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Regional governance change in Northern Norway
Insights for Northern Ontario, Canada

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Master thesis in Governance and Entrepreneurship in Northern and Indigenous Areas
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Abstract

Northern Ontario has been inadequately governed, perpetuating chronic health, social and economic issues. Recent policy discourse has suggested that the region take more control through the development of new regional governance or governments. The region should also look to other Northern jurisdictions for ideas.

This comparative case study examined the state of regional governance in two Northern regions, comparing the calls for regional governance change to more effectively administer Northwestern Ontario (as a part of Northern Ontario) against the Norwegian state-mandated amalgamation of Troms and Finnmark Counties (as part of Northern Norway). Six public officials– elected officials (politicians) or public servants (bureaucrats)– were interviewed in Northwestern Ontario and four were interviewed in the former Troms and Finnmark Counties.

Informants in both countries validated the concept of Northern alienation and generally agreed that better regional governance and less central control was needed. Important considerations from Norway experience's could inform Northern Ontario should it embark on regional governance change, including: consider a collaborative approach rather than a top-down, forced amalgamation; avoid determining the "form before function"; consider a "place-based" approach; consider regional rivalries and the impact of "re-centralization" to new capitals; include an external perspective; and involve Indigenous people from the beginning.

Finally, in both Northern Norway and Northern Ontario, the most important overarching observation may be that public and Indigenous governance remains on separate tracks. This is of greater concern to Northern Ontario, where public regional governance appears to be stagnant while Indigenous governance continues to evolve.

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1 Introduction

Chronic health, social, and economic issues in Northern Ontario have been linked to inadequate public governance at a regional level (Coates & Poelzer, 2014; Conteh & Segsworth, 2013; Conteh, 2013; MacKinnon, 2016). Consequently, public policy discourse in recent years suggests Northern Ontario take more control of its own destiny (MacKinnon, 2015; Robinson, 2016; MacKinnon, 2016; Conteh, 2017; McGrath, 2018; Everett, 2019; MacKinnon, 2019). Meanwhile, across the Circumpolar North, many regions are managing rapid change due to increasing development pressures, changing climates, and advancing Indigenous rights, through innovation in public and Indigenous governance systems. What can Northern Ontario learn from other "Norths"? In this thesis project, I explore regional governance change in Northern and Indigenous areas by describing the situation in Northern Ontario, Canada, a subarctic and continental region, and comparing it against Northern Norway, an Arctic region.

While both countries are constitutional monarchies, there are relevant differences. Canada's federal system includes national, provincial, and municipal levels of government (Parliament of Canada, 2018). The first two levels have responsibilities listed in the *Constitution Act, 1867*, while the elected municipal level is a delegated authority from the province. There are also local Indigenous governments, which are the jurisdictional responsibility of the federal government. For example, First Nations are governed by band councils that make decisions about their local communities (Parliament of Canada, 2018). Alternately, Norway's unitary system has three democratically elected levels including the central Norwegian state, county councils, and municipalities (Angell et al., 2016,

Government.no, 2019; Government of Ontario, 2018). The Norwegian government is represented at the regional level by an appointed county governor, an institution representing the state's interests since 1662 (Angell et al., 2016, p. 18). Service delivery functions are split across the two tiers of local government in a "generalist local authority system" whose uniformity starkly contrasts with Ontario's municipal diversity (Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, n.d., p.11).

Both regions face issues common to Northern jurisdictions, albeit at different scope and scales. Vast Northern Ontario accounts for nearly 90% of the Ontario's landmass (approximately 800,000 km^2 – more than double the size of Norway as a whole), but only about 6% of its population (797,000 in 2017) (Southcott, 2002; Ministry of Finance, 2018). As settlement and treaty-making moved North and West, the present 10 districts of Northern Ontario (which are administrative boundaries only) were formed at different points from 1858 onward to the early 1900s (Ontario Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, 2015a). While there are 144 municipalities and over 100 First Nations, just over half of Northern Ontario's population is concentrated in five small and medium-sized cities with populations above 50,000 people (Ministry of Finance, 2018; Robinson, 2016). The low population density is more extreme in the so-called Far North of Ontario (42% of Ontario's landmass, roughly North of the 51st parallel), which has approximately 24,000 people living in 31 First Nations communities, 2 municipalities, and 1 local services board (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 2018). Of key importance to this project, unlike Southern Ontario or Norway, Northern Ontario does not have regional municipalities or counties (AMO, 2018; Slack et al., 2003).

Before 2020, Northern Norway was considered to include Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark Counties (Fitjar, 2013, p. 75; Angell et al., 2016; OECD, 2017, p. 23). Like Northern Ontario, Northern Norway has also been considered to be "a thinly populated and economically disadvantaged region" (Fitjar, 2013, p. 75). After decades of little change, for the past several years the Norwegian government has pursued reform to local and regional governments across the country to improve efficiency, customer service, and local democracy. First establishing larger municipalities to better take on further tasks, the state has now implemented plans to likewise amalgamate counties (Government.no, 2019).

Another key focus area of this project involves the considerable opposition to the merger of Norway's two Northernmost counties, formerly Finnmark (48,618 km^2, 15% of all Norway) and Troms (25,877 km^2, 8% of all Norway) (Statista, 2018). Finnmark was Norway's largest county by area but smallest by population; approximately half of its 75,997 residents lived in four small and medium-sized municipalities (out of the 19 pre-merger municipalities total in Finnmark). Likewise, nearly half of Troms' 166,810 residents live in the city of Tromsø (one among the 24 pre-merger municipalities in Troms). According to a referendum in Finnmark on May 14, 2018, 87% of voting Finnmark residents opposed the merger (Staalesen, May 16, 2018). While not as vocal, public opinion polls show large opposition in Troms as well (Berglund, May 14, 2018). Nevertheless, Troms og Finnmark Fylkeskommune (Troms and Finnmark County Council) was established on January 1, 2020 (Berglund, January 6, 2020).

2 Overview of Research

2.1 Research Questions

This thesis project explores regional governance in Northern Ontario and Northern Norway. The research questions are:

1. What are the drivers for change for regional governance systems in Northern Ontario and Northern Norway? How do the drivers of change compare?
2. What are the options for, and implications of, these and other proposed governance changes?

These are answered by examining: 1) the calls for more autonomy and improved regional governance in Northern Ontario; and 2) the amalgamation of existing regional governments (i.e. Troms and Finnmark counties) in Northern Norway.

2.2 Methodology

A comparative case study approach was used. My goal was to identify insights to inform policy discussions, as opposed to making general conclusions. Several knowledgeable public officials and academic researchers in Northern Norway and Northern Ontario were consulted on the design of this project.

Data was collected using interview techniques. Six public officials – elected officials (politicians) or public servants (bureaucrats) – were interviewed in Northwestern Ontario (as a division of Northern Ontario) and four were interviewed in the former Troms and Finnmark counties (as a division of Northern Norway). Informants were selected via snowball sampling. All informants held or had held roles within municipal, county, or Indigenous

governments (see Table 1). In Northwestern Ontario, most informants were municipal politicians, while in Troms and Finnmark, most informants were county council level civil servants. This was based on ease of access; in Norway, it was found that public servants were more willing and able to participate freely than their Canadian counterparts. Most of Northwestern Ontario's politicians had also held roles in regional municipal associations. There was representation in both countries by people who had worked or were currently working for Indigenous governments. I conducted 1-hour interviews either by Skype video or in person. Question-based interview guides maximized limited time and encouraged elaboration (Morgan & Guevara, 2008). Semi-structured interviews built upon a preliminary understanding to yield richer data from better-targeted questions, but also allowed spontaneity (Brinkmann, 2008).

Finally, it is important to situate myself within the research. As a senior manager in Ontario's provincial government, I have held roles in Northern development, land use planning, and Indigenous land claims negotiations. Thus, this project has been intentionally separated from my work activities; as a precaution, I sought formal conflict of interest guidance from the responsible ministry executive. The nature of my employment was disclosed to informants. Given my work, it became increasingly difficult to recruit Indigenous participants and therefore the Ontario sample has a municipal bias. In addition, the project received ethics approval through simplified assessment from the Data Protection Official for Research in Norway.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Key theories and trends

3.1.1 The changing nature of governance

In a traditional sense, the term governance was used interchangeably with "government." However, an evolving body of research describes new methods of governing (Stoker, 1998). While there is no single definition, *governance* describes processes of rule in public administration that include networks and ongoing collaboration with multiple stakeholders, as opposed to a conventional, top-down management hierarchy (Bevir, 2012, p. 3; Pierre, 2009). Notably, Peters and Pierre introduced the concept of "governance without government" to characterize these trends in public management and administration (1998, p. 223, 241). Characteristics of modern governance include its multi-scale and multi-level dimensions. While there are differences across disciplines, "jurisdictional, institutional, networks, management, and knowledge" *scales* can be distinguished (Termeer, Dewulf, & van Lieshout, 2010, online). *Levels* generally refer to points on the scale and are often hierarchical. Further, Multi-Level Governance (MLG) has been defined as "a process of political decision making in which governments engage with a broad range of actors embedded in different territorial scales to purse collaborative solutions to complex problems" (Alcantara & Nelles, 2013, p. 185).

