contributed to conserving the economic structure of northern communities with its overgrown resource and public sectors.

The poor outcomes of development suggest that the critique of Western development projects in the ‘Third World’ waged by post-developmentalists thinkers, to a large extent, applies to the Canadian and Russian North. Not only did discursive doctrines, economic regimes and policies of development mute local voices and ignore the cultural “polymorphy” of the frontier, they delivered unsustainable, inefficient, and sometimes destructive forms of development. The crises of Fordism and state socialism and the pivotal changes in political discourses in both countries resulted in the demise of the resource Fordist and Gosplanist regimes in the 1980s. Both the Canadian and the Russian North ultimately witnessed what some termed the “impasse of development” (Schuurman, 1993).

However, the development regimes in the North have not been completely unsuccessful. After all, resource Fordism and Gosplanism remained unchallenged throughout many decades. In fact, they worked well for *some* places and in *some* periods. Regions involved in mega-projects received enormous investments, drastically improved their infrastructure and population well-

being (Agranat, 1992; Rea, 1976). Workers in the northern wage sector were well paid and the industrial towns, in which they lived, were state of the art in urban planning and design; Native welfare and employment dramatically increased (Stabler & Howe, 1990).

As a result of the fundamental inadequacies of development policies, both the Canadian and Russian North share extreme levels of marginality. Although some radicals question the very possibility of ‘developing the North’, and call for abandoning this idea (Pivovarov, 1997), it appears that the development project in the North is far from being finished. The optimistic view may be related to at least two considerations: a continuing (and increasing) importance of northern resources as the assets of the future and a surge in post-developmental discourses of regional renewal aimed at bringing sustainable development to lagging regions.

### **Recent Economic and Political Changes in the North**

Both the Canadian and the Russian North have witnessed dramatic changes over the last few decades. Sweeping political shifts, economic restructuring, cultural emancipation, and institutional reforms are only a few aspects of the fundamental transformation observed in these northern regions. Contemporaneously, these regions have witnessed major environmental changes which have seriously impacted traditional- and wage-economy-based livelihoods in northern communities.

After the demise of Fordist and Soviet economic regimes, both the Canadian and the Russian North have become a highly fragmented and contested ground between industrialism, aboriginalism, environmentalism and nationalism (Hayter et al, 2003). Caught at the “flexible crossroads” of post-Fordism and amid the “war in the woods” for natural resources (Hayter, 2003), northern regions struggle to find new sources of vitality.

Over the past two decades, the Russian and Canadian North have experienced similar trends in terms of their social, political and economic development. To begin with, both have witnessed sweeping institutional transformations. Both regions have seen a substantial decline in the (direct) role of the federal state in managing economic development. Neo-liberal practices of devolution and the inauguration of Aboriginal self-government played a fundamental role in Canada. Neo-liberal policies coupled with fiscal and political bankruptcy of the federal center worked to diminish its role in Russia’s northern affairs.

Similarly, both the Russian and Canadian North have witnessed the brutal restructuring of major northern staple industries, including forestry, mining and fishing (Hayter, 2003; Bradshaw, 1995). International competition amid low raw material prices devastated largely inflexible production complexes in the North. In Russia this was coupled with skyrocketing production costs and drastically reduced domestic demand. The late 1980s and 1990s were the hardest years for the mining sector in both countries. When cyclical recovery arrived at the beginning of the 2000s, it found the staple sector – in both peripheries – in a very different state: privatized, fragmented and diversified.

The weakening of labor unions is another important trend. Unions were the corner component of the Fordist triangle (state and corporations were the other two). Hayter et al., (1994) illustrate the demise of union power in BC's lumber industry, a process observed throughout the North (Southcott, 1998). Soviet labor unions did not bear similar independent functions and were rather a part of political-administrative system of the state. Even if unions might have assumed more bargaining power After the Soviet system's collapse the neo-liberal reforms prevented unions from ceasing more bargaining power.

Both regions are also experiencing significant changes vis-à-vis Indigenous rights and self-governance. The land claims process in Canada, launched in the early 1970s, turned Indigenous communities into a powerful driving force of development decision-making (Cameron & White, 1995; AHDR, 2004). Whereas the land claims process is not in place in Russia (Fondahl & Sirina, 2003), Indigenous people are granted considerable economic privileges and land use rights. However, the legislative acts to this effect are not always enforced (Stammler & Wilson, 2006).

### **Contemporary Economic Development Policies in the Russian North**

Russia's economic reforms following the collapse of the USSR have had a long-standing and dramatic impact on northern regions. The history of the early post-Soviet policies in the North is a vivid illustration of chaos and disarray in regional development. While the neo-liberal character of these policies has been maintained a lack of regulatory clarity and inconsistencies have worsened an already dire economic situation in the Russian frontier.

