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The Territorial North

Learning Objectives

- To describe the physical and historical geography of the Territorial North as a basis for understanding the region's social and economic position in Canada
- To describe the dual character of the Territorial North (in terms of resource frontier and homeland)
- To describe the Territorial North's position as a resource frontier in the core/periphery model
- To outline the key role Canada's north plays in geopolitics by discussing Arctic sovereignty
- To outline the key role played by megaprojects in the region's development

Chapter Overview

The Territorial North is Canada's largest region and the only one to be categorized as a **resource frontier** in the core/periphery model. Key themes of this chapter include:

1. Remoteness of the Territorial North.
2. Resources within the Territorial North.
3. Recognition of this region as a homeland for Indigenous peoples

The Territorial North within Canada and the World

The Territorial North comprises 39 per cent of Canada's area, 0.3 per cent of its GDP, and 0.3 per cent of its population. As a result of its geographic remoteness and dependence on resources, **mega-projects** in this region have significant implications not only for economic development but also for social conditions and the environment.

Physical Geography of the Territorial North

The Territorial North extends across four physiographic regions and two climate zones. Bone points out that the physical geography of the Territorial North is influenced more by its cold environment than by physical topography (p. 367). It is largely because of the cold environment that northern ecosystems are frequently described as "fragile" or "delicate," and require prolonged periods of time to recover from human activity. A cold environment with permafrost, cool summers, etc., also poses considerable challenges for development.

Environmental Challenge: Climate Change

Climate change is more rapid in the Arctic than the rest of the world. Several factors are involved in greater temperature increases occurring in the Arctic, such as heat transfer from lower latitudes to higher ones, but the primary factor is the albedo effect. Global warming may result in unimpeded ocean transportation across the Northwest Passage, yet land transport, with the melting of permafrost, will pose unique challenges and wildlife will be affected.

Historical Geography of the Territorial North

Non-Aboriginal settlement is relatively recent in the Territorial North. Following the years of whaling and fur trade activity, the North became a “forgotten frontier.” In the post–World War II era, the region took on strategic significance as tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union mounted during the Cold War. More recently, the Territorial North has been a scene of resource development megaprojects that have evolved within the context of changing social, environmental, and political agendas.

The Territorial North Today

The Territorial North remains a resource frontier far from world markets and Arctic urban centres are very small and isolated. Indigenous peoples participate in a mixed economy of land-based and wage economies.

Economic Spearheads

Art, tourism, the growth of Indigenous development corporations, and global trade opportunities are described as “economic spearheads” (p. 385).

Frontier Vision of the Development in the Territorial North

Little transportation infrastructure exists in the north and in developing resource projects, transportation costs are weighed in relation to mineral value, etc.

The Territorial North’s Economic Anchor: Megaprojects

Bone defines megaprojects as large scale construction projects, often related to resource extraction, that often exceed \$5 billion and take several years to complete (p. 389). While there are examples of megaprojects in the other regions (the James Bay Power Project, the Confederation Bridge), this type of development takes on much greater significance in the Territorial North. At the same time, megaprojects are the “Achilles heel” of the northern economy (p. 393).

Challenge Questions

1. What economic spearheads are forecast as the North becomes more accessible with global warming?
2. Why would the British naval expedition led by Sir John Franklin stand a better chance of navigating across the Northwest Passage today than in 1845?
3. Why is transportation infrastructure so limited in Nunavut, particularly, and other regions in the Territorial North?
4. Why is population increase occurring in the Territorial North in a significantly different way than in many southern, urban Canadian regions?
5. How have comprehensive land-claim agreements equipped Aboriginal peoples to chart a successful new future course?
6. On the one hand, megaprojects are the driving force behind the economy of the Territorial North. On the other hand, these projects have an “Achilles heel.” What is this “Achilles heel” (or weakness) and why does it exist?

7. Discuss the pros and cons of megaprojects in general.
8. Why is the Arctic Basin and Arctic sovereignty important to Canada?
9. How will global warming and the changing view of the North's strategic importance alter the region in the next 25 years?

Key Terms

Air commuting Travel to a work site, such as a mine, by aircraft owned or hired by the company. Commuting to work is a common theme in geographic literature. However, air commuting is a relatively new phenomenon because until the 1970s, companies built resource towns to house their labour force and the families of the workers. Since then, companies have opted to employ air transportation to take their workers to and from the work site. These employees remain at the work site for a week or two, working long shifts (often 12 hours per day) and then have a week or two at home. The company pays for the air transportation and for the food and lodgings at the work site. (p. 389)

Albedo effect Proportion of solar radiation reflected from the earth's surface back into the atmosphere. (p. 369)

Barren Grounds The vast area of tundra stretching from the west coast of Hudson Bay to the Great Slave and Great Bear lakes and northward to the Arctic Ocean is known as the Barren Lands. The Barren Ground Caribou use this region for calving each summer before migrating to the Boreal Forest. (p. 374)

Boom-and-bust cycles Rapid increase in economic activities in a resource-based economy, quickly followed by a downturn usually associated with a contraction in the business cycle. (p. 365)

Circumpolar countries The eight nations associated with the circumpolar area are Canada, Denmark (including Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States. (p. 377)

Country food Food, primarily game, such as caribou, fish, and sea mammals, obtained by Aboriginal peoples from the land and sea. Although most Indians, Inuit, and Métis now live in settlements, they still fish and hunt for cultural and economic reasons. (p. 387)

Homeland People who live in a region develop a strong attachment to that place; a sense of place. (p. 365)

Kimberlite Funnel-like shaped intrusions of igneous rocks in the earth's crust. Diamonds are sometimes found in these rocks. (p. 392)

Megaprojects Large-scale construction projects, often related to resource extraction, that exceed \$1 billion and take more than two years to complete. (p. 365)

Northern frontier View of Canada's North as a place of resource wealth to be exploited. (p. 365)

Northern lights (*aurora borealis*) The visible portions of the dissipation of solar energy carried to the earth's magnetosphere by solar winds. (p. 367)

Resource frontier The perception of the Territorial North as a place of great mineral wealth that awaits development by outsiders. (p. 365)

Underemployment Labour that falls in this category includes those workers who are highly skilled but working in low paying jobs, workers who are highly skilled but working in low-skill jobs and part-time workers who would prefer to be full time. (p. 365)

Urban areas As defined by Statistics Canada, places with a population greater than 1,000 and a population density of at least 400 persons per km². (p. 380)

Winter roads Temporary ice roads built during the winter to provide ground transportation for freight and travel over muskeg, lakes, and rivers; necessary for transport to some remote communities. (p. 387)