

Currently, resource towns in British Columbia are facing changes due to economic pressures and are dealing with the challenges of restructuring, diversification and sustainability (Halseth and Sullivan 2002). To overcome these challenges, these resource towns must demonstrate 'community capacity'. That is the ability to come together and work towards effective goals (Sullivan and Halseth 2005). Therefore this research looks at how a sense of community is constructed, through community capacity, in towns that were specifically built to provide a place for the industry workers to live.

This paper will provide an outline of my proposed MA thesis project. It starts with a description of the area of study and definitions of key terms to provide a framework for the research. The proposed fieldwork will be introduced, and an explanation of the intended research methods. I will conclude with an explanation of why I am studying this and what practical applications the research may have.

Resource towns are a common feature across rural and northern Canada. Such towns can be manifested as company towns and instant towns among others. A Company town is owned, built, and maintained by the company. Construction of these towns is often fast, and unplanned, with no concerns for growth or the future (Porteous 1970, Lucas 1971). There is often a sense of impermanence, such that the town will disappear once the company has finished its operations (Bradbury 1980). All of the services and amenities are also provided by the company. This can result in the industry effectively controlling the lives of inhabitants. Social groups are allowed or prohibited by the company, and

places of socialization are provided or banned by the company (Porteous 1970). Thus, interaction is structured by the company as is the development of a sense of community.

An instant town on the other hand, while built for the same reasons; has differences in the town's planning and development. A company may invest a large amount of money to start the construction of the town but the governance of the town is left to a municipal government (McCann 1978, Beckley 1996). This removes the responsibility from the company and gives control to the citizens. Despite this seeming separation between company and municipality, the municipal government may still be monopolized by influential members from the industry (*Northern Sentinel* Vol. 2 No. 9 1955, p.6). The company still selects which groups or places it will support financially. However, inhabitants are often provided with more options for socialization than what is available in a company town (Larsen 2005).

Since the Second World War, Canada's approach to resource town development has been to apply comprehensive planning principles in creating these 'instant towns' (Bowles 1992). Part of the intent of the comprehensive planning is to support the development of a sense of community (Larsen 2005, Rotman and Nassaney 1997). This strategy is supported in the hope that it will bring stability and resiliency to the town.

With this background, the research is concerned with the question of whether comprehensive planning was successful in creating or supporting the development of a sense of community.

A sense of community is a feeling of commonality shared by individuals and groups based on identification (Chavez 2005, Brubaker and Cooper 2000). In a town, the common interest would be the town itself, however different communities of interest can exist within the town as well (St. Martin 2005, Gill 1990, McCann 1978, Portes 1998).

Community capacity depends on the acquisition of social capital, which is building of trust that is developed through social cohesion among other things (Gill 1990, Lochner *et al.* 1999, Hays and Kogl 2007). Social cohesion, in turn, is developed through interaction (Hofferth and Iceland 1998, Portes 1998). Thus interaction leads to the development of social cohesion which allows for the creation of social capital. Increased social cohesion increases a community's capacity to work together toward common goals (Wallis 1998). The crucial first step in the development of community capacity is therefore interaction; however, interaction is structured by many factors including place and social characteristics, either of which can inhibit or encourage interaction.

How people define themselves and interact can be considered in terms of identification. Identification can be categorical, that is based on the sharing of attributes such as gender, age, and ethnicity. And it can also be relational, that is based on relations such as family and friendship (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). These identifications act as hindrances or aids to interaction.

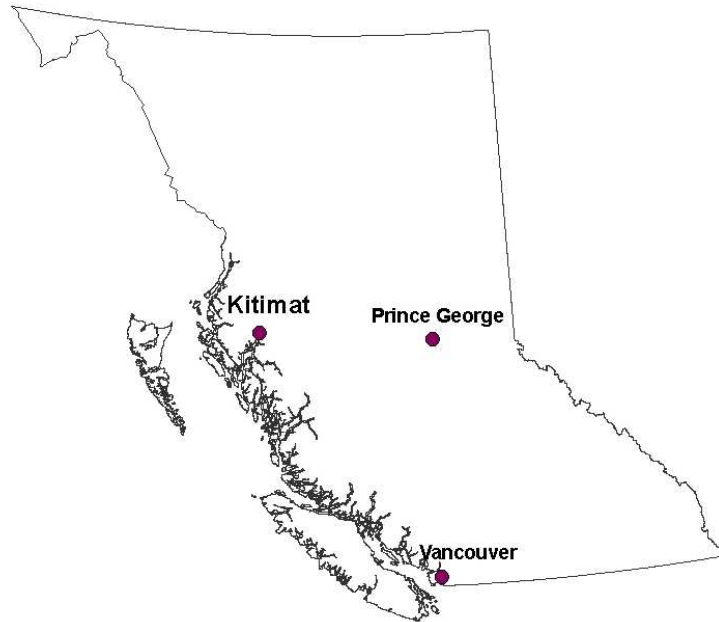


Figure 1 Map of British Columbia

Source: Author

To explore the roles of interaction and place in the development of a sense of community, research will be conducted in Kitimat, BC. Kitimat is located in Northwestern British Columbia (Figure 1). It is an instant town that was built in 1953 to service the new Alcan smelter.

