Arctic and northern community governance: The need for local planning and design as resilience strategy

Kristof Van Assche and Monica Gruezmacher
University of Alberta
Northern Communities

Often remain unobserved by the centers of power, money and expertise

Have the need for *local* strategies for resilience

Those strategies need to embrace spatial planning and need to be closely associated with environmental design
Vignettes
Churchill, Manitoba

- railroad linking Churchill and the Hudson Bay to Winnipeg and Chicago still exists but port infrastructure is crumbling -tourism cannot compensate for the loss of the port and the military base
- late recognition as fully empowered local government
- decades of exclusion (Dene and Inuit people), made it difficult for anyone to significantly influence development strategy
- weak local governance aggravated a host of social and ecological problems
Iqaluit, Nunavut

- Restructuring of multi-level governance, potentially reducing informality and bricolage and representing a radical change in inclusion of local and traditional knowledges in governance
- Many do not wish to entirely adopt traditional lifestyles. Planning challenge; dependency on cars and car infrastructure, while wrecked cars and other kinds of waste, resulting from modern lifestyles, cannot easily find a place or adequate management
- Reinvention paradox: intense process of change (positive and needed) creates doubts (everything new is questioned creating hesitance)
- Newly emerging identity of Iqaluit poses problems in narrative terms for the newly emerging polity of Nunavut
Nome, Alaska
Effective strategy requires collectively biding decisions \(\rightarrow\) require some form of governance.
Northern Governance

• Traumatic history and bricolage
• Visibility and representation
• Material dependencies
• Fragile differentiation
Traumatic history and bricolage

- relatively recent colonization and resource extraction leading to polarization (indigenous traditions vs development)
- formal model of multi-level governance rarely works in the north
Visibility and representation

- selective investment in communities, in infrastructures, in health and school systems make it harder to change the development path at a given point
- long distance to centers of power, learning and economy make northern regions selectively represented in media South
Material dependencies

- Can be human-made (infrastructures), natural (bedrock, climate, soil fertility) or hybrid (a polluted environment, a deeply entrenched forest management tradition).
Fragile differentiation

- maintaining distinct social function systems: politics, law, religion, science, art is difficult in the north
- Adaptation and managing complexity requires differentiation
- combining too many roles makes differentiation difficult
Desirable features of northern resilience strategies

• it needs to be a strategy

• the strategy narrative and the process of producing it has to be inclusive of and sensitive to local and traditional knowledges and interests

• *resilience strategies cannot be restricted to one domain of governance.*

• a northern local resilience strategy cannot replace a continuous conversation on assets, threats, vulnerabilities, common goods, and opportunities in the community
Towards local planning and design as resilience strategy

Strategy in the form of spatial planning; arena for policy integration it can contribute to managing change (harness adaptation) and it can be a site for the integration of knowledge.
Conclusions

- Planning as process this process has to entertain notions of spatial intervention, of design in a structured and continuous manner.

- Resilience strategy, in the form of local planning, and planning-as-design, does not undermine the necessary flexibility and inclusivity, as argued for by others, but that, on the contrary, they can be crafted in a way that make them the soundest base available for Northern community resilience.