Churchill, Manitoba and the Arctic Gateway: a historical contextualization

Jean Michel Montsion, York University

This is the pre-peer reviewed version of the following article: JM Montsion. 2015. Churchill, Manitoba and the Arctic Gateway: A Historical Contextualization. *The Canadian Geographer* 59(3): 304-316, which has been published in final form at https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12199.
This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.

Abstract: In 2010, the University of Winnipeg and the Government of Manitoba hosted the Arctic Gateway Summit to discuss the regular use of a commercial shipping line running from Winnipeg to Murmansk, Russia via the Port of Churchill and the waters of Nunavut. In this article, I put this initiative in the historical and spatial context of the town of Churchill to help us understand how the Arctic Gateway represents the town's past and current positioning in Northern transportation and economic development plans. The Arctic Gateway vision echoes various proposals developed since the 1910s for a port on Hudson Bay to become a key link between Western Canada and foreign markets. However, it raises concerns among Churchill's leaders that the town is shifting from being perceived as a Northern Canadian community to becoming an outpost not quite North enough anymore. Based on archival work and interviews, I utilize community reactions to the Arctic Gateway project to examine how Churchill is positioned in the Canadian geography of transport and Northern development, and to reveal the shift that the community has perceived in recent years in terms of investment and public attention being directed to other, more Northern communities.

Keywords: Churchill, gateway, transport, Northern development

Introduction

In November 2010, the Arctic Gateway Summit was held at the University of Winnipeg to discuss the possibility of creating a federally recognized gateway linking Winnipeg to Murmansk, Russia, via the privately owned Port of Churchill and through the waters of Nunavut. Although the logistical challenges of such a vision are significant—there are infrastructural and legal limitations related to port facilities, a brief navigational season, and practical challenges related to safety and insurance along the proposed shipping route—the Arctic Gateway nonetheless lays out a clear vision for transportation and investment in support of Northern Canadian development. As a discussion paper for the summit states, "[f]raming the future of Canada's Arctic from a national gateway perspective would enable governments and the private sector to adopt a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to development in the region" (PPM Public Management 2010, 4-5).

This initiative depends heavily on the town of Churchill in Northern Manitoba (58°47'N, 94°12'W), located 966 kilometers from Winnipeg by air and 1,697 kilometers by rail, to be an exit point and node to international distribution networks (Newton 2000). Building on a dominant narrative about Churchill years before the railway was completed in 1929 and the first shipments of wheat left the port in 1931, the Arctic Gateway project is an updated version of the ideal vision of the Port of Churchill facilitating exports of Western Canadian products to foreign markets, especially in Europe (Pearson 1947; Cohen 1971; Taylor 1993; Tannis 1999; Burns and Goldsborough 2012). More specifically, such a revitalization project for the Port of Churchill builds on the momentum created by the demand for natural resources by Asia's emerging markets, Saskatchewan's world reserve of potash, new partnerships for development between Manitoba and Nunavut, and the extended navigation season in Canada's North due to global warming (Stewart et al. 2010; FPTFCC 2013).

In light of Michel de Certeau's (1984, 98) work on the role of spatial ordering and designs to provide "an ensemble of possibilities and interdictions" for any given location, I use the Arctic Gateway initiative to understand how the community of Churchill sees its current position in the Canadian transportation system and Northern development projects. The hopes for a prosperous Churchill have been continuously linked to a "concept-city" (Certeau 1984, 95) developed by government and business interests over the past century, which envisioned a functional international port-city on the shores of Hudson Bay. I argue that despite the project's continuity with previous attempts at local development, the community is concerned about the Arctic Gateway vision leaving it caught between Canada's Northern and Southern communities. Community reactions to the Arctic Gateway initiative reveal a shift in the local sense of place, as the Arctic Gateway is seen as leading to losing out on investment and receiving less public attention, both of which would get diverted to other, more Northern communities.

