

Preface and acknowledgements

This book is the result of an international research-based collaboration consisting of academic researchers and practitioners from around the world who are interested in understanding the causes and consequences of population change in sparsely populated parts of developed nations. The collaboration features researchers and their institutions from a growing list of nations and was conceived and fostered by one of our editors, Dean Carson. This network of like-minded researchers has contributed to explaining the interplays between population change, human geography, the economies and the well-being of communities in such areas.

Settlements at the Edge is a logical extension of our last book *Demography at the Edge* (published by Ashgate in 2011) and not merely by name. In *Demography at the Edge* we focused on sparsely populated (or remote) areas of developed nations in the broad or macro sense. We sought to explain why and how populations change in the ways that they do, and what it might all mean for policy makers, industry and communities. It was well received across many disciplines for presenting demography in a situational context and for isolating the meaning of that context for undertaking research to inform theory and analysis as well as helping those charged with ‘making policy’ in and for these areas.

Understanding population compositions and change in sparsely settled areas and their settlements is instrumental for facilitating sanguine policy in relation to the distinctive northern developed economies and environments. The task of understanding populations in northern contexts is difficult and population change affects other systems (economic, social, cultural and so on) disproportionately in comparison to urban, regional and rural areas. In this book we specifically examine the settlements located within sparsely populated areas of developed nations in order to add depth and granularity around our shared and expanding knowledge. Our research is inter-disciplinary but the common premise is that local contexts are important for understanding population diversity and change, and that change for settlements cannot be understood through regional development lenses because of the vast diversity in the historical, demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of settlements within

regions. The extension is that policy makers must 'know' and understand 'the local' context and that population characteristics are prime in determining the effectiveness or otherwise of policies for northern jurisdictions and their settlements.

It has been greatly rewarding to work closely with the 60 or so contributors to this book who share similar research passions and a belief that understanding populations is vital to facilitating positive change in northern contexts. The usual suspects from *Demography at the Edge* have returned as editors for this book with the welcome addition of Gertrude Saxinger, or 'Gertie' as we know her. Gertie researches social and cultural impacts for settlements and workers in circumpolar regions from the practice of long-distance commuting for work in extractive industries. Her work is emblematic of the sorts of issues we cover in this book and you can read about it in Chapter 3. I sincerely thank my co-editors, who are all in some way mentors and friends, for their contributions and support. I want to give a special mention for the significant contributions of Dean Carson and the perspectives he has brought from his research in northern Sweden, including valued contributors from that part of the world.

This book signifies a collaboration of interest more so than a book based on specific projects, although it is certainly manifesting in the latter. This is likely the main reason that the network has survived and flourished because, in the current higher education research environment, the modern researcher maintains a perilous balance between 'winning' projects and the traditional academic role of collective thinking, theory building and problem solving. The legacy of our network so far includes symposiums, special issues of journals, book projects, keynote speaking, joint papers, visiting fellowship exchanges and placements on respective university examination and supervisor panels for higher degrees students. More recently we convened the Sparsely Populated Areas Demographic research network (SPADE) via the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University (Australia). The network welcomes researchers of any discipline with an interest in the human geography of sparsely populated areas and you can find us on Facebook.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University and our Director Ruth Wallace in particular. Finally yet importantly, I would like to thank freelance editor extraordinaire, Jonathan Dyer. His patience, attention to detail, 'nothing is too hard' attitude and made-to-order sandwiches ensured we had a book to deliver in the first place to our accommodating publishers, Edward Elgar. I hope you enjoy reading this book and hearing about the opportunities

and challenges facing villages, towns and cities 'at the edge' of our modern world.

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