This project touches upon territorial or jurisdictional scales: local, regional, provincial, national, and to some extent, international. Concepts such as decentralization (i.e. distributing power to various governments or agencies) and devolution (i.e. transferring power to actors and institutions at lower levels) are discussed (Berkes, 2010). Two broad jurisdictional

dimensions of governance are distinguished for the purposes of this discussion: *public governance*, referring to settler systems at different levels of state governments; and *Indigenous governance*, referring to systems led in varying degrees by Indigenous peoples.

Finally, governments in general are facing increasing policy complexity, long-term revenue problems, decreasing public trust, and challenges in horizontal coordination (Pierre, 2009, p. 594). Consequently, Pierre points to a need for further research and even constitutional discourse about how emerging forms of governance align with traditional models of representative democracy (p. 596, 605). Given the challenges faced in Northern regions (and in modern public policy in general), new governance capabilities are needed to address very complex policy problems. Increasingly, the literature shows that traditional command and control policy making methods and governance approaches are not sufficient for complex and rapidly changing environments (Termeer et al., 2015; Sørensen & Waldorf, 2014).

3.1.2 Northern Governance

Both study regions can be situated within pan-Northern governance discourse. First, the divide between Northern and Southern Ontario can be assessed at a national scale. "*Provincial Norths"* – that is, the Northern, largely subarctic regions of Canada's provinces – comprise a vast, natural resource-rich geography that is home to approximately 1.5 million people, including dozens of culturally distinct Indigenous groups (Coates & Morrison, 1992; Coates & Poelzer, 2014). From the perspective of those in more populous Southern regions, these regions are the provincial periphery, or "the hinterland" (Summerville & Poelzer, 2005).

Despite considerable natural resource wealth potential, citizens of Provincial Norths experience some of the greatest health, social, and economic problems in Canada; yet, the federal government has had minimal interest in this "forgotten North" (Coates & Morrison, 1992; Coates & Poelzer, 2014). Operating as internal colonies with less control and political power than other regions in Canada, these regions face challenges related to rapid natural resource development, evolving Indigenous rights, and delivering services across a large geography (Coates & Poelzer, 2014; Coates et al., 2014). While receiving periodic policy attention narrowly focused on resource exploitation or public emergencies, little decentralization or devolution of authority to the region from provincial governments has occurred (Coates et al., 2014, Coates & Poelzer, 2014).

Still, there are signs of a new regionalism emerging. Some Provincial Norths are developing distinct identities, finding their own solutions, and building new Northern institutions (Summerville & Poelzer, 2005). The restructuring of regional governance systems in Northern Québec and Labrador have been significant (though they are notable exceptions) (Coates & Poelzer, 2014). For example, the Nunavik government in Northern Québec provided a unique example of regional autonomy within a provincial system. Driven by opposition to hydroelectric and other development, the province, the Cree of eastern James Bay region, and the Inuit of Northern Québec executed Canada's first modern treaty, the James Bay Northern Québec Agreement in 1975 (Wilson, 2017; Kirkey, 2016). Today, Northern Québec has three regional governments equivalent to a regional county municipality; the predominantly-Cree Eeyou Istchee James Bay Regional Government and the Kativik Regional Government, covering the predominantly Inuit Nunavik region (Katavik Regional Government, 2019; Gouvernement régional d'Eeyou Istchee Baie-James, 2019). While many Nunavik institutions are under the policy authority of Québec, over time they

have increasingly become more autonomous within an innovative MLG framework (Wilson, 2017).

Meanwhile, Canada's Arctic has experienced greater change in, and attention to its governance systems, with devolution forming a major part of Canada's Northern strategy (Robinson, 2016, p. 12; Coates & Poelzer, 2014, p. 1). Indeed, the Arctic in general has been an international leader in governance innovation (Poelzer & Wilson, 2014). Leading up to and into the early 21st century, prominent trends, particularly in land and resource management, have included: an increasing emphasis on Indigenous empowerment and property rights; increasing local and regional ownership of land; governance models that include delegation or devolution of authority and/or co-management regimes; and efforts to incorporate and use traditional knowledge with scientific information to inform decisions (Caulfield, 2004; Poelzer & Wilson, 2014).

Moreover, while there is broad variation in the relationships between Arctic states and their Northern peripheries, there is a common theme of deeper integration of Indigenous affairs at multiple levels (Poelzer & Wilson, 2014; Broderstad & Dahl, 2004). Indigenous peoples have diverse governance arrangements, ranging from home rule autonomy in Greenland, to joint governance and co-management (e.g. the Finnmark Estate in Norway), and to ethnic self-determination (Broderstad, 2015). However, as in Provincial Norths, questions remain for Arctic governance. There are ongoing concerns about whether existing governance systems can respond to rapid change in a way that benefits these Northern regions and their peoples (Caulfield, 2004). Likewise, financial and human resource capacity challenges remain important considerations (Poelzer et al., 2014).

3.2 Regional Governance in Northern Ontario

3.2.1 Lack of regional control and coordination

> *"The juxtaposition of resource potential and Aboriginal distress is compounded by long-standing northern grievances about the lack of attention given to the region by the provincial capital and the striking gaps in quality of life and government services between the province's north and south"* (Coates et al., 2014, p. 29).

Northern Ontario keenly feels the challenges common to Provincial Norths (Coates & Poelzer, 2014, p. 4). Compared to Southern Ontario, the population is largely stagnant, health is poorer, and unemployment is higher (Southcott, 2013; Conteh, 2013; Health Quality Ontario, 2017, p. 11). National media attention is drawn to frequent crises and states of emergency in impoverished, remote communities, highlighting a "national disgrace" (Coates & Poelzer, 2014, p. 4; Coates & Poelzer, January 24, 2012, online). For decades, economic growth in Northern Ontario has been lower than all other Provincial Norths and most Northern regions in general (Southcott, 2013; Conteh, 2013; MacKinnon, 2016).

Why is this the case? Northern Ontario has tremendous resource potential (for example, boasting over half the metals and three-quarters of the forest lands in Canada) (Natural Resources Canada, 2004; Natural Resources Canada, 2014; Hall & Donald, 2009); a central geographic location connected to sea routes; and an overall population higher than many Northern areas (Robinson, 2016; MacKinnon, 2015). However, as introduced in Chapter 1, inadequate governance has been a barrier. The emerging literature describes inter-connected issues such as: a systemic lack of horizontal policy coordination (Conteh & Segsworth, 2013, p. 9); long-standing tensions between Northeastern ("led" by Sudbury) and Northwestern Ontario ("led" by Thunder Bay) (MacKinnon, 2015); insular debates, lack of

data, and unsuitable comparison to and dependence on Southern Ontario (MacKinnon, 2015); and feelings of political marginalization, isolation, and alienation (Brock, 1978; Coates & Morrison, 1992; MacKinnon, 2015). It has been called a "symbolic region that lacks any political autonomy" (Hall & Donald, 2009, p. 4). Northern Ontario sends only 11 elected representatives to the 124-seat Legislative Assembly of Ontario (Elections Ontario, 2020). Hence, this region has limited political clout within Ontario and Canada and an associated lack of control over taxing and spending (Robinson, 2016, p. 10).

Ironically, Northern Ontarians see a myriad of structures providing local and regional public administration. Table 2 lists examples of regional agencies and other bodies discharging provincial responsibilities. The geographic boundaries of these provincial institutions are inconsistent and often overlapping. Federal agencies and First Nations treaties demarcate regional boundaries differently again (Northern Policy Institute, 2020). Figure 1 shows examples of various boundaries in Northern Ontario generated using the Northern Policy Institute's online Boundary Maps tool. Coupling boundary differences with a lack of so-called "real power," these organizations stand as a barrier to achieving improved regional coordination and local governance (Robinson, 2016, p. 10).

Furthermore, increasing complexity has been cited as a major trend in the "tangled web" of relationships between municipalities in general and the Ontario government (Côté & Fenn, 2014, p. 25). Adding to this are federal jurisdictional responsibilities for Indigenous local governance. Governance of First Nations communities is guided by historic treaties and Canada's *Indian Act*. Generally, treaties in Northern Ontario were completed in the latter half of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century (see map on Figure 1). Setting out rights and responsibilities for First Nations, Ontario, and Canada, these land agreements cover

vast traditional territories, ceding Crown lands and establishing reserves (Ontario, 2020b). There is ongoing disagreement about the intent of these treaties with respect to the use of land and resources (Hall & Coates, 2017). Regionally, while legal authority remains with individual First Nations, most communities are politically represented by one of four regional Provincial-Territorial-Organizations (PTOs) in Northern Ontario. Moreover, many of Northern Ontario's 106 First Nations communities are represented in one of 14 Tribal Councils that seek to build regional capacity and deliver services within their member communities (Hall & Coates, 2017).