Certeau's approach (1984) helps us understand the interplay between the formal practices structuring a space and the ways people reproduce and oppose these practices in their everyday interactions. It focuses mainly on the conventional ways of operating that define a space, and utilizes people's trajectories—not individuals' per se—to deepen our comprehension of the location's meanings through the materialistic, discursive, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of lived experiences (Certeau 1984). As such, this research involves mostly archival work, complemented by six interviews with local leaders with experience in guiding community discussions and business ventures in Churchill (see Annex 1 for sample interview questions, and the Endnotes for a list of interviews cited). These local leaders, whether from government, business or community sectors, were selected based on their local involvement and political engagement in the Arctic Gateway project or other initiatives related to Churchill's development. I use insights from these interviews conducted in Churchill in May 2011 to put the spatial design envisioned for the Arctic Gateway in perspective based on how Churchill's past and present engagements with other communities that are involved in this project are spatially understood and negotiated.

After a brief discussion of the historical and spatial context of Churchill, I focus on the Arctic Gateway vision as a strategic design that aligns with other government and industry initiatives for Northern Manitoba development. I then discuss the community reactions to the project and the shifting sense of place of Churchill leaders, especially how they express their growing concerns about the town losing attention to other Northern communities.

Positioning Churchill

Churchill's historical and spatial positioning is usually told through reference to grand foundational moments, including the indigenous use of the land by the Pre-Dorset, Dorset, Thule, Dene, Chipewyan, and Cree peoples; the European 'discovery' of the Churchill area in 1619 by a Danish expedition; the creation of Fort Churchill as a permanent trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1717; and the taking of Fort Prince of Whales in 1782 by Lapérouse during the Anglo-French rivalry for control of North America (Payne 1990; Newton 2000). At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the hopes for the development of Churchill arose from various unfortunate circumstances affecting neighbouring communities, including York Factory's decreasing profitability, as well as the impracticability of building a port at Port Nelson (Cormie 1917; Taylor 1993; Tough 1996). In this section, I discuss Churchill's recent history in order to show continuity in how its spatial design is framed by government officials and industry interests. Notwithstanding some efforts at economic diversification since the 1980s, especially in the area of tourism, I argue that hopes for a prosperous Churchill remain intrinsically and continuously linked to the strategic and functional plans to create a node connecting the shores of Hudson Bay to foreign markets for products from Central and Southern Canada (Spearman 1975). As noted by the 1969 Royal Commission Inquiry into Northern Transportation, the "transportation history of Manitoba has been dominated by the demand for an alternative to the politically compelled East-West flow either by way of a competitive railway to the United States border or by way of a railway to the Bay," (Government of Manitoba 1969, 176) and Churchill has often been presented as the solution to the latter option.

PLACE FIGURE 1 APPROXIMATELY HERE.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Churchill's fate became linked to government and business hopes for the creation of an operational seaport on the shores of Hudson Bay. The development of a railway, grain terminals, and a port on the Hudson Bay has been part of political platforms since the 1910s (Patton 1929). The role of the On-to-the-Bay Association, a group of local politicians and business leaders from Central Canada, in requesting that these transportation developments be a federal priority was especially pivotal in the 1920s (Patton 1929; Innis 1930). One of the things that made such developments so appealing was that the distance between Churchill and Liverpool is slightly shorter than the distance between Montreal and Liverpool, which means that products from Western Canada could be shipped in significantly shorter time if they did not have to be transported first to Ontario or Quebec by rail (Ridout 1931). In opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company's historic control over the area, the federal and provincial governments' efforts to develop the railway to and seaport at Churchill significantly modified the regional transportation system in which land-based means (i.e., rail) became favoured for domestic markets, and water-based means through the port were re-oriented for international markets (Tough 1996).

According to Harold Patton (1929, 234-235), "Canada's push to Hudson's Bay is in many ways an act of faith." This top-down push was coupled with great expectations for the development of a prosperous city where the railway and the port would meet. Early plans included the creation of an attractive European-inspired city. The 1912 proposal of Roblin City, named in honour of the then-Premier of Manitoba, envisioned a megacity whose prosperity would be based on shipping grain, fish, and forest products to European markets (Burns and Goldsborough 2012). Although Roblin City remained a project that existed on paper only, the presence in Churchill of the railway, the port, a grain elevator, churches, banks, and even a movie theater by 1930 created a momentum on which many hopes were founded. At that time, Denzil Ridout (1931, 128) indicated that "the future of Churchill as a shipping centre for export and import seems assured. It is a great venture and the opening up of the harbor in the fall [of 1931] will inaugurate a new era in the development of the North American continent." With regular shipments of grain from Churchill averaging 573,000 tonnes per year from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s and reaching an all-time high in the late 1970s before falling into continual decline, the hopes for an active port on the shores of Hudson Bay seemed to be coming into fruition for a period of time (Newton 2000).