The decades of Soviet development ended in 1990, when the central government of the USSR implemented reforms aimed at limiting and later withdrawing its commitments associated with

the centralized delivery system, subsidization and the guaranteed purchase of northern products. This effectively terminated the Soviet ‘priority-constraint’ system of development, under which prioritized enterprises received virtually unlimited investments in order to fulfill the Plan, regardless of their immediate economic efficiency (Petrov, 2008). In 1992 the market reformers in Moscow continued and amplified this policy. In full accordance with the new belief in market forces as the primary policy tool, all protectionist regulations, preferential trade and investment conditions, and subsidies to northern industries were cancelled. As a result, stark polarities have emerged between northern and southern regions in terms of the ability of producers to compete in a market economy. The subsequent political and economic devolution and disintegration of Russia left the North without a coherent federal economic development policy. Facing severe economic and political crises, the federal government had neither the political influence nor financial means to conduct such a policy. The center of economic policymaking moved to regions, which obtained power and fiscal might under the bilateral agreements with the federal center (Solomon, 2004). Thus, in less than five years, the over-centralized Soviet regional policy transformed into its antipode, an array of disconnected region-based policies without a coherent common objective.

Since 1995 (after the downfall of the radical liberals) the federal government renewed attempts to create or revitalize a comprehensive development policy in the North, but with little success. Since 1996, the federal state once again became actively involved in the protection and enhancement of northern regions. New policies contained a peculiar mix of Soviet-like ‘selective protectionism’, and state support to prioritized industries in addition to neo-liberal provisions. Overall, while the policy statements were mildly neo-liberal, the lack of state resources to deliver on the welfare and subsidy programs effectively brought a stronger neo-liberal stint to the post-Soviet development doctrine. State withdrawal, fiscal austerity and ‘free market’ triumphalism became the hallmarks of the northern development policy of the 1990s. At the same time, all attempts to establish a complex legislative framework to regulate the development in northern regions in that period largely failed (Kharitonova & Vizhina, 2005).

Another major dimension to the development policies in the 1990s was associated with a widely-shared belief that the North was overpopulated and, thus, its population had to be reduced. The notion of overpopulation came from the fact that many migrants (and their families), driven to the North by high wages in order to satisfy ever-growing labor demand under the Soviet

'priority-constraint' system, became a burden to the economic system, especially after they quickly lost their jobs in the early 1990s (Petrov, 2008). In the late Soviet era, the participation rate in the North was only 48%, meaning 52% of northern residents, or 5.5 million people. To alleviate this problem Russia launched so-called "resettlement programs", which were designed to stimulate the out-flow of population from the North by providing them with housing subsidies in more southern regions. The lack of funds, however, severely limited the program's efficiency. The Government also received tens of millions of dollars from the World Bank's northern restructuring program.

The scarcity of policy instruments on the part of the federal state, along with the strong devolution within the system of policymaking, made regions the focal points of regional development in the North. Some northern regions were more active than others. For example, the Sakha Republic pioneered a number of policy innovations in respect to Indigenous economies and resource governance (Fondahl & Sirina, 2003). Similar active policymaking occurred in other richer northern regions, e.g., in Khanty-Mansi and Yamal-Nenets autonomous districts. Regional administrations used their considerable political weight to negotiate assistance from large resource corporations in building public infrastructure and serving communities (e.g., Rosneft-Sakhalinmorneftegaz in Sakhalin, ALROSA in the Sakha Republic, Norilsk Nickel in Taimyr). However, most northern regions were left without means to support themselves, let alone to conduct a coherent regional policy.

After 2000 the development regime entered a "mixed regulation" phase, where continuing state support (regulatory, subsidies, etc.) coexists with economic coordination. The latter is a more flexible model of regulation, under which the accent is shifted from redistributive budget mechanisms to multipartite coordination and institution building (Pilyasov, 2005). The federal state, that continues to support northern industries, is joined by the strong regional state and powerful corporations in a complex system of negotiation and coordination of northern development. The resulting development model, thus, in many ways is converging with its Canadian counterpart.

Regional development policy experienced a sharp turn during the first Putin administration, when the federal government started concentrating decision-making power and fiscal instruments back into its hands. After the reforms of 2002, regions lost their share of resource-related revenues to Moscow (Oleynik, 2007). Tax reforms also deprived regions and municipalities of

substantial sources of income and denied them flexibility in tax regulation. Simultaneously, the new Ministry of Regional Development started formulating a new policy for the North.