Attempts to span jurisdictions have been modest and are generally focused on relationships between Indigenous, federal, and provincial governments (not municipalities). For example, Anishinabek Nation, a political-territorial organization advocating for 40 member First Nations across Ontario has been in self-government negotiations for over 20 years (Anishinabek Nation, 2019). In 2017, the Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement was signed with Canada, recognizing "Anishinabek law-making powers and authority over education on reserve" (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2017). In turn, Anishinabek Nation signed a framework agreement with Ontario to guide the interaction been this new system and Ontario's provincial education system (Ministry of Education, 2017).

More like Canada's Arctic, the largely undeveloped and majority-Indigenous Far North of Ontario also holds promise for governance innovation. One example is set out by the *Far North Act, Ontario* (FNA). Far North First Nations can and have initiated joint "community based land use planning" with the Ontario government on Crown lands (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 2018a). While controversial, the FNA represented the first law in Ontario where First Nations consent was required for use of Ontario Crown land

(Wilkinson & Shulz, 2012; Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2019; Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 2018b). Other examples relate to regional collaboration for major projects. Wataynikaneyap Power is a partnership of 24 First Nations communities and an energy firm that has successfully achieved provincial and federal approvals to connect remote communities to the Ontario power grid (MacKinnon, 2019). Even more significant (and more controversial) may be the "Ring of Fire," which could lead to the transformational, multi-generational production of chromite and other metals (Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, 2019). The project must bridge numerous regional interests; regional planning and agreements are crucial (Hall & Coates, 2017).

3.2.2 Self-governance in Northern Ontario

The notion of Northern Ontario governing its own affairs has been around for decades (MacKinnon, 2015; Robinson, 2016). Gordon Brock's 1978 book, "*The Province of Northern Ontario,"* detailed a history of regional disaffection, the origins of the separatist Northern Ontario Heritage Party, and the failed actions of government committees on the North (Brock, 1978). For example, in 1978, the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment recommended, among other things, that a "study group of northern residents should be appointed to recommend ways for northern people to become involved in the decisions by government ministries and agencies that affect their lives and communities" though little change resulted (Brock, 1978, p.30).

In more recent decades, the late 1990s and early 2000s marked a period of instability for municipalities across Ontario. To achieve economies of scale and eliminate perceived duplication, the provincial government initiated voluntary and involuntary municipal amalgamations, reducing the overall number of municipalities by 40% (Ontario Ministry of

Government and Consumer Services, 2015b; Miljan & Spicer, 2015, p. 4). There were also significant policy changes, including the downloading of services (at a significant cost to municipalities) and major tax and property assessment reforms (Miljan & Spicer, 2015, p. 7). At the tail end of this period, a report on small, rural, and remote communities was presented to the provincial government's Panel on the Role of Government. Among other things, a regional level of public governance in Northern Ontario was recommended:

> "A modified form of two-tier system seems most suitable and practical given vast distances, low population densities, limited municipal fiscal resources, and current expenditure responsibilities at the local level .... In a two-tier system, the upper tier in some instances would be directly elected bodies; in other instances where densities are very low, the province or a designated authority might serve as the upper tier. A two-tier structure would allow for some sharing of costs over a wider geographic area and a degree of local participation in decision-making" (2003, p. 37).

However, these regional reforms were not implemented.

More recently, some have argued that local governance in Ontario was approaching an inflection point. This was due to unsustainable pressures, including the growing recognition of municipalities' roles in promoting economic development, increasing policy complexity and relationships with other governments, and emerging financial threats to the sustainability of local governments (Côté & Fenn, 2014, p. 4). These trends have a different impact in the North, for example, where "the absence of a county system makes the policy-making environment for human services and economic development cumbersome and often ineffective, and predictably too focused on cost and parochial considerations" (Côté & Fenn, 2014, p. 23). At the same time, public opinion research has revealed dissatisfaction with the

provincial government's management of Northern Ontario (56.5% indicated the government's management was poor or very poor; 56% said Northern Ontario residents could manage the affairs of Northern Ontario better than the provincial government) (Oraclepoll Research, 2014 in Robinson, 2016, p. 5). However, at the time of writing, there was no indication that the Ontario government was considering regional governance change.

Consequently, Northern organizations are taking up the charge. First, municipal associations bring a stronger collective policy voice on Northern interests to Toronto. For example, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA) began in 1946 and is made up of four smaller district associations. NOMA is led by a Board of Directors made up of 19 municipal politicians from across the region and has tabled policy resolutions related to regional concerns (Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, 2019). The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM) represents the eastern half of Northern Ontario.

Second, the Northern Policy Institute (NPI, Northern Ontario's think tank) has championed the public governance conversation for Northern Ontario more broadly. Notably, Robinson has assessed regional governance options ranging from making Northern Ontario a separate province to the colonial status quo (2016). Framed on the principle of subsidiary, he posited three viable alternatives: granting Northern Ontario powers that are similar to the distinct powers granted to the City of Toronto, namely authority for regional representation and taxation; creating an elected Northern Ontario body that provides advice to the Ontario legislature and government; or creating a semi-autonomous district with many provincial powers that assumes control over decisions that only affect the North (Robinson, 2016, p. 13). Robinson concluded that Northerners need to determine the path, but more populous Southern Ontario was not likely interested. Finally, David MacKinnon's series of reports, based on

formal and informal interviews, provided several recommendations to overcome chronic governance challenges (MacKinnon, 2019; MacKinnon, 2015; MacKinnon, 2016). Most recently, he concluded that "Northern Ontario's business, municipal, and Indigenous leaders and provincial organizations should develop and present to the Ontario government a plan to implement regional governments throughout the North" (MacKinnon, 2019, p. 5). MacKinnon has also noted that "Northern Ontario has more in common with other northern jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere than it does with Southern Ontario..." and "the experiences of other northern regions can help illuminate the path forward" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 18-19). Therefore, this thesis project looks to another Northern jurisdiction for regional governance insights.

3.3 Comparison to Norway

3.3.1 Context for change in Northern Norway

> *"Northern Norway has a long history of being perceived as distinct, in a negative sense. The past history is one of unequal development of regions: for centuries the people of the north had a lower standard of living, more poverty and less access to facilities provided by the state"* (Saugestad, 2012, p. 231).

Relevant context in Northern Norway is introduced by briefly discussing the development of regional identities and governance. First, like Northern Ontario, Northern Norway has seen itself as a victim of political and economic marginalization, exploitation, and colonialism by Southerners (Fitjar, 2013). Working to overcome negative stereotypes from the South, a North Norwegian identity movement has been about inclusion into a wider national tradition, while a Sámi movement has been about achieving "recognition as a distinct

culture, different from Norwegian culture, but equal in status and appreciation" (Saugestad, 2012, p. 233).

The region's primarily resource-based economy has been a part of its identity for many years (e.g. power production, fishing, tourism, reindeer herding, and more recently, fish farming) (Norwegian Ministries, 2017). More recently, wealth in the Hammerfest region generated from petroleum production in the Barents Sea has been an influence. There is national agreement that the disadvantaged regions producing petroleum should benefit. However, the identity of "the region" is not clearly defined, and, for example, has been referenced as either Northern Norway or Finnmark County or both (Fitjar, 2013).

International relations add another dimension. Northern Norway is bordered by Sweden, Finland, and Russia and Sámi traditional territories extend across these countries. Further, Northern Northway has experienced increasing geopolitical importance as Europe's gateway to the resource-rich Arctic and the opening Northern Sea Route (OECD, 2017). Relationships have both a national and regional component. For example, led in large part by efforts of the Norwegian foreign ministry, the Barents Euro-Arctic Region was established in 1993 to improve cooperation and bring stability to the region (Hønneland, 1998). It includes two councils: the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), which is made up of foreign ministers; and the Barents Regional Council, which unites regional and Indigenous representatives from 14 member counties in Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway, including the former Troms, Finnmark, and Nordland counties (Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 2019; Hønneland, 1998). International cooperation is a key priority of Norway's 2017 Arctic Strategy (Norwegian Ministries, 2017).

Second, regional governance has been influenced by the institutionalization of Sámi rights to language, culture, and traditions. Development of these rights has progressed in stages through periods of conflict and raising awareness (Broderstad, 2015). Unlike Canada, Norway ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO Convention No. 169) in 1990 (the first to do so), following a long struggle (Ravna, 2014). Today, progress continues in an "enhanced institutionalization phase," further delineating and implementing rights and political participation through complex frameworks (Broderstad, 2015, p. 11).

Institutionally, the Sámi Parliament or Sámidiggi takes a non-territorial approach to Indigenous autonomy. Established in 1989, the Sámi Parliament has been of interest at an international level as a model for Indigenous self-governance and participation in decision-making (Mörkenstam et al., 2016). Representing over 15,000 Sámi registered on an electoral roll from across the country, the institution administers responsibilities granted by the state and has tight connections to counterpart parliaments in Sweden and Finland (Angell et al., 2016). ILO 169 provided the rationale to develop agreements on consultation procedures between the Government of Norway and the Sámi Parliament (Henriksen, 2008; Allard, 2018). The basic consultation agreement signed in 2005 applies to the government and its agencies in matters that may directly affect Sámi interests, not to general matters that affect broader society. Additional cooperation agreements have been signed with county governments within Sámi traditional areas (Allard, 2018).