The 1960s were considered a second phase of hope for Churchill's development because of its existing transportation infrastructure. It became an integral part—at least on paper—of the various projects related to the natural resource extraction boom of the 1960s, the international interest in nickel found in Northern Manitoba, and the development of hydroelectricity projects in the area (Rogge 1972). In this second phase, Churchill is seen as key to enabling access to mining activity in surrounding communities and redistributing resources across Canada and abroad, extending well beyond Manitoba's traditional function of "Mid-Canada Corridor" (Rogge 1972, 216). Moreover, other growing sectors of activity in Churchill also extended beyond transportation, especially to serve Canada's military and strategic interests during the Cold War. Churchill played a pivotal role in facilitating strategic cooperation with the American military forces on Arctic research and defence initiatives, including the operation of the Churchill Rocket Research Range from the 1950s to the 1980s (Pearson 1953; Taylor 2003). It was also a site for Canadian and American military forces to test military materials under Arctic conditions. Even after the withdrawal of the American activities from Churchill in the 1960s, the National Research Council continued to use the location for applied research projects through the mid-1980s in hopes of spurring local and national economic development (Taylor 2003).

The 1969 Royal Commission Inquiry into Northern Transportation denoted Churchill's advantages over other Northern communities, including that its basic transportation infrastructure provided a good foundation for stimulating economic and social development by linking pockets of growth and having a broader regional impact, and that it permitted access to new resources and markets through an expansion of available routes (Government of Manitoba 1969). Churchill was booming demographically, and hopes were high for the town to become the transportation solution to Northern development and growth, especially through its ability to link directly to international markets. Other related projects tried to build on this advantage, including the creation of an all-weather highway to Churchill; the use of the Canadian Wheat Board to encourage grain shipments from Churchill; and the exploration of other types of shipments, including pulp and paper, sulfur, potash, and import cargo (Government of Manitoba 1969). When the operational commercial air service was installed between Winnipeg and Churchill in 1957, and population growth reached almost 20% from 1961 to 1966, the expectations for the success of Churchill and its transportation infrastructure also included an estimated increase in port traffic of 40% by 1985 (Government of Manitoba 1969).

However, such expectations were not met. Specific challenges to Churchill's development during the second boom phase were notably linked to its subarctic climate. Churchill's population reached 7,000 in 1965, but then experienced a steady decline over the years, dropping to somewhere between 800 and 1,000 residents in the 2000s, notably after port activity declined starting in the late 1970s (Tannis 1999; Newton 2000). Since the 1960s and 1970s, various studies have shown that Churchill shares features with other Arctic communities, including inadequate infrastructure and resources needed to maintain a functioning city in this climate; social problems resulting from isolation from other communities; lack of access to health care and parental care; alcohol abuse; and perceived social discrimination against indigenous populations, especially in contrast to non-indigenous populations. Moreover, systemic problems of Northern communities' relations with Southern communities were also found in Churchill's recent history, including the discrimination by banking institutions against local businesses in need of financing, and pressures on the local infrastructure from the sudden increase in temporary residents and/or tourists during times of seasonal growth and growth due to overall increased activity (Reid and Frideres 1971; Spearman 1975; Dimitrakopoulou 1994; Newton et al. 2002).

