

RESOURCE COMMUNITIES IN A GLOBALIZING REGION

DEVELOPMENT, AGENCY, AND
CONTESTATION IN NORTHERN
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Edited by Paul Bowles
and Gary N. Wilson



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Introduction

Globalization in a Northern, Resource-Based Region

GARY N. WILSON AND PAUL BOWLES

The future of Canada-Asia energy relations is not about Beijing;
it is about Kitimat.

– YUEN PAU WOO, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ASIA PACIFIC
FOUNDATION OF CANADA (CATANEO 2012)

Northern British Columbia is undergoing a profound transformation, the implications of which are critically important, not only for this resource-producing region and its communities but also for Canada and the world, both now and all the way to the middle decades of the twenty-first century. From new mines and resource development projects that will fuel the national economy to ports and pipelines that will link North America with Asia, northern British Columbia's significance to the global economy is entering a new and potentially dynamic stage.¹ A diverse and powerful set of actors and interests is reliant on developments in this sparsely populated and remote region, including the provincial government of British Columbia, whose budgets rely heavily on northern resource rents; other resource-rich Canadian provinces, such as Alberta and Saskatchewan, which are landlocked and require access to the Pacific in order to export their resources to markets in Asia; the federal government, which has championed the Asia-Pacific Gateway strategy as a key part of Canada's economic diversification and future development as an energy superpower; Canadian and multinational corporations as well as foreign governments, which are eager

to benefit from increasing global trade between Asia and North America; and international environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS) seeking, for example, to prevent the expansion of the Alberta oil sands. Collectively, these actors are shaping and influencing resource communities throughout northern British Columbia in ways that both complement and oppose the interests of local actors who call this region home.

Although the global changes currently transforming the region are dramatic in terms of size and scope, they are taking place in a shifting regional context that could either facilitate or inhibit the grandiose plans for the region's global future. Over the last decade, northern British Columbia has witnessed the birth of new regional alliances and innovative partnerships between governments and industry. At the same time, however, the changes affecting the region have created new fissures and given rise to new and renewed contestations over land rights and the environment. Such contestations have, in turn, raised questions about the form that development should take in the North, and encouraged new and renewed alliances promoting alternatives to the status quo.

Consequently, the current globalizing phase of development is viewed by actors both within and beyond the region as either an opportunity or a threat. In certain respects, this has parallels with earlier phases of globalization and development, but rather than just accepting their fate as they have done in the past, actors in the North are now taking proactive steps to respond to the changes that are occurring in their region. It also speaks to the acute polarization of the region and its inhabitants. Indeed, the emergence of new political and economic actors at the regional level and beyond has intensified this polarization and raised the stakes of development in ways that were not apparent in earlier phases of globalization.

This book examines and explains how this new globalizing phase is occurring and with what consequences. As a distinct region, northern British Columbia provides a timely and compelling case study for examining the impacts of globalization on northern, resource-based regions. Indeed, the opportunities and challenges facing northern British Columbia at this point in its development are similar to those that have existed in other parts of the Canadian provincial and territorial North for several decades (Conteh and Segsworth 2013; Bone 2009; Slowey 2008; Scott 2001; Coates and Morrison 1992; Page 1988). They are also evident throughout the circumpolar North, in places and settings as diverse as Greenland (Nuttall 2008), Norway (Grydehøj, Grydehøj, and Ackrén 2012), and Russia (Thompson 2008; Hill and Gaddy 2003). In addition to revealing tangible similarities between

northern and remote regions, especially in juxtaposition with southern and urban regions, these cases highlight the importance of balancing economic, social, and political development in a rapidly changing global context.

It is important to note from the outset that northern British Columbia, as a region, comprises a number of distinct communities that have deep roots in the diverse, resource-based economies that have sustained the development of this region and some of its inhabitants for many centuries. This book uses the term “resource communities” in the broadest way possible. In one sense, it refers to the settler and First Nations communities (such as cities, towns, villages, and reserves) affected and sustained by the development of the region’s bountiful natural resources. It can also refer to distinct communities of people (such as NGOs) and the values and opinions they hold about resource development. Collectively, these resource communities constitute a rich socio-cultural, political, and economic tapestry that provides the empirical basis for our inquiry.