Furthermore, the *Finnmark Act*, 2005 was innovative in spanning public and Indigenous governance systems. Principally, the Act prescribed the transfer approximately 45,000 km^2 of state land in Finnmark County to be managed by Finnmarkseiendommen (the

Finnmark Estate or FeFo), a private landowner governed by a Board of Directors consisting of three members appointed by the Sámi Parliament and three members appointed by the Finnmark County Council (Ministry of Justice and the Police & Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, n.d., p. 2). FeFo manages land and natural resources for all residents of Finnmark County, as well as safeguarding Sámi culture and traditional land rights (Broderstad, 2015).

Third, the development of public governance in Northern Norway has reflected the national unitary tradition. Dating back to the 17th century, counties are Norway's oldest level of government (Borge, 2012). Local self-government goes back to 1837 with the core idea that the people have the right to govern themselves within a certain geographic area (Angell, Flo & Grimsrud, 2016). European countries generally favour the *principle of subsidiarity*. Evolving from Catholic doctrine over centuries, the concept involves the dispersal of political authority to devolve decision-making to a level as close as possible to the citizen (Follesdal & Muniz-Fraticelli, 2016). Local governance in 1800s Norway was considered highly decentralized and autonomous and evolved to a more centralized extreme in the 20th century (Borge, 2012).

Today, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Norway has two-subnational governments (municipalities and county municipalities) with political representation and no hierarchical relationship to each other (OECD, 2016). The Norwegian state has a local and regional presence in the form of the county governor. With far less complexity and broader scope than Ontario's municipal system, Norwegian municipal functions primary schools, health and social care, social services, local planning and other services strictly local in scope (Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, n.d., p. 11; OECD, 2016).

County functions include county roads, secondary schools, regional development, regional planning, culture, and some environmental responsibilities. Spending autonomy has been limited and programs are delivered in a strongly sectoral approach, led by the state who sets priorities to ensure that the same services are delivered for citizens regardless of location (OECD, 2016; OECD, 2017; Angell, Flo & Grimsrud, 2016).

There have been more than three decades of discussion about reforming and expanding the responsibilities of local and regional government in Norway. More recent efforts have been framed in the Northern governance literature as an opportunity to improve local democracy, allowing Northern Norwegians "to make decisions that [are] relevant to their particular circumstances" (Poelzer et al., 2014, p. 195). In 1976, counties were reformed into their present shape as a separate political level (Borge, 2012). This was viewed as an unsuccessful attempt at improving their questioned legitimacy. While the 2002 nationalization of the hospital sector further challenged their existence, more recently, counties have been viewed as a tool for regional development (Borge, 2012; Angell et al., 2016). In this vein, the OECD has recommended that Northern Norway improve mechanisms for horizontal and vertical integration toward regional development, as well as establish more consistent connections with the Sámi to take advantage of their important roles in land use, agricultural, and regional tourism (OECD, 2017).

Early Norwegian government efforts to amalgamate all Northern Norway into a single county failed in 2008. At the time, Troms supported the merger, Nordland favoured a merger with only the more populous Southern parts of Troms, and Finnmark rejected the merger outright (Fitjar, 2013). The latter two counties feared losing political power and being dominated by Troms. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the Norwegian government

finally succeeded with a partial amalgamation of Northern Norway, despite Finnmark's objections, creating the 74,813km^2 Troms and Finnmark County on January 1, 2020. This was part of the "country's most comprehensive administrative reform since 1662," bringing the overall number of counties from 19 down to 11 in Norway (Nikel, January 19, 2020). Municipalities were also amalgamated across the country. Policy analysis of the broader reform described goals of creating "stronger local units in terms of expertise and capacity, integration of functional labour market regions and strengthening of local democracy" (Bukve, 2017, p. 14).

4 Results and Analysis

4.1 Northern Ontario

The feedback provided by Northwestern Ontario informants (N=6) supported the reports of Northern alienation in the literature. Major themes are summarized in Table 3. Key points are discussed below.

4.1.1 Current state of governance

4.1.1.1 Southern policies do not reflect Northern differences

Northern Ontario and Southern Ontario are different. “I got in a car and drove to Windsor, the same distance to B.C. [British Columbia], crossing 4 governments,” one informant said about the long drive across Northern Ontario and down to Southern Ontario. “We are living with Queen’s Park rules and the vast majority of M.P.P.s [Members of Provincial Parliament] haven’t been to Northwestern Ontario.” Thunder Bay, the largest city in Northwestern Ontario, is nearly 1400 km by road to capital city Toronto (a 15-hour drive). Kenora, the furthest West city in the province, is nearly 1900 km away (a 20-hour drive).

Not surprisingly, informants felt that provincial policy- and decision-makers in Toronto did not understand that Northern Ontario’s unique geography, demography, and economy. They stressed that, unlike Southern Ontario, the regional economy remained heavily dependent on natural resources. Though, as informants pointed out, concerns arising from these differences have been raised by municipalities for many years. For example, a 1980 policy paper on local government in Northern Ontario cited municipal difficulties related to “transportation, costs, small and scattered populations and dependence on single

industries result in slow growth …, boom and bust cycles, and a limited property tax base. Rugged terrain also results in increased construction costs for roads and water and sewer networks" (Weller, 1980, p. 18-19). In 2003, a government sponsored paper noted that smaller Northern communities were more "at risk" than larger communities because of their limited economic diversification and limited control in the face of external economic forces (Slack, Bourne & Gertler, 2003).

Likewise, informants underlined distinct demographic pressures. Declining and aging populations across the region have resulted in labour shortages and challenges to the viability of smaller towns. This has led, according to some informants, to a conundrum: municipalities needed to attract immigration, but the necessary cultural supports were not in place. Similar mixed feelings were expressed about First Nations people increasingly migrating to regional centres like Kenora, Thunder Bay, and Sioux Lookout from remote communities. On one hand, most informants acknowledged that as the only growing population in the North, First Nations people seeking to join the workforce provided a solution to labour shortages. On the other hand, municipal leaders also highlighted the underfunded pressures for employment training, public health, policing, or social services.

The main point was that policies developed in more crowded, populous centres in the South did not translate well to the North. "[Provincial bureaucrats] don't understand," said one long-time municipal official. "The rules don't work for massive, vast areas we have in Northern Ontario." Many informants went on to list long-standing provincial policy grievances. Recurring themes included restrictive land and natural resource management policies curtailing development, and inadequate funding, taxation, and lack of revenue tools

constraining infrastructure development. A perception of excessive and burdensome regulations permeated most conversations. Their lack of control was inhibiting progress.

Three recurring examples are illustrative. First, the high profile “Spring Bear Hunt,” which was cancelled in 1999 but only very recently reinstated on a limited pilot basis, has become symbolic of provincial indifference. Before the ban, hunting black bears was estimated to contribute $43 million to the Northern Ontario economy (Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, 2020). However, some informants felt that bureaucrats, succumbing to pressure from environmentalists, cancelled the hunt to appease Southern voters while devasting Northern tourist operators. Extensive lobbying and media stories of nuisance bears in Northern towns has forced the government to rethink the matter.

Second, the *Planning Act, Ontario*, was decried as a Southern-focused, one-size-fits all framework that poorly accounted for Northern realities. The Act outlined the processes for land use planning and control in all Ontario, including the provision of strategic land use direction through a Provincial Policy Statement (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2010). Instead, it was suggested that there should be a “Northern Ontario Policy Statement” because, as one informant framed succinctly: Southern policy is about managing rapid growth in an ever-crowding region; Northern policy is about stimulating growth in vast areas that are stagnant or in decline. Different approaches are needed.

Third, informants felt that provincial policies were having negative fiscal impacts. For example, seemingly straightforward new provincial regulations about sidewalk safety required Northern municipalities to disproportionately spend more from limited tax bases on new snowplows. Moreover, many were frustrated with the chronic revenue challenges facing Northern municipalities, lamenting inadequate provincial funding and the highest municipal

taxation rates in Canada. One passionate mayor said he could “go on and on about rules imposed on us from Queen’s Park by people who don’t walk the walk.” Leaders felt like they had limited options and were dependent on chasing government grants.

4.1.1.2 Unincorporated communities

Informants also raised challenges about the interaction between *unincorporated communities* and municipal systems. In 1992, only 40,000 out of the 810,000 square kilometres of Northern Ontario was municipally organized (Nickerson, 1992). The percentage has not changed much since. There are over 100 unincorporated communities (that is, "unorganized” settlements that have formed on provincial territory but have not incorporated as a municipality) across the region, including 46 Local Services Boards (LSBs) (Slack et al., 2003; Robinson, 2016, p. 10). LSBs, along with Local Roads Boards, are the provincial government’s unique answer to delivering direct (albeit limited) local services in unorganized areas (Coates et al., 2014). Generally, many informants’ lamented people who bought properties outside of municipal boundaries to avoid paying higher taxes, but then relied on public services inside municipal boundaries. Also, some informants raised the disproportionate influence these small communities had on government organizations, such as the District Social Services Administrative Boards (DSSABs). It was an issue of fairness.