Nonetheless, Churchill also benefited from privileged attention by state authorities, which allowed for the development of specialized infrastructure and services in comparison to other remote Northern communities. Such attention was due to its perceived role in supporting and delivering services to surrounding communities (Newton 2000). Notwithstanding the resources invested in the development of a research installation for geophysical studies and military activities, the community has seen the development of important services since the 1970s, including the Churchill Health Centre, which provides preventive care and clinical activities; the Keewatin Community College which provides post-secondary and technical training; and a Town Centre Complex, which has a swimming pool, curling rink, library, gymnasium and a cafeteria (Tannis 1999; Taylor 2003; Town of Churchill 2014). Moreover, other assets were developed over the years, including the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, created in the 1990s to support research and university collaborations in surrounding communities and ecosystems. Other amenities such as an insurance provider, a bank, a travel agent, and more than ten hotels and bed and breakfasts, not only serve the population of Churchill but also situate it as a 'safe' destination for tourists, a stopover point for surrounding smaller communities, and a main provider for communities to the North, such as Arviat, Rankin Inlet, and Baker Lake (Fleming 1988; Newton 2000; Taylor 2003; Town of Churchill 2014).

For these reasons, Churchill's infrastructure, services, and institutions made the town integral to how the government tried to relate, through various strategies and programs, to indigenous peoples living in the area and perceived as being in need of government assistance. Even though indigenous peoples account for about 50 percent of Churchill's past population and about 60 percent of its current population, and even though they are widely acknowledged and celebrated in local history and school curriculum, the town has nevertheless played a controversial role in the federal government's designs for neighbouring indigenous populations, including the relocation of the Sayisi Dene First Nation to Camp 10 from 1956 to 1973 (Waldram 1987; Newton 2000; Newton et al. 2002; Chow 2012). It was also part of the government's residential school system, and had a temporary vocational training centre for Eastern Arctic and Kivalliq Inuit children in the 1960s (Milloy 1999).

Since the 1980s, Churchill's development and prosperity has been increasingly linked to its international image. For example, it has hosted international film productions such as the 1982 film *Iceman*, has branded itself as the 'Polar Bear Capital of the World,' and has developed numerous historical, cruise, wildlife, and eco-friendly tourism attractions (Fleming 1988; Tannis 1999; Stewart and Draper 2007). With the decline of grain shipments and of research and military activities, and the constant maintenance and upgrade requirements of Churchill's transportation infrastructure, the community came to be seen as increasingly unsustainable and led to the 1997 sale of the Port of Churchill to OmniTRAX, the same American company that owns the Hudson Bay Railway and operates the rail service from The Pas to Churchill (Newton 2000). In an environment in which industry interests are now in charge of the Port of Churchill and its future, a lot of the community hopes for Churchill's development at the turn of the 21st century remain primarily grounded in the promise of its transportation infrastructure and the possibility of a renewed utilization of the port for international exports (Newton 2000; Newton et al. 2002; Chow 2012).

Framing the Arctic Gateway

Much like On-to-the-Bay Association's lobby to the federal government in the early 20th century to support the development of a port accessible by rail on the shores of Hudson Bay, the Arctic Gateway vision builds on the spatial designs, strategic initiatives, and functional hopes of a combination of government, industry, and community leaders in Central, Western, and Northern Canada. More specifically, the vision situates Churchill as a key pillar for a federally recognized multi-modal transportation system in Northern Canada. The Arctic Gateway's novelty is in combining the traditional vision for the development of Churchill with more contemporary federal priorities of building gateway infrastructure and engaging Northern communities.

PLACE FIGURE 2 APPROXIMATELY HERE.

The Arctic Gateway proposal suggests that the federal government designate as its national Arctic Gateway a T-shaped network of trade corridors in Northern Canada with a "primary north-south segment [being] the region bordering the western side of Hudson Bay including portions of Manitoba and Nunavut [and the] east-west segment [being] the Northwest Passage and the shipping routes through the Arctic waters, connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic" (PPM Management 2010, 12). Through existing transportation infrastructure and routes, the Arctic Gateway is seen as an umbrella under which a common vision can be built: "[it] would include several communities and modal connections across the region, rather than one large urban hub [… it] would particularly involve the communities of Iqaluit, Churchill and

Winnipeg that have multi-modal facilities, and it would extend in its linkages with the other territories and provinces through air, rail and port connection for both passengers and freight" (PPM Management 2010, 12). Leading the discussion for such a project, the former University of Winnipeg President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Lloyd Axworthy reiterates Canada's interest in utilizing transportation projects to create economic opportunities and support culturally sensitive development by "focus[ing] on trade corridors in the North with active Indigenous and community participation to ensure sustainable development of one of Canada's most valuable regions" (University of Winnipeg 2011).

