

COMMONS FORUM *Response*

Response to: Demographic Change and Commons Management: A Focus on Migration, by Leticia Durand and Rosalva Landa

Out of the North

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Discussions of inter-regional migration often focus on what might be called South-to-North flows, such as Mexico to the U.S. In this note I use North in a different sense, meaning Far North- the northern rim of the Atlantic (North Atlantic Arc) and the north circumpolar lands. Over the past 14 years, my colleagues and I have studied migration flows out of this North. Such flows occur within some highly developed countries, including Canada, the U.S. and Norway, but like low latitude flows they move from less-developed to more-developed places.

They are comparable to low-latitude flows in proportion though not in magnitude. There are some quite visible migrants into the North: predominantly young men drawn by resource-extraction, construction and transportation work, or by the extensive public-sector economy. On scales of years to decades, however, their migration tends to be temporary. Sociologically, a more interesting pattern is the flow of native northerners to the south. Many native northerners are indigenous peoples, such as Sami or Inuit, whose cultural identity is linked to landscapes where their ancestors lived for thousands of years. Others, scarcely less “indigenous,” are descendants of farmers and fisher folk with many centuries of northern history themselves.

For such northerners, moving south can be a large cultural step. Making it larger is the concern that northern educations and experiences might not have fully prepared them for urban life in the south. Because northern communities tend to be small - often, just a hundred to a few thousand people - the demographic consequences of out-migration can be large. Out-migration draws away more energetic, skilled and ambitious young adults - social and human capital a small community can ill afford to lose. Their departure weakens potential for sustainable development and gives more reason for the next person to leave. Paradoxically, out-migration might be viewed as a positive sign in some places, evidence that local families and schools are raising young people who can get away - which many adolescents say they would like to do. Trends in the size of northern communities depend mainly on balances between migration and births. In fishing villages around Newfoundland, Iceland or north Norway, net outmigration dominates low birth rates, producing local decline.

In Arctic Russia, rising death rates erode the population as well. In northern Alaska, high birth rates drive population upwards in some villages despite net out-migration. More native women than men leave the North. “Female flight” reflects push and pull factors - gender differences in

the appeal of modern vs. traditional roles, in attitudes about education and careers, and in experiences with village and urban life. Marriage to New fisheries targeting invertebrates such as crab or shrimp have flourished after predators were removed, but they tend to be less labour intensive. Fisheries troubles can directly drive out-migration, as seen when fish catches and migration flows are graphed on time plots together. Such plots sometimes also reveal more gradual out-migration preceding the fisheries crisis.

Better commons management might reduce outmigration but not end it; there are further reasons why young folks choose not to be a fisherman, or a fisherman's wife. Female flight leaves a demographic footprint: relative shortages of women in the source communities, creating problems for both males and females who remain.

Living resources sustained traditional societies throughout the North, and remain very important today. Across the North Atlantic Arc, from Newfoundland to north Norway, exist some of the most fisheries dependent places on earth. A variety of common property management schemes have struggled to keep catches from becoming fatally high amidst the urgent needs of stakeholders in competing fisheries large or small, from different ports or nations, and for predators or prey - all of them depending on complex ecosystems embedded in changeable seas. Management has failed spectacularly in some instances, with the collapse of labour-intensive fisheries for cod off Newfoundland and West Greenland, or herring off Iceland and Norway. Other fisheries fluctuate wildly, or see long-term declines.

Other common-property resources important to northern peoples include caribou and marine mammals in the North American Arctic, or reindeer and their grazing grounds in northern Europe and Russia. Problems with these resources could make life much harder for indigenous peoples, but their links to migration are less studied.

The articles below provide a few points of entry to research on migration from the North.

Hamilton, L. C. and C. L. Seyfrit. 1994. "Coming out of the country: Community size and gender balance among Alaskan Natives." *Arctic Anthropology* 31(1):16-25.

Hamilton, L. C. and M. J. Butler. 2001. "Outport adaptations: Social indicators through Newfoundland's cod crisis." *Human Ecology Review* 8(2):1-11.

Hamilton, L. C., C. R. Colocousis and S. T. F. Johansen. 2004. "Migration from resource depletion: The case of the Faroe Islands." *Society and Natural Resources* 17(5):443-453.

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