Conversely, an informant who was a long-time LSB member felt that neighbouring municipalities were not interested in collaboration, despite his attempts. Unincorporated communities were experiencing challenges not appreciated by municipalities nor the provincial government. Stressing that local-decision making was essential, the informant indicated that the LSB’s enabling legislation, the *Northern Services Board Act, Ontario,* provided no opportunity to expand their beyond providing very limited services (Ministry of

Energy, Northern Development, and Mines, 2020). He said that "our Act is old and woefully outdated. ... Consequently, we are unprepared for the rapid changes in the North. Another result of our Act being outdated is the inability to keep up with the demands of increasing policy complexity. With no legislative supports communities such as ours are made less efficient (weakened power, limited abilities)." He then listed several initiatives (e.g. a helicopter landing pad for ambulance services) that the community had funded themselves, without any provincial or federal support. Interestingly, a common thread between this individual and the municipal informants was that most wanted to take a regional perspective but lacked the legislative and policy tools to promote a collaborative approach. Instead, it was felt that the system was designed to pit one type of community against another.

4.1.1.3 Relationships between public and Indigenous governance systems

The lone First Nations informant, an experienced leader at band and tribal council levels, emphasized that regional and provincial politics were completely different from local First Nations politics. He said that the biggest challenge for increasing Indigenous participation in regional decision-making was to first increase voters in First Nations, particularly in the remote Far North. Ontario has more remote First Nations than any other Canadian region (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). According to the Government of Canada, approximately a quarter of Ontario's 126 First Nations are remote (i.e. do not have all-season road access); all are in Northern Ontario and nearly all are in the Far North of Ontario. For comparison, Canada has 619 total First Nations.

However, the informant pointed to recent signs of improvement. For example, for the 2018 provincial election, a new electoral district was added in the Far North, Kiiwetinoong. Created by splitting the huge former Kenora-Rainy River riding, the new electoral district

became the only one in Ontario with a majority Indigenous population. Sol Mamakwa was elected as its first Member of Provincial Parliament and the runner-up, Clifford Bull, was appointed by the government as a Special Advisor to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs. So, the net result, according to the informant, was two new Northern, Indigenous voices at Ontario's Legislative Assembly ("Queen's Park") in Toronto. In addition, the informant cited an increase in the number of people standing for provincial election across Northwestern Ontario.

Municipal informants provided a largely optimistic perspective on municipal-First Nations relations. They indicated that relationships between First Nations and municipalities had improved over time. Indeed, municipal-Indigenous relations have been identified as a current priority of the Association of Municipalities Ontario. In 2019, the organization, through the work of a task force led by a Northwestern Ontario mayor, released a discussion paper on "Municipal Governments and the Crown's 'Duty to Consult': Towards a Process that Works for Local Communities" (AMO, 2019, p. 19). Recommendations involved asking the Ontario government to clarify municipal responsibilities around the duty to consult Indigenous communities and to establish a process to facilitate consultation; the lack of direction was identified as a barrier to local governments "on the ground."

Informants generally recognized that First Nations "have to be part of the process" for any regional governance change. Nearly all informants spoke about the need to bridge municipal and Indigenous systems; although, the group was split on whether there could ever be a shared regional government. One mayor spoke passionately on this topic:

> "We have to do better. We are on their land. They have more authority in the constitution than municipalities. We have none. We are all still learning how to work

together. Screw ups on both sides over the years. It's important to do whatever we can together."

However, it was also noted that many municipalities still have a "send them home" attitude toward Indigenous peoples migrating into or travelling through municipal centres.

The relationship between the Municipality of Sioux Lookout and Lac Seul First Nation was frequently cited. Referring to their self-initiated efforts, one municipal official indicated that "Sioux Lookout is ahead of the curve." Practical considerations were a driving factor, according to another informant, who noted that "necessity is the mother of invention: [the] unique location." Sioux Lookout, "Hub of the North," has 5,600 residents (the only Northern municipality that is growing) and serves 29 northern First Nations communities (Municipality of Sioux Lookout, 2014). Nearby Lac Seul First Nation has approximately 900 people living on reserve (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). These two communities (plus Slate Falls First Nation) signed a Friendship Accord in December 2013 that provided a framework for agreements about communications, social and cultural matters, public safety and economic development, and other matters (Municipality of Sioux Lookout, 2013). According to informants, results included new businesses, expansion to other area First Nations, and recognition by the Association of Municipality Ontario.

4.1.2 Perspectives on governance change

Interestingly, all informants recognized regional governance problems, but many admitted to not having given much thought to regional governance solutions. It was noted, though, that regional governance had been on the radar of NOMA. One informant with deep connections to NOMA indicated that the organization had approached the issue from an

economic development perspective: "we've been pushing for regional decision-making. Some people in the region think that regional governance is creating more bureaucracy when we should be creating economies." This perspective makes sense for two key reasons. First, as described above in section 3.2.1, municipalities are increasingly expected to drive economic development. However, in Ontario, a major governance issue has been described in the misalignment between municipal boundaries and economic regions, resulting in difficulties in coordination, planning, and policy (Côté & Fenn, 2014, p. 22). Second, the desire to coordinate and collaborate rather than create new governments reflects the surrounding policy environment. Over the past four decades, successive provincial governments' regional policy on Northern Ontario has focused on economic development. More recently, provincial, and federal policy interventions have begun to shift from a management approach to a governance approach (with a broader set of actors, including municipalities, Indigenous organizations, and private sector organizations) (Conteh, 2013). Questions remain about how to coordinate policy in this MLG system.

Moreover, regional governance in Northern Ontario, or at least the idea of "regional governments," has not been raised by the current Progressive Conservative provincial government. According to the 2019 Ontario Budget, the government's focus for Northern Ontario was to create jobs and economic growth by reducing administrative burdens for development projects, providing job training, and investing in infrastructure (Ministry of Finance, 2019). Of note, a review of all 8 regional municipalities in Southern Ontario that same year did not result in changes (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2019). Northern Ontario was not mentioned at all. Similarly, informants had not heard of any government interest in discussing regional governments in the North.

Linking back to the trend of increasing policy complexity mentioned in section 3.1.1.1, is worth noting here that *revitalization* has been described as a necessary governance capability to deal with wicked problems (e.g. like the chronic problems facing Northern Ontario); sometimes, an external intervenor with a fresh perspective is needed when the actors in the system cannot breakout of stagnating patterns themselves (Termeer et al., 2015). Throughout my interviews, I was left with the impression that the municipal officials would like to pursue regional governance but were focused on more pressing issues within their municipality. There was no clear political champion for regional reform.

Yet, high level ideas were presented. One informant indicated that the answer does not involve looking at traditional boundaries but instead considers regional organization by transportation routes and economic corridors. Another suggested amalgamating unsustainable smaller municipalities using a similar approach. The concept of dividing heterogeneous Northern Ontario by logical sub-regions with common economic, geographic, or demographic attributes aligns with recent research. One example is Conteh's (2017) 11 discrete economic zones, which included six "city-regions" and five "industrial corridors." It was suggested that these new units could provide enough density for longer term planning and reduce parochialism to address common challenges. In another example, unique sub-regional populations and geographies have been described by Northern Ontario health care leaders as a way to reorganize health governance (Everett, 2019).

Alternately, some informants suggested that regional governments organize around First Nations' treaty territorial boundaries. Though, they conceded that jurisdictional challenges could be difficult to overcome, and that Indigenous communities and organizations may be more interested in a sovereignty model. In this regard, many informants suggested

that looking to other Northern jurisdictions was important. A few pointed to the model in Northern Québec as a starting point to consider regional government at the Tribal Council or Political-Territorial Organizational level. However, many suggested these historic treaties could be a barrier and noted that regional governments in Quebec resulted from a modern treaty. One informant suggested renegotiating Northern Ontario's treaties.

Are treaties a barrier to public regional governance change? While beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting that treaty interpretation may not be as static as implied. First, there are many Indigenous land claims across the region, and at least one First Nation, Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, has filed an Aboriginal title claim against Ontario and Canada in court, asserting that they were never a signatory to the 1850 Robinson Superior Treaty (Ojibways of Pic River, 2020). This region has many different interests (other Indigenous land claims, mining, forestry, protection, parks, etc); if there is a major land claim negotiated in the area, creative governance solutions may be needed. Second, the Restoule v. Canada (Attorney General) multi-stage treaty annuities trial (2018 ONSC 770) will likely have landmark implications. First Nations in the Robinson Huron and Robinson Superior Treaty areas won a court ruling against Ontario and Canada (currently under appeal). Significant increases to annual payments to members were required based on revenue generation from the lands and waters ceded to the Crown, going back to 1850. The major potential financial impact to Crown treasuries – coupled with other developments in the region – could eventually lead to a political appetite for more fundamental change.