In order to examine northern British Columbia’s interaction with the global economy at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the authors adopt an analytical lens that examines the globalizing region along two dimensions. The first, common to economics and business, uses “globalizing” as a descriptive term that focuses on the trends in key variables. By using this approach, we are able to document the extent to which trade and investment flows are transforming northern British Columbia and, in particular, how the economic focus of the region has shifted towards Asia over the last decade. In this regard, the rapid growth of forestry exports to China and the shipments of coal to Japan and Korea are prominent examples of existing flows with the proposed expansion of oil and gas pipelines that provide evidence of potential flows in the future.

But while this gives us some indication of the changes under way in northern British Columbia and the implications of these changes beyond the region, it is only a partial picture. To this we must add a second meaning of “globalizing,” more common to politics, political economy, and sociology, as an active term pointing to the actors and their interests that are shaping the broader trends impacting this region. This second meaning highlights the role of agency, or the ability to act, and it operates at multiple levels. It refers to the ability of governments at all levels – municipal, provincial, and federal – to use their regulatory powers to shape the way in which the region is repositioned within the global economy. It concerns the capacity of communities, including First Nations communities, to take advantage of, to modify, and to constrain as necessary the forces of globalization to which

they are now being exposed. It pertains to the ability of labour organizations, environmental groups, and other nongovernmental organizations to influence the way in which the region is globalizing. It includes the ways in which corporations and other private actors are changing their production capacity and operational behaviour in the face of shifting global markets. And it encompasses the ability of agents *in the North*, long subject to external forces, to shape their own political and economic destiny *for the North*.

It is the intersection of neoliberalism (an ideology that advocates the withdrawal of the state from the economy and society) and globalizing trends and processes that has given rise not only to new forms of collaboration but also to new forms of contestation in northern British Columbia. The concept of neoliberalism, a defining characteristic of the current globalizing phase, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1; suffice it to say here that it is having a profound impact on the political, economic, and social dynamics of the region. On the one hand, neoliberal ideology at the federal and provincial levels has led to new practices and policies that have devolved responsibility to local actors such as municipal governments, economic development agencies, and the private sector over some of the infrastructure, such as ports and airports, which is central to the globalizing agenda. On the other hand, many of these local actors are concerned not only about whether they have sufficient access to global markets but also whether they have the capacity to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalization. For example, some First Nations have seized some opportunities for greater global engagement, which has led to collaboration with each with other, with governments, and with corporations. In other contexts, however, First Nations have steadfastly opposed the globalizing actions of governments and corporations, as illustrated by the Lax Kw'alaams Band Council's rejection in May 2015 of a liquefied natural gas terminal, proposed by Malaysian multinational Petronas, in an ecologically sensitive part of their territory (Lax Kw'alaams Band 2015). Corporations and labour have collaborated in some areas, such as trade missions to China, but have contested others, as seen in the case of employment of temporary foreign workers in the mining sector. Environmental groups and other NGOs have formed broad alliances to contest the globalizing agenda of corporations and governments when it comes to key infrastructure development projects such as pipelines.

The contemporary globalizing phase in the region is therefore characterized by the shift of trade to Asia, by the ascendancy of neoliberal ideology (albeit with changing modalities) at the provincial and federal levels of

government, and by shifting alliances and contestation between actors seeking to advance their vision of globalization for the region. This book examines the complexities and nuances of these processes, and their similarities with and differences from previous globalizing phases in a region long integrated into global markets. Our multidisciplinary team, based in the region, is uniquely placed to make this contribution.