The new “Concept of the state support to the economic and social development of the regions of the North,” adopted in 2000, outlines the priorities of economic development in the North. It emphasizes restructuring, market efficiency and indirect support for basic industries. It further asserts the doctrine of depopulating the North, withdrawing direct state subsidies and minimizing protectionism. Although labeled neo-liberal (Oleynik, 2007), the Concept continues to call for an active role of state in directing economic growth, improving social conditions, coordinating labor market and assisting Indigenous peoples. While advocating a reduction in direct government support of inefficient enterprises, the Concept retains an emphasis on state support of a number of strategic (e.g., the military complex, petrochemistry, gold mining, timber, pulp and paper, fishing).

In the seven years since the Concept was approved, the Russian government has largely failed to act on most of its suggestions. It would appear that interest on behalf of the federal Russian state in northern development policy has waned (Oleynik, 2007). Notably, the North remains the only large peripheral area of Russia without a special federal development program (such programs function in the Russian rural South, in the Far East and Baikal Region, in the Chechen Republic, in Kuril Islands and other marginal territories).

It appears that two decades of reforming Russia’s northern development policy failed to offer any progressive or alternative ways of delivering viability to northern economies. An odd combination of Soviet legacies and neo-liberal innovations, the northern development regime in Russia remains a peculiar, but yet ordinary version of the resource Fordism. The strength of the state and the weakness of local stakeholders (including Indigenous communities) reduce the negotiation parties to two principal actors – the state and corporations – which determine the nature of the hegemonic project of ‘development’ in the North. Alternative avenues of regional viability, e.g., associated with the land claims process, community-corporate agreements, and multipartite resource co-management, remain virtually unexplored.

### **Contemporary Economic Development Policies in the Canadian North**

Contemporary regional development policies in the Canadian North follow a generally neo-liberal path, bounded by welfare commitments of the states, negotiated with Aboriginal

communities and between levels of government. These include incentives for businesses (especially local), increase in accessibility to negotiate socio-economic impacts with resource developers and direct investments in infrastructure and human capital. It must be said that efforts implemented since 2004 bear a strong influence of the 'knowledge-based' development paradigm and explicitly target economic diversification and innovation activity.

Whereas attempts to design the new comprehensive strategy for the North apparently have failed, partially due to the change in political control in Ottawa, some distinct economic development mechanisms came to fruition over the last few years. The Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development (SINED) program is an example of strategic investment coming from the federal budget. Its two components (Targeted Investment Program (TIP) and the Innovation and Knowledge (I&K) Fund) provide approximately \$90 million in 2004-2009 to three Territories for projects that strengthen 'driver sectors', broaden economic base, improve local capacities and increase coordination among partners and programs (INAC, 2008).

The TIP makes available funds to specific projects according to annually updated territorial investment plans (e.g., INAC, 2008). Most of the funding goes to building knowledge base, enhancing infrastructure, capacity building and economic diversification (INAC, 2008). Funds primarily go to public or private organizations, small and medium size enterprises (SME) and individuals working to advance economic development in the North. The Innovation and Knowledge (I&K) Fund makes an investment of \$350,000 annually. The principle objective is to disseminate knowledge and support its production in the North (INAC, 2008).

Clearly, fostering innovation is an alternative way to induce economic growth and achieve diversification in remote communities. However, the question remains whether these investments would become another tool in the arsenal of neocolonial utopism, or would truly nurture a production of local knowledge. Another "enabling" program is the Resource Access Negotiations Programme. By introducing it, INAC seeks to improve the ability of Native communities to negotiate socio-economic impact benefit agreements with resource companies.

Current economic development policies, although they seem to lack an overall strategic vision (since the northern strategy is yet to be developed), are quite distinct in both welfare paternalism of the 1950-70s and 'wild' neo-liberalism of the 1980-90s. Although some may still find these policies a "silent surrender" of active economic development in the North (Polese, 1999), they attempt to bridge the harsh environments of post-Fordist globalized capitalism and



community capacity building. Indeed, funding constraints are much harder, and residual risks that transnational corporations are ready to assume are lower compared to crown corporations of the past. To make things worse, in spite of program restructuring and substantial cuts in federal funding over the last two decades, the ‘patchiness’ of economic development interventions remain intact: today, for example, in the Northwest Territories 16 federal agencies operate 76 programs, while the territorial government runs another 24 (GNWT, n/d).

Another prominent avenue to stimulate regional development is associated with compensatory payments under comprehensive land claim agreements (CLCA). In most cases, the beneficiaries of such payments (i.e., Aboriginal organizations) used a portion of funds to establish Aboriginal corporations. Although forms and mandates of the latter may vary, they channel funding (whether settlement money or self-generated incomes from their portfolios) into communities (Saku & Bone, 2000). In other words, Aboriginal corporations adopted modern investment strategies and, in many instances, purchased stakes in the on-going resource projects. Saku and Bone (2000) found a direct correlation between availability of CLCA payments and the economic prosperity of northern communities.