Canadian gateways are primarily defined in terms of multi-modal transportation systems for international trading purposes. As such, the Arctic Gateway vision brings together (1) the existing transportation infrastructure in Churchill, (2) the role of Manitoba as Canada's Mid-Continent Corridor vision, and (3) the 1994 Arctic Bridge initiative (Transport Canada 2009; PPM Management 2010). First, the Arctic Gateway vision builds on the efforts to revitalize the use, branding, and raison d'être of transportation infrastructure both to and within Churchill. The Churchill Gateway Development Corporation leads this current promotion of Churchill's transportation infrastructure as a public-private partnership involving Western Diversification Canada, the Province of Manitoba, and OmniTRAX. Created in 2003, this partnership focuses on researching and promoting the shipment of various goods from the Port of Churchill, exploring various business opportunities for the development of the port and related infrastructure, and deepening its integration into global supply chains (Churchill Gateway Development Corporation 2014). In line with these efforts, the 2013 report from the Federal-Provincial Task Force on the Future of Churchill (2013) frames the opportunities for the town's development based on upgrading, branding its transportation infrastructure and making it more accessible, focusing on diversifying the shipment of products, and serving as a provider to the boom in natural resource extraction activities in Nunavut. Building on the 1969 Royal Commission Inquiry into Northern Transportation and the 1995 Gateway North report, it mostly emphasizes that Churchill's integration into global supply chains is underutilized, and that its most promising development advantage is based on further internationalization through its transportation assets (FPTFCC 2013).

Second, the Arctic Gateway vision builds on a broader rationale and traditional role for Manitoba in Canadian and international distribution networks. It reifies the role of Manitoba in providing a functional mid-continent hub of trade corridors, running both East-West and North-South. For instance, the 1998 report of the Mid-Continent International Trade Task Force emphasized the importance of developing a more efficient transportation system and a better trade policy environment to promote increases in cross-border relations between the United States of America and Central and Northern Canada. This report was key to the creation of CentrePort in 2008, a crown corporation operating an inland container port in Winnipeg. It was also key to ensuring better connections between Canada's and North America's transportation gateways and corridors, and advocating for the establishment of a foreign trade zone or export-processing zone in Central Canada (Government of Manitoba 2008; PPM Management 2010; Winnipeg Inland Port 2014). Located in Winnipeg, the inland port provides businesses with a "high-speed transportation corridor" to move goods internationally and promotes a low-cost, efficient, and speedy continental distribution network (CentrePort Canada 2011). In this context, a Northern shipping line could build on this momentum and strengthen the North-South nexus of trade corridors.

Third, the Arctic Gateway vision is closely associated with the 1994 Arctic Bridge initiative, a precursor that builds on a history of economic development projects with similar hopes and rationale, “Manitoba strongly believes in the synergies that will develop between the CentrePort Canada and Arctic bridge connections of Murmansk-Churchill and Krasnoyarsk-Winnipeg. These Arctic-based supply chains will serve as highly efficient linkages to funnel air and ocean-based trade to and from CentrePort facilities, contributing to the success of the Arctic Port of Churchill” (Arctic Bridge Gateway 2014). The Arctic Bridge maps the specific routes associated with the Arctic Gateway vision, and makes the case that a shorter, cheaper, and more direct commercial route to Eurasia is in Canada’s best interest (Newton 2000). Moreover, it plays a role in reinforcing friendly circumpolar relations. It has officially been recognized by government officials from Canada and Russia as a key step in the development of Arctic trading opportunities and further economic cooperation: “[t]he Arctic bridge represents a true international Northern strategy. The Russian ambassador has publicly endorsed the Arctic bridge vision since 2003 and both Russia and Manitoba have recognized the potential benefits of the strategy” (Arctic Bridge Gateway 2014).