All the chapters in this volume share the same analytical starting point, namely, the need to distinguish between flows and actors, and proceed using a variety of methodological approaches to examine how particular communities, levels of government, and industries are shaping and are being shaped by contemporary neoliberal globalization. The authors, who represent a range of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, employ different research methodologies, such as interviews, ethnography, and statistical analysis to reveal both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of this complicated narrative.

By examining the alliances and contestations that have arisen during the process of globalization, we point to the different development implications for the resource communities of northern British Columbia of particular globalizing paths. In doing so, this book provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the “globalizing region,” which extends beyond northern British Columbia and is of analytical relevance to other resource regions experiencing similar trends, such as those found throughout northern Canada and the circumpolar North, in the resource regions of Australia and New Zealand, as well as in Latin America.

Global and Ideological Changes in a Remote Northern Region

During the past several decades, neoliberal globalization has had a dramatic impact on countries and communities around the world. When we think about the changes wrought by the current phase of globalization, however, there is a tendency to focus on how they affect large metropolitan areas. Cities such as Shanghai, New York, and London are often seen as being on the frontline of global transformation. While this is certainly the case, such changes are just as profound, far-reaching, and contested in remote, resource-based regions.

Over the last two decades, regions such as northern British Columbia have been transformed both by the broader changes that are taking place in the global economy and by the shifting policy priorities of government. These changes have mobilized existing actors and, at the same time, have also encouraged the emergence of new actors, both internal and external to the

region. It is the interplay and contestation between these various actors that will determine the future of the region and its communities and inhabitants. They will also have a profound effect on British Columbia and Canada, since it has been argued that much of the existing and proposed development in the region is vital to the provincial and national economies.

Many of the chapters in this volume examine the present and future of this resource-producing region. However, in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of northern British Columbia and its inhabitants, we must begin by considering the region's long history of development and integration with the global economy. Many of the policies and actors in the current phase of globalization may be new, but the region itself is not a newcomer to globally driven change. As argued by Ken Coates and John Young in Chapter 3 and Jim McDonald in Chapters 4 and 6, northern British Columbia and its inhabitants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have for several centuries been affected by global forces largely beyond their control. In certain respects, the fact that they have occasionally been able to harness these forces and use them to their advantage is remarkable given their circumstances and limited capacity. At the same time, successive waves of globalization and development have had far-reaching and negative consequences for some communities and peoples in northern British Columbia. The legacies of colonialism are deeply embedded in the social, economic, and political fabric of this region.

During the current wave of globalization, we see both agency and vulnerability in many communities across northern British Columbia. As Tracy Summerville and Gary Wilson note in Chapter 5, neoliberal globalization has encouraged the development of a decentralized and diversified distribution of power through the expansion of multilevel governance. In some cases, communities have been able to use their location or capacity to benefit from the changes taking place around them. Other communities have been less fortunate, however. Metaphorically speaking, they are "watching the train of globalization go by," leaving in its wake the negative consequences of developments that are beyond local control. In a northern, remote region, where the barriers of geography and distance are immense and capacity comes in limited quantities, it is often very difficult to take advantage of new opportunities, and resilience and entrepreneurialism will take communities only so far.

Northern British Columbia experienced a profound series of changes over the course of the twentieth century, mainly through industrialization

and the development of permanent settlements, but the political and economic transformation that has taken place during the first decades of the twenty-first century has also had far-reaching consequences for the region. Neoliberal government policies have dismantled much of the political infrastructure that sustained the region in the past, just as globalization has reoriented and transformed the region's economic focus. Despite these changes, many have not entirely embraced the new order. Certainly, we would expect opposition from so-called progressive groups within society but, as Paul Bowles observes in Chapter 7, neoliberalism's "traction" among local economic development officers (EDOs), whom one might expect to be firm supporters of neoliberal globalization, is limited. Indeed, many EDOs appear to support a more activist state capable of providing critical support to northern communities.