Conversely, a long-time municipal official from a larger centre pointed out that new regional bodies may not be the answer at all. While agreeing that the current one-size-fits-all approach to provincial policy does not work, this informant outlined the need for "local

reflection, not necessarily local decision-making." County governments would not necessarily work in Northwestern Ontario due to great travel distances and fears from the smaller communities about losing authority to a regional body. He noted that some of the existing regional bodies were working well, while others were not. For example, DSSABs (introduced in Chapter 1) coordinate delivery of range of services that are typically provided at the regional municipality level in Southern Ontario. Their implementation indicates that a different governance approach can be taken for Northern Ontario (AMO, 2018; Slack et al., 2003; MacKinnon, 2019). Informants' feelings on the effectiveness of DSSABs were mixed, though some suggested they could be built upon. In contrast, the outgoing Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), which were applied in "cookie-cutter" fashion across the province, were not seen by some Northern health leaders as achieving local decision-making, despite having local boards (Everett, 2019). The key, the informant suggested, was that local or regional boards not merely be a "rubber stamp," but instead have the proper authority to apply provincial funding in the best way to serve Northern citizens.

Finally, intra-regional rivalries and tensions would need to be overcome in any new regional approach. In addition to the frustration towards the provincial and federal capitals, informants reported tensions between small towns and larger cities within Northwestern Ontario, and more broadly between Northwestern and Northeastern Ontario. Much like the perspective that the LSB informant presented toward municipalities described above, one informant referred to the City of Thunder Bay as a regional "bully." Another went further:

> "One of the problems with regional governance – you have an axis of evil – Kenora and Thunder Bay Districts – named cities confused with districts. Kenora district is the size of France, not city of Kenora. Thunder Bay District is the size of Germany.

> Sucks the life out of small communities and everything gets put there. Even though Sioux Lookout is half a continent away, Queen's Park thinks they are solving a problem in the north when you put something in Kenora … Northern Ontario is an insert on Ontario maps."

Overcoming these traditional internal divisions has been recommended in the public policy discourse (MacKinnon, 2016; MacKinnon, 2019). Simply put, as one informant emphasized, we need to "look at something that doesn't pit one town against the other. Fair services and payment."

4.2 Northern Norway

Informants (N=4) in Northern Norway provided insights about regional governance from two perspectives: 1) having had a long history of county governments; and 2) recently undergoing regional governance change. Key points are discussed below in three areas: current governance (benefits and challenges are summarized in Table 4), Indigenous participation in regional governance, and reform.

4.2.1 Current governance

Like Northern Ontario, Northern Norway has a history of socio-economic challenges. For context, some Norwegian informants noted that Northern counties had lagged the rest of the country after being hit hard in World War II. Compared to Southern regions, one informant noted that "the unemployment rate has always been higher, income rate has been lower, and like in other Northern areas around the globe, every statistic … is in the wrong end." Again, like in Northern Ontario, "permanent disadvantages" were identified. Recurring

issues related to longer distances, Northern climate and accessibility, resulted in higher costs compared to the rest of Norway. For example, an informant from Finnmark stated:

> *"*Finnmark is a challenging county to govern, as the geographic scale of the county is far larger than the other counties in Norway…there are far less inhabitants here comparted to other counties in Norway. At the same time, the level of service offered to the inhabitants is expected to be at the same level. This makes Finnmark county municipality normally less cost-efficient to run that the other counties.*"*

Another informant noted that "Troms shares some of the same challenges in governance as Finnmark, especially northern parts of the county. At the same time Troms has an axis of more densely populated areas running from Harstad in the south to Tromsø – which is among the top 10 cities in Norway in number of inhabitants."

Furthermore, aspects of the governance system itself were reported as challenges. Notably, all informants referenced Norway's strongly centralized approach to public policy. Negative concerns were frequently expressed about the lack of control in Northern areas, misalignment of responsibilities between levels of government, and the need for more policy coordination between sectors. For example, one informant expressed frustration about county municipalities receiving funding from different ministries for different responsibilities with different goals. In addition, a decades-long trend of declining responsibilities for county municipalities had "partly devaluated the standing of county municipalities to the inhabitants, as there are less relevant services offered from the county municipalities now – compared to 40 years ago." These concerns were coupled with complications resulting from administrative borders themselves. For example, the border of Troms and Nordland cuts through a labour market, resulting in different regimes between neighbours. The

misalignment between municipal boundaries and economic sub-regions was consistent with Ontario's experience.

Many informants also spoke about the challenges recruiting and retaining qualified leaders and other public servants. For example, one Finnmark informant noted that "with fewer inhabitants the possibilities of recruiting political talents able to respond to increasing policy complexity is less than in more densely populated areas." Human capacity challenges have emerged as a trend across the Circumpolar North (Poelzer & Wilson, 2014). In addition, like in Northern Ontario, role conflict or parochialism was presented as an additional challenge. One informant noted that most politicians elected to the local parliament in the county municipality also have political roles in the local municipality.

Nonetheless, benefits to the current structure were also identified. Informants from both counties suggested that smaller governments offered flexibility. One informant pointed out that "in Finnmark the small government organization, consisting of few employees with larger areas of responsibilities, make the organization well suited for rapid changes." By necessity, smaller administrations must cooperate, and staff are generalized in several different subjects. Moreover, informants described the need to wear multiple hats and had experience in multiple leadership roles. While this may be a result of limited human resources, it may also promote an ability to span jurisdictional scales.

Like in Northern Ontario, informants spoke about a difference in thinking between Northern and Southern areas. This was sometimes described negatively, such as when it was said that it "feels like we are quite far from Oslo. People of Finnmark are often misunderstood, and of course, we misunderstand sometimes." More often, though, "Northern thinking" was positively associated with resiliency, overcoming challenges, and practical

solutions. A so-called "rural logic." It was also said that Northerners were used to rapid change; they lived far away, so they could not wait for help.

Some informants also saw benefits related to achieving consistency and economies of scale. One informant noted, "in my opinion, the 19 county municipalities have relatively equal level of services offered to the inhabitants, more so than the 400+ local municipalities, as the cooperation and possibility to compare services is far greater in the county municipalities. The county municipalities have traditionally been rather cost-efficient in the production of services." Interestingly, the Norwegian informants' expectations for equal service delivery differed from the discourse in Northern Ontario. Northern Ontario informants were more likely to suggest that public services should be uniquely tailored to local needs, likely due to cultural differences and the much larger geographic scale.

4.2.2 Indigenous participation in regional governance

Generally, many informants described Indigenous participation in regional decision-making as insufficient, informal, or in one case, "almost non-existent." Informant feelings about the effectiveness of bilateral cooperation agreements between county governments and the Sámi Parliament were mixed. While relationships had strengthened over time, issues remained, particularly on contentious subjects such as reindeer herding and resource development. An informant knowledgeable in the genesis of these relationships provided a historical anecdote:

> "The establishment of the Sámi Parliament in 1989 was a major shift. There started to be a gradual collaboration between Sami Parliament and the municipalities…

> At the political level, there had been talks… Barents Euroarctic Region in the beginning of the 90s and the Iron Curtain was gone and there was a series of meetings also on the Russian side. In one of those meetings, on the other side of the Ural mountains, far, far in Russia, the president of the [Norwegian] Sámi Parliament and the mayor of county council had talks, maybe over a beer or two late in the night, and said, why are we having these talks here, could we not have them at home?"

Later, the Sámi Parliament offered a multilateral cooperation agreement with both counties. Both counties refused, citing different challenges. One informant came to see this as a missed opportunity. He felt that the counties have been "locked" into bilateral relationships with the Sámi Parliament. "When you put together Troms and Finnmark, you will have most of [where] the northern Sámi speaking population lives. And the Troms and Finnmark county will border Russia, Finland, and Sweden. And in my opinion, creates possibilities for cooperation that has not been exploited to this day – in cultural cooperation, in language cooperation, and business development cooperation – in a lot of sectors there would be possibilities that haven't been exploited."

Finally, like Northern Ontario, there was also evidence of rivalries. Seen by some informants as more progressive to Indigenous issues, Troms was the first county to execute a cooperation agreement. One informant felt that there may be a more competitive relationship between the Sámi Parliament and Finnmark County (where the Sámi Parliament is located), noting that there is a perception that the Sámi Parliament has more media attention and that unlike municipalities, it has a direct consultation agreement with the national government.

4.2.3 Perspectives on reform

Informants saw benefits in the stated goals of municipal reform, including coordination, simplification, and increased democracy. Some informants even saw the county councils as a good starting point, noting that they have a cross-sectoral vantage point with a location-based perspective. However, most informants expressed skepticism and felt that perceived financial efficiencies were the primary driver.

Significantly, concerns with the reform process was a recurring theme. It was felt that regional reform was a late addition to the local reform initiative and was not well thought out. Some informants expressed that the process seemed backward. The government largely focused on the boundaries first and not on responsibilities, which was felt to be a missed opportunity. Likewise, informants criticized the government's "preoccupation with [the] size" of municipalities and counties. In addition, while the premise was that larger counties could manage larger responsibilities, only small tasks were on the table to be transferred. In other words, it was felt that the new responsibilities could just as easily be performed by the existing counties. One informant noted that this was detrimental to gaining public support: "it is difficult to sell a voluntary amalgamation when you don't know what you are supposed to build." Many suspected that "backroom deal-making" and moving on to mandatory amalgamations led to hostility in the North. "When you are forced to sit at the same table, you will look at each other with suspicion not cooperation in mind."