As Kitimat grew, its industrial economy diversified to include a pulp mill and a methanol production plant. In 2001, 43% of the working population was employed in manufacturing (Statistics Canada 2001). It is municipally governed, its economy is dependent on resource commodity production and it is a planned instant town in a remote location.

Kitimat was planned by Clarence Stein using comprehensive planning principles. Stein was one of the major proponents of comprehensive planning during its inception. His planning principles influenced how we view and approach modern land use (Hall 1988). The intention of comprehensive planning is to create a town with a strong sense of community to provide a more stable workforce than the transient, single-male workforce that historically dominated many industry based towns (Bradbury 1980).



Kitimat was the first instant town built using comprehensive planning principles and it has been used as a model for most of the instant towns that followed (Figure 2). The design was one of mixed housing, to encourage social mixing, and a separation from the industry. The road system was the antithesis of the grid system, using

main arteries that lead to a town centre and cul-de-sac roads that are surrounded by ample park space (Stein 1954).

Previous research relating to social cohesion in Kitimat was conducted by Larry McCann, in 1978. McCann found that there were definite social divisions within the town, most notably, there were divisions based on socio-economic status. Those employed in production were grouped on the outside edges of town. These areas were also where the low-income households were clustered. High-income households were clustered in the areas that correspond with the clustering of managers and professionals.

McCann's research was concerned primarily with social organization based on place. To build upon this, this research intends to address the role of interaction in developing social cohesion. Stein's comprehensive plan focused on interaction and would expect the existence of the multiple groups observed by McCann. The design would structure the interaction between these groups by encouraging it.

The goal is to determine if the comprehensive planning principles applied to Kitimat succeeded in the development of a strong sense of community. Whether today the community exhibits this and whether this has changed over time. The intention is to address the roles place and identification play in the structuring of interaction and the development of a sense of community. And determine whether these structuring factors have changed over time.

Multiple methods will be used in the research. The rationale is that the various methods will inform one another to create a more clear and complete, in depth understanding of what is structuring the development of a sense of community (Berg 2004). Initially,

several focus groups comprised of active members in social organizations in the town will be conducted. The focus groups will be formed of participants who belong to social organizations as identified in publicly available lists of community groups. Attempts will be made to form groups of common interest to facilitate discussion (Pavey *et al.* 2007). Focus groups will allow for interaction and discussions regarding how these organizations are structured, how they interact with other organizations and groups, the level of community participation, and how they feel about their community (Lochner *et al.* 1999, Mendis-Millard and Reed 2007). The focus groups will allow for the identification of themes which can be elaborated upon in a series of key informant interviews.

As such, the second research method includes semi-structured interviews. Participants will be chosen based on their length of residence in the town as well as their past participation in community groups. This will allow changes over time in the sense of community in Kitimat to be ascertained, as well as any changes in what is structuring its development. The interviews will provide more in-depth information about individuals' sense of community in relation to their identity (Babbie 2004). The interviews will be used to clarify themes that are identified in the focus groups and the mapping.

The third research technique to be used is GIS. GIS will be used to develop thematic maps regarding the social composition of Kitimat. These maps will identify any spatial clustering, or network dispersion of social groups within the town (Yeates 1998). This can be analyzed to determine the role of physical space in structuring interaction and

developing a sense of community. These maps will also be used to determine the role of proximity in interaction.

Finally, analysis of documentary data will be carried out to support and inform the other research methods. Content from the community newspaper concerning social organizations and community events will be gathered. Also, lists of community groups and events from a variety of sources will be compiled. Reference will also be made to industrial and community reports such as Alcan's community commitment plans and Kitimat's Official Community Plan. Finally, to round out the documentary analysis, local histories will be reviewed. These documents will be used to create a timeline of community involvement and events to inform the analysis of the other research.

In summary, this research pertains to the development of a sense of community in the instant town of Kitimat. A sense of community is developed through interaction which is structured not only by place but also by group and individual identification (Chavez 2005, Worster and Abrams 2005, Panelli and Welch 2005, Hays and Kogl 2007). Instant towns, such as Kitimat, were comprehensively planned to promote a sense of community. These places are currently facing challenges that will require them to exert their community capacity, by drawing upon their sense of community, in order to achieve their goals of sustainability. With a better understanding of what encourages and prohibits interaction and the development of a sense of community, we can work to develop policies and plans that allow for the development of structures that encourage interaction and minimized those that inhibit it.

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