Economic development in the provincial North is under provincial jurisdiction, and varies among provinces. The notable examples of North-focused provincial efforts are the FedNor programs in Ontario and the Canada-Saskatchewan northern development agreement. The FedNor originally created to manage regional adjustment funds has evolved into a complex institutional structure that operates multiple regional development programs in rural and northern Ontario. The Northern Ontario Development Program has a mandate somewhat similar to SINED, and invests in projects related to innovation, community and human capital development. The institutional infrastructure program component is represented by Community Futures Development Corporations that offer services to support (both with a consultation and funds) small businesses and community initiatives.

The Canada-Saskatchewan Northern Development Agreement (NDA), signed in 2002, in many ways resembles the SINED as it funds infrastructure, innovation, skill development and capacity building projects using federal appropriations. NDA is directing \$10 million of federal money over five years (with an equal provincial match) to non-profit and public applicants with community and business-related proposals in northern Saskatchewan. While SINED and FedNor are run by government departments, NDA is governed by the Northern Development Board that

includes delegates from several northern Saskatchewan Aboriginal and community organizations. A tri-partite committee (with federal, provincial and Board representatives) reviews all projects and approves allocation of funds. This is a more explicit attempt to deploy a 'postcolonial' form of economic development governance. It is also an illustration of a new post-Fordist regulation framework in the North, where Aboriginal actors are actively involved in decision making.

Economic development policies in northern Canada are both adjusting to new institutional and political settings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while presenting some elements of the past, such as program patchiness, overreliance on business incentives, absence of clear conflict resolving mechanisms. This is not to deny progress that has been made in making development more tailored to community needs and focused on long term capacity building. In contrast to Russia, devolution and deregulation did not produce the regulatory chaos and secession of funding. The Canadian civil society also appears to be more open (or historically prepared) to listen to economic desires of Aboriginal northerners. An increased access to market (as well as non-market) means of regulation on the part of Indigenous communities has become an important tool in ensuring locally-oriented economic development. In contrast, in Russia the market reforms seem to empower resource corporations who added new powers to the administrative support that they almost certainly enjoy (especially state monopolies).

A renewed interest in the Northern Sea Route in Russia and the North West Passage in the Canadian Arctic signified dramatic moves on the part of both governments to enhance economic and military infrastructure in the region. Within the last two years, the Canadian government pledged C\$3.5 billion for new patrol boats, C\$100-200 million for a new deep water port in Nanisivik, C\$45 million to increase and reequip Canadian Rangers force, and C\$4 million for the Canadian Forces Arctic Training Centre in Resolute Bay (Office of the Prime Minister, 2007). In 2007 Russia commissioned its first nuclear icebreaker in 20 years and started slowly to reinvest in its military installations in the Arctic.

## **Conclusions**

Are development policies in the North in Canada and Russia converging? On one hand, the answer is yes, as both countries went through a period of neo-liberal reforms that replaced the past state-dominated systems of planning and negotiating economic growth (whether Fordist or Soviet) with more flexible, devolved and deregulated development frameworks. Federal states in

both countries limited their involvement in northern economic affairs and resorted to coordinating and enabling mechanisms of development. In Canada this resulted from the rising bottom-up movement, the unfolding land claim process and the devolution of economic governance. In Russia the withdrawal of the federal state from northern affairs was both a deliberate objective of market reforms and an unintended consequence of a severe fiscal crisis. In the first instance, strengthening local initiative was coupled with capacity building, in the second, policy disarray and lack of resources delivered a devastating blow to northern economies, although empowered some regional stakeholders.

These latter differences mean a lot when we observe consequences of neo-liberalism. Whereas both the Russian and Canadian North went through troubled years of economic decline, experienced the mounting pressures of flexibilization, restructuring and global competition, fiscal austerity and increasing regional disparity, Canada managed to open up several new avenues of development during the turmoil in the 1980s and 1990s. Based on novel principles of regional development laid upon cooperation between state, locality and corporate capital, these alternative strategies are gaining momentum to form a new, post-colonial regime of development in the North. These strategies are slowly penetrating in the Russian North (Stammler & Wilson, 2006). However, federal government's attempts to centralize resource ownership and strengthen its regulatory grip may not be helpful for forging a new dialog around community development, if appropriate legislation and contractual obligations that guarantee local development actions are not implemented.

A final judgment on ultimate directions of the northern development policy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is, perhaps, premature. It appears that the Russian development regime has been set to accomplish two irreconcilable discursive purposes: a neo-liberal scaling-down of northern economy and a Soviet-rooted maintaining of production and living standards in the North. Neither was achieved, and the development regime is yet to finish its transition. In the Canadian North, however, we see an emerging new development regime that, as argued below, is able to become a postcolonial model of regional development that successfully reconciles post-Fordist capitalism with the postcolonial ideal.

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