Beyond process, there were regional differences in assessing the merits. Most informants felt that Troms wanted the amalgamation and Finnmark did not. The Finnmark referendum mentioned in Chapter 1 supported this. While a larger Northern county could have a stronger voice at a national table, Finnmark informants worried about proportionately less representation on the merged county council and in parliament. Some informants alleged

that Troms did not want to share political and administrative power (i.e. they wanted to centralize everything in the largest city, Tromsø). And many in Finnmark felt it was necessary to maintain county government presence in Finnmark's current administrative centre, Vadsø. Much like in Northern Ontario, there was also worry that rural areas would get overwhelmed by more populous growth areas (Tromsø and Hammerfest). Generally, informants' concerns aligned with those of some Finnmark politicians: the weakening of local democracy, longer travel distances to access public services, loss of a unique Barents identity, and risks to their special relationship with Russia (Staalesen, May 15, 2018). In then end, citing significant cultural differences, some informants in both counties felt that there was not enough to justify amalgamation.

As a result, many suggested alternate approaches. Ideas generally coalesced around an improved division of responsibilities between levels of government supported by appropriate resource allocation. Informants spoke of finding a vague "sweet spot" where responsibilities were aligned at a level "not too low and not too high", consistent with the principle of subsidiary. Achieving economies of scale and avoiding parochialism should be objectives. Tasks that required coordination over a large area should be administered by the body with matching geographic boundaries. Tasks requiring political judgement "should be added to the elected bodies [and] not a state directorate of the county governor." Finally, tasks that should not be influenced by local politics should be state responsibilities.

Rural and regional development was cited as an example of successful decentralization. Giving more autonomy to counties and improving horizontal and vertical coordination had begun to foster an effective "place-based approach." Broader implementation was inconsistent. For example, regional planning was broad and inclusive,

while transportation planning at the national level was too centrally driven. In that spirit, one informant suggested to resolve regional problems through "mutual cooperation before someone else tells them" what to do. In other words, for some, the gaps were less about structural changes and more about better communication, collaboration, and coordination.

In terms of jurisdictional boundaries, many felt that there were better options. Some suggested a fully amalgamated Northern county (combining Finnmark, Troms, and Nordland) to provide a strong Northern regional perspective. A key benefit would be to dampen the parochial interests of dominant municipal centres in small counties. Success required that the county government spread administrative functions across the region. For one, it was all or nothing: "the existing regions are too big anyway, so might as well make it even bigger…And that is not going to happen, so we might as well stay where we are."

Alternatively, like in Northern Ontario, two informants suggested restructuring counties based on sub-regions with similar demographic or economic characteristics. For example, one informant suggested an urban-rural split, noting that "if Troms has been split in two and Southern parts merged with Nordland and Northern parts merged with Finnmark, I think we would have seen two county municipalities more suited to the challenges of the region." Yet another option was to structure counties from a totally Sámi perspective, basing boundaries on different Sámi language dialects. In the end, informants conceded that there would be winners and losers in any option.

4.2.4 Reform and Sámi institutions

What impact would reform have on relationships with the Sámi? Many felt that, on its own, the reform would not result in much difference. Intergovernmental relationships would

still be defined by consultation and cooperation agreements. However, one informant strongly emphasized that "there are things that will affect the Sámi interests. Planning processes. Environmental issues. High north issues. Industry development. Fishing and farming issues. These are important things." Amalgamation could dilute the Sámi voice in regional governance because the proportion of Sámi in the merged county becomes less than it was in Finnmark alone.

Informants were also unclear on potential impacts to the co-managed Finnmark Estate. The *Finnmark Act* and its innovative institutions' effectiveness at securing Indigenous land rights have faced preliminary questions (Ravna, 2014). In addition, public support for the organization has been a concern. Early on, the equal composition of board members between the municipalities and the Sámi Parliament were raised in the media because the latter organization represented far fewer citizens (Broderstad, 2015). There has been evidence of a continuing low public support (Broderstad et al., 2019).

Finally, many felt that there was too little consultation with the Sámi people. Some indicated that the Sámi Parliament was very upset that the national government had not first discussed amalgamation with them, noting a potential breach of the consultation agreement. One said that it was "so sad that there has been no real investigation into what the consequences will be regarding Sami affairs beforehand." Each county department was expected to follow up on their own to assess consultation needs and impacts. This left little time and resulted in rushed efforts. Moreover, the approach imposed additional burdens on the Sámi Parliament as they would have to engage with multiple departments. Overall, one informant said this was a "problem because the process is poorly run; it is embarrassing."

5 Conclusion

In summary, this thesis project explored regional governance in Northern Ontario and Northern Norway, using interview data from sub-regions within those large areas. In Northwestern Ontario, while there was no consensus on the form, informants generally agreed that better regional governance and less central control by the Ontario government was needed. However, despite a decades-long recognition of the issues, there was no clear political driver, or champion, for public regional governance change. On the other hand, Norway's two Northernmost counties (now merged as Troms and Finnmark County) were experiencing change. The drivers, according to the national government, were based on finding efficiencies, improving democracy, and providing better services. Some informants were skeptical about the latter two points. Plainly, informants agreed that the municipal reform process was undertaken poorly.

In that vein, the following insights should be considered if Northern Ontario pursues regional governance reform:

1. *A collaborative approach rather than a top-down, forced amalgamation.* The mandatory approach to merging counties was poorly received in Northern Norway. In Northern Ontario, informants repeatedly said "one-size fits-all" approaches from the South were not working. Regional public governance change should involve true collaboration among the numerous actors in Northern Ontario;
2. *More multilateral agreements between Indigenous and public regional governments (as opposed to strictly bilateral arrangements).* An informant involved in developing the cooperation agreements between individual counties

and the Sámi Parliament, came to see these relationships as a barrier to improved Northern collaboration.

3. *Take the needed time and avoid "form before function."* In Norway, informants felt that amalgamations were rushed and had an unnecessary, overwhelming focus on the number and size of the municipalities and counties. Instead, it was felt that a better starting point would have been a functional analysis that determined the appropriate responsibilities and political authorities for each level of government;

4. *A "place-based" approach.* Building on the previous point**,** any boundary changes should also consider sub-regional variation within the North. In Troms and Finnmark, informants suggested different ways to divide the region to better reflect various demographic, economic, or geographic characteristics. In much larger Northern Ontario, the myriad of existing jurisdictional boundaries were described as overlapping, arbitrary, and inconsistent. The North is not a homogenous entity; regional boundaries should be evidence-based;

5. *Regional rivalries and "re-centralization" to new capitals.* By establishing a larger county, some Norwegian informants expected changes in political and power dynamics in favour of the more populous cities. Likewise, much larger Northern Ontario is a diverse region with internal rivalries and imbalanced power relationships. Any governance change should not simply be about devolving authority from a Southern capital into a re-centralized Northern one;

6. *Broadening perspectives***.** It was felt that the plans for amalgamation failed to consider the important subnational relationships that Northern Norway has with other countries, particularly in the resource-rich Barents Region. As stated in the literature and by informants, traditionally insular Northern Ontario could benefit

from comparisons to and relationships with other Northern jurisdictions at broader scales; and

7. *Engage and involve Indigenous communities and groups from the beginning.* The early development of Norway's municipal reform did not include Sámi input. Consultation on implementation after the fact, and then on a narrow range of "cultural issues," was insufficient. As many informants noted, First Nations in Northern Ontario must be a partner in determining the region's destiny.

Finally, in terms of local and regional governance institutions, the uniform system with fewer players in Norway differed substantially from the diverse and complex system in Ontario. Yet, a major observation was that public and Indigenous regional governance change seemed to be on disconnected paths in both Norths. In Northern Norway, concerns were expressed about Sámi participation in municipal reform. Indigenous participation in regional decision-making was considered inadequate. However, at the time of this study, the Norwegian government was expanding to municipalities the duty to consult Sámi people. The disconnect in Northern Ontario was worse. While there are early examples of innovative Indigenous regional governance arrangements, Northern Ontario public governance has remained stagnant. My concern is that diverging paths could further exacerbate regional tensions. However, there is much common ground for communities – municipalities, local services boards, First Nations, and others – who all desire to improve social, health, and economic conditions, as well as seek more autonomy over their distinct Northern needs. A Northern Ontario Indigenous informant concluded that "nobody's going away fast. Like it or not, we're neighbours. Learn to live together respectfully. Let's deal with our issues. Let's deal with racism. Let's deal with welfare. Let's put people to work."

Figures and Tables

Table 1 – Summary of informant characteristics

	ONTARIO	NORWAY
ONLY MUNICIPAL OR UNINCORPORATED GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE	5	2
ONLY INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE	1	
BOTH MUNICIPAL AND INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE		2
POLITICIAN	6	1
PUBLIC SERVANT (BUREAUCRAT)		3

Note: Norway N=4, Ontario N=6

Table 2 – Examples of provincial service delivery agencies in Northern Ontario.