The changes in the relationship between the state and society engendered by neoliberalism have had significant implications for northern British Columbia. One obvious example is the abandonment of appurtenancy – the spatial requirement that lumber be milled in the area where it is cut. In Chapter 9, which focuses on developments in the mining sector, Fiona MacPhail and Paul Bowles explore other important examples of this shift in policy, mainly in the way neoliberal globalization has separated work and community by changing the relationship between communities, government, and industry while also reinforcing the temporary nature of employment and gender segregation within the workforce. Such policies place northern British Columbia at the forefront of neoliberal change and the global processes that reinforce and support these changes.

Diversity, Demographics, and Development in a Remote Northern Region

The debate over diversification has long-standing roots in northern British Columbia. To outsiders, the region and its communities may appear to be lacking in diversity, and whereas this may be true in an economic sense, it is certainly not true geographically, demographically, or even politically. Indeed, the diversity of the landscape and its people has acted as both a facilitator of and a barrier to the consolidation of neoliberal forms of globalization.

To begin with, the region is divided geographically by mountain ranges and river systems. Although these geographical features have often served as natural barriers to greater inter-regional consolidation and cooperation,

they also unite northerners and differentiate them from other, more urban parts of the province. Geographical distance and remoteness from the centres of power far to the south have engendered a distinct political culture in the North; although, administratively, as Young points out in Chapter 2, there does not appear to be a clear definition of what actually constitutes “the North.” As a “provincial north,” the region lacks the administrative and political autonomy – and the economic resources and political structures that come with such autonomy – that exists in the Canadian “territorial norths.” This not only inhibits the region’s ability to respond to globalization but also makes an analysis of globalization in the region difficult. For example, in terms of the latter, the lack of disaggregated statistical data that are specific to northern British Columbia hampers our analysis of the trends that are shaping the region.

Within the region itself, the remoteness of communities and the distances between them have also created distinct subregional political cultures. Historically, these subregional distinctions have provided a basis for inter-community competition and contestation. More recently, the promise of greater regional development stemming from the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative have encouraged the emergence of regional organizations that attempt to connect the North and, to use a distinctly northern metaphor, encourage its communities to paddle in the same direction.

The demographic and ethnic diversity of northern British Columbia are greatly enhanced by the Aboriginal communities in this region. As the original inhabitants of this vast region, Aboriginal peoples have deep roots in the land and waterways. Their collective presence is a constant reminder of the pressing need for environmental stewardship, a role that is being challenged in many respects by the development projects that globalization brings to the region. At the same time, many Aboriginal communities are in dire need of the very products that globalization promises: jobs, economic development, and services. As indicated by Jim McDonald in Chapters 4 and 6 and Paul Bowles and Henry Veltmeyer in Chapter 10, the debate about balancing environmental stewardship and economic growth, and the forms that “development” will take, lies at the heart of many of the discussions about the future of the region.

Although it can be said that Aboriginal peoples have a distinct set of perspectives, especially compared with many non-Aboriginal peoples in the region, this does not mean that they are homogenous in their responses to issues such as the relationship between the environment and economic development. The Aboriginal population in northern British Columbia is

composed of many nations and communities, all of which have different histories, circumstances, and political aspirations. Compared with other parts of Canada, where treaties have been settled, treaties between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown were never signed in most of British Columbia, including the North. As a result, many Aboriginal groups are currently in the process of negotiating treaties and self-government agreements with the federal and provincial governments. If successful, this should place the province's Aboriginal peoples far ahead of their counterparts in many other parts of Canada, in terms of political and economic autonomy. At present, however, the politics of treaty negotiations often complicate economic development and the rolling out of projects that are connected with the current phase of globalization.

In contrast with its geographic and demographic features, northern British Columbia displays very little economic diversity. Like many other northern and remote regions, economic diversification has been a long-standing but elusive goal for many communities and the region as a whole. For many centuries, northern British Columbia has been locked into a staples economy, relying primarily on natural resource exports as a source of employment and economic development (Innis 1995). Although resource industries have sustained many communities, these communities are prone to the boom-and-bust cycles that characterize all resource-based economies.