ORGANIZATION / BOUNDARY UNIT	PURPOSE	NUMBER IN NORTHERN ONTARIO	NORTHERN CITIZEN REPRESENTATION	NOTE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO[1,3]	Provincial electoral district	11	Elected Member of Provincial Parliament	
DISTRICTS[1]	Territorial boundary. Not an organization.	10	None.	
PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS[4]	Administer health promotion and disease prevention programs	8	Appointed board of directors, largely made up of elected municipal officials in service area	
LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS[5]	Plan, integrate, and fund local health care. Home and community care.	2	Appointed board of directors.	Phasing out into single provincial organization with sub-regional health teams.
SCHOOL BOARDS[6]	Administer elementary and secondary schools.	Approx. 26	Elected board of trustees.	
MUNICIPALITIES[7, 10]	Local services delivery	144	Elected council.	
DISTRICT SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARDS (DSSABS)[1,2]	Social services delivery (e.g. social housing, financial assistance, social assistance)	10	Appointed board, largely includes municipal officials and representatives from unincorporated areas	
WORKFORCE PLANNING BOARDS[1,9]	Gather intelligence about the supply of labour and the demand side of the local labour market	6	Board, various.	

Note:

1. Northern Policy Institute, 2020 – Boundary Maps.
2. Kenora District Services Board, 2020
3. Elections Ontario, 2020.
4. Ontario Ministry of Health, 2019.
5. Local Health Integration Network, 2014.
6. Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020.
7. Association of Municipalities, 2020.
8. Ontario, 2020a.
9. Workforce Planning Ontario, 2020.
10. Robinson, 2016

Table 3 – Northern Ontario informants – major themes

AREA	MAJOR THEME	KEY POINTS
CURRENT STATE OF GOVERNANCE	Inherent economic, geographic and demographic characteristics causing challenges for governing	Vast size and long travel distances Heavy dependence on natural resource economy Small and dispersed populations Declining and aging populations Growing and migrating Indigenous population need training Hub municipalities need support for new and transient residents Jurisdictional complexity related to providing services for increased urban Indigenous populations
	Too much central control for policy and decision-making in provincial capital	Centrally developed policies don't reflect Northern needs. Long-standing, specific policy grievances identified. Disproportionate impact of provincial downloading and regulations on Northern municipalities Lack of revenue tools for municipalities Different perspectives on natural resource management between North and South
	Challenges related to communities in unorganized areas	Citizens from unorganized areas don't pay their fair share for services Local Services Boards having disproportionate influence on area planning and administrative boards Local Services Boards do not have the legislative authority to suitably expand their services
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PUBLIC AND INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENTS	Limited Indigenous participation in regional decision-making in public governance	Regional politics completely different than local First Nations politics Recent increase in Northern Indigenous voices at Queen's Park
	Relationships between municipalities and First Nations have improved over time	Recognition that municipalities and First Nations communities need to build relationships and learn to live together Sioux Lookout and Lac Seul First Nation highlighted as best practice Need to overcome long-standing racism toward Indigenous peoples
PERSPECTIVES ON REGIONAL GOVERNANCE CHANGE	Suggestions for regional governance models	Need to build economies Treaty territories as boundaries for new regional governments Looking for best practices in other jurisdictions, e.g. Northern Quebec Local reflection not necessarily local decision-making Amalgamation based on travel patterns Will always have two parallel systems (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) but how do we share governance of overlapping areas
	Challenges to regional governance	Not necessarily on municipal radar – many new politicians in last election, learning curve Jurisdictional complexity Rivalries between different-sized towns and cities Provincial doesn't understand regional differences within Northern Ontario Regional governments will take time There hasn't been dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous regional bodies on regional governance (e.g. NOMA and NAN)

Table 4 – Northern Norway informants – benefits and challenges of current regional governance

	THEMES	SUBTHEMES
BENEFITS	Small size offers flexibility and adaptability	Readiness for rapid change Used to change – changing all the time
	Northern thinking	Resiliency, pragmatism More generalized staff allows for better problem-solving Leaders with "multiple hats"
	Cost efficiency of regional municipalities	Economies of scale
	Cross-sectoral vantage point	Combined perspective – service coordination and regional geography
CHALLENGES	Permanent disadvantages	Larger distances Northern climate Accessibility challenges Higher costs
	Too much central control by state	Lack of control in Northern areas More policy coordination needed Decades-long trend of declining responsibilities for county municipalities
	Division of roles and responsibilities	Misaligned or inappropriate tasks assigned Lack of coordinate at state level More responsibilities needed by county
	Leadership	Supply of qualified leaders Parochialism

Figure 1 – Comparing regional divisions in Northern Ontario using the Northern Policy Institute Boundary Map tool (Northern Policy Institute, 2020)

a) Northern Ontario

b) Northern Ontario, provincial electoral districts

c) Northern Ontario, federal electoral districts

Northern Ontario

April 11, 2020

Northern Ontario Boundary

Override 1

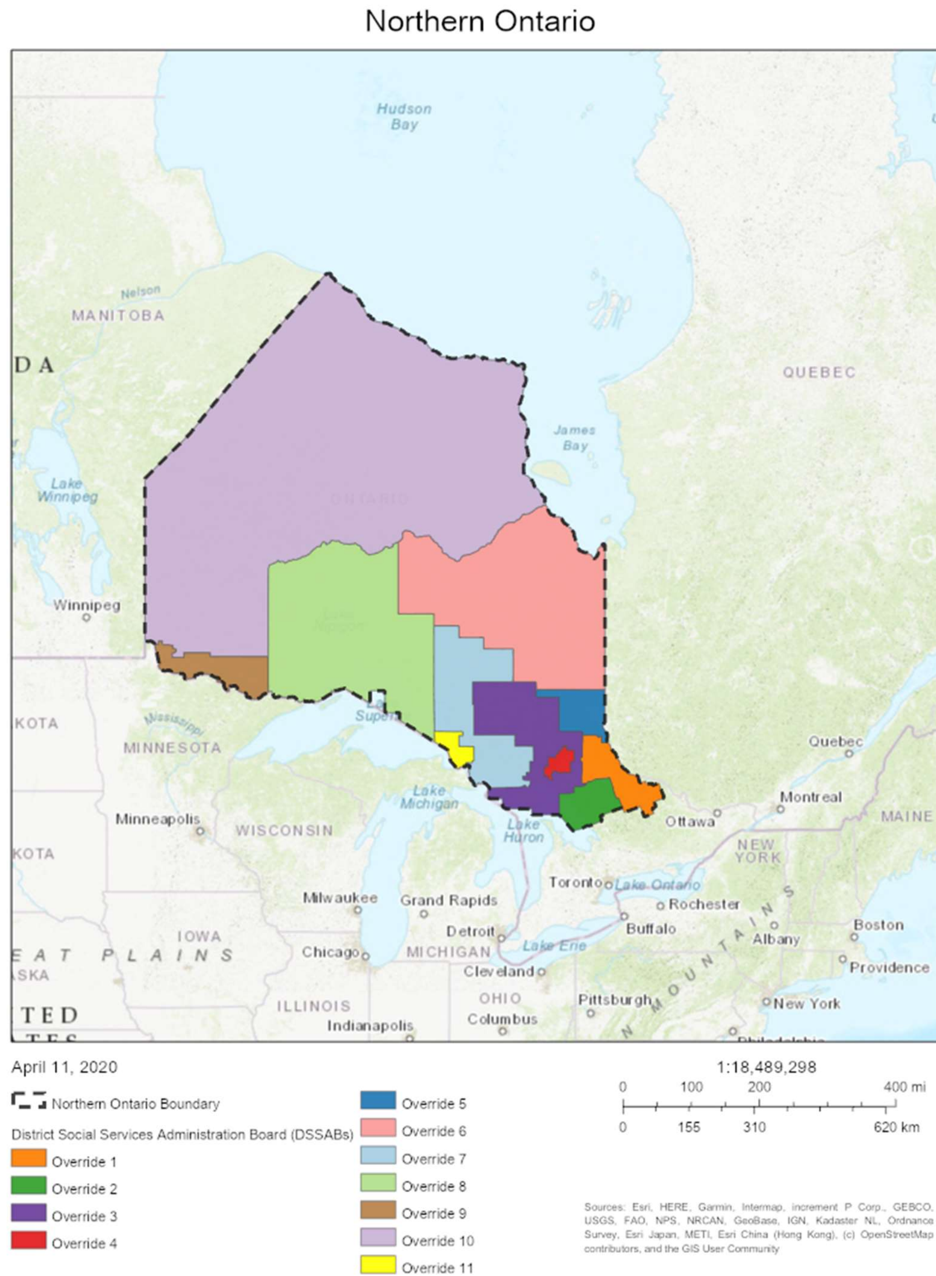
1:18,489,298

0 100 200 400 mi

0 155 310 620 km

Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

d) Northern Ontario, District Social Services Administration Boards service areas



e) Northern Ontario, First Nations Treaty areas

Northern Ontario

April 11, 2020

Northern Ontario Boundary

First Nation Treaty Map

- Robinson-Huron Treaty, 1850
- Robinson-Superior Treaty, 1850
- Treaty 11, 1798
- Treaty 3, 1873
- Treaty 45, 1836, Treaty 94, 1862
- Treaty 5, 1875
- Treaty 9, 1905
- Adhesion Treaty 9, 1929-30
- Williams Treaties, 1923

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Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

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