Neoliberal globalization and the development of the northern spur of the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor promised to diversify and grow the region's economy, mainly by providing new investment and development opportunities as well as access to Asian markets for local manufacturers. While it may be too early to discern the full impact on the region of this particular aspect of globalization, a number of chapters in this book provide some interesting insights into how these processes are unfolding. In Chapter 5, Summerville and Wilson argue that the region has seen significant infrastructure development, along with the growth of so-called hub communities. Yet, many smaller communities have yet to realize the benefits of the gateway and corridor, and are instead struggling with some of the negative consequences of development.

In Chapter 8, Bowles and MacPhail discuss the diversification of markets for northern British Columbia's forest products, away from the United States and towards Asia, particularly China. In the short term, it is acknowledged that the "China shift" saved the region's forestry industry in the wake of the global recession and the collapse of the American housing market, as

well as the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic that recently decimated the region's forests. In the longer term, however, Bowles and MacPhail argue that the prospects are not so positive for labour and communities. At the same time, this shift has also created new fissures between industry and labour and within First Nations communities that have attempted to take advantage of the growth in Asian markets and the accessibility of northern British Columbia to these markets.

Globalization is not only enhancing northern British Columbia's place as a resource-producing region but is also putting pressure on the region to serve as an access point for resource development projects in other parts of Canada that are designed to cement Canada's place as a global energy superpower. Although the pipeline linking the Alberta oil sands with port facilities on the coast of northern British Columbia is still in the planning stages, this project has revealed a number of significant political fault lines in the region. As Chapter 10, on pipelines and protest, suggests, opposition to the pipeline has brought together a wide variety of actors and, in some respects, has reinforced a regional identity and an alternative vision of globalization and northern development.

Collectively, this volume presents a multifaceted analysis of the impacts that neoliberal globalization is having on resource communities in a remote, northern region. As a case study, therefore, it has broad applicability to other northern regions that are undergoing similar changes. The volume's overriding strength lies in its multidisciplinary approach to understanding the fundamental and groundbreaking changes that are transforming northern British Columbia in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The complexity of globalization cannot be understood from a single disciplinary perspective and is more fruitfully examined from a range of backgrounds. The team of authors that produced this volume come from a variety of disciplines, including economics, political science, anthropology and Indigenous studies, history, and sociology, and therefore approach the questions of how and why northern British Columbia is being transformed by neoliberal globalization from a range of perspectives.

This approach enables us to draw upon a number of theoretical frameworks to produce a broader and richer analysis of the current globalizing phase. For McDonald, the use of "epitomizing moments" informs his analysis of Tsimshian society's engagement with globalization, whereas for Young, "hyperfractionalism" is important for understanding the political dynamics of a sparsely populated northern region. Bowles uses "contingent neoliberalism" as a way of understanding economic development tensions in the

region, while Summerville and Wilson employ the concept of “urban entrepreneurialism” to highlight the pressures on communities to diversify and create opportunities in a rapidly changing global economic environment.

Together, these divergent approaches enable the reader to appreciate not only the multiple lenses through which globalization in the region can be analyzed but also the complexity of the interactions occurring. That being said, the coherence and integration of the volume around the common themes identified in this introductory chapter have been strengthened by the fact that the volume has been a collective project, with all team members providing input throughout the research and writing process. Our intention has been to produce a volume characterized by disciplinary rigour and multidisciplinary scope, one that will be of interest to a wide audience.

Note

- 1 For a list of resource and infrastructure projects in northern British Columbia, see <http://www.investcariboochilcotincoastbc.ca/major-projects-investment-opportunities/map-view>, <http://investnortheastbc.ca/major-projects-and-investment-opportunities/map-view>, and <http://investnorthwestbc.ca/major-projects-and-investment-opportunities/map-view>.

For a list of projects and other socio-economic information about northern British Columbia, see <http://chip.northernhealth.ca/CommunityHealthInformationPortal/OtherTopics/NorthernDevelopments.aspx>.

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