The Arctic Gateway vision is not only in line with various regional and provincial initiatives, but is also compatible with federal priorities, as it intersects with the Government of Canada’s gateway infrastructure platform and the economic and social development of Northern communities. For example, it is inscribed in the federal government’s renewed interest in maximizing the role of Canada’s coastal regions in international distribution networks (APGCI 2012). Since 2006, the Government of Canada officially designates gateways to recognize and invest in contemporary multi-modal transportation systems—in Halifax for the Atlantic Gateway, Montreal and Toronto for the Continental Gateway, and Prince Rupert and Vancouver for the Asia-Pacific Gateway—serving as connection nodes between North America and international markets (Transport Canada 2009). In its 2009 National Policy Framework, the Government of Canada puts the emphasis on investing in port and transport capacities in order to profit from the increasing demand of international trade as well as to improve the reliability of established transportation systems in terms of coordination across jurisdictions and modernization of policy and governance structures (Transport Canada 2009). As such, the federal government’s role in supporting a designated gateway is limited to providing the best physical and legal infrastructure for the private sector to flourish, utilizing the services available in its designated gateway locations (Evans 2008, 2010).

In addition, the Arctic Gateway vision fits within the Government of Canada’s engagement with Northern communities, notably by supporting their economic and social development while also reinforcing Canada’s Arctic presence (PPM Management 2010; CanNor 2011). In its 2009 Northern Strategy document, the Canadian government makes economic and social development one of the four key pillars of future investments. The untapped potential in terms of natural resources extraction projects requires major infrastructure development and support, especially in terms of transportation (Government of Canada 2009). With the idea of “helping to build self-sufficient, vibrant, and healthy Northern communities” (Government of Canada 2009, 14), the government established the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor) in 2009 to guide the “develop[ment] and diversif[ication of] territorial economies that support prosperity for all Northerners” (CanNor 2011, 6). Although Churchill is not explicitly mentioned in this strategy, the focus on reliable access between Northern and Southern communities for business and economic development, and the need to provide better social programs to Arctic communities, especially in terms of health care, may implicitly rely on Churchill performing this historical function and role (Government of Canada 2009).

The federal government's engagement with Northern communities—by emphasizing economic development based on natural resource extraction, the opening of trade routes, and a strong Arctic presence—combines political, social, and economic considerations, which are addressed in the Arctic Gateway vision. Whereas the 2009 Northern Strategy stresses the importance of adding more ships and increasing activity in the Arctic in order to ground the Inuit's historical claims and Canada's contemporary use of the area (Government of Canada 2009), the 2011 Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy encourages complementing Canada's military and defence presence with trading and mining practices (FAITC 2011). Through regular commercial practices in Canada's North, as promoted by the Arctic Gateway, Canada's Arctic presence and Northern development are facilitated through synergetic efforts "[a]s global commerce charts a path to the region" (FAITC 2011, 2).

Nonetheless, there are some challenges for the federal government to designate an Arctic Gateway. For one thing, the Arctic Gateway cannot be built on the type of transportation infrastructure and urban conditions that are available in other Canadian gateways. In fact, the Arctic Gateway vision contrasts with other gateway projects in that it actually promotes the use of such designation to prioritize the building of entirely new infrastructure in Northern communities (in addition to the Churchill infrastructure that requires upgrading). Furthermore, while Churchill's role in the Arctic Gateway vision is a selling point for the designation, its geographical location actually puts it at the Southern margin of the federal government's plans for Northern development.

Churchill moving South?

The Arctic Gateway vision explicitly addresses future economic development opportunities for Churchill that build on the history of government and business hopes for a major transportation hub on the shores of the Hudson Bay. As a metaphor, the Arctic Gateway also allows us to investigate the everyday negotiations of people inhabiting the location, and helps complete our strategic and functional understanding of the space of Churchill by including an on-the-ground sense of place (Certeau 1984). From the community reactions presented in this section, the Arctic Gateway may not be perceived as quite as novel as one might think, given that the revitalization of Churchill's port infrastructure has been actively introduced every two or three years for at least the last 40 years (Churchill BP #1, Churchill CL #1, Churchill CL #2, Churchill GO #1)[i]. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged as the first time that the role and location of Iqaluit and Nunavut communities are explicitly recognized (Churchill CL #2). Community reactions to the Arctic Gateway vision shed light on the community's growing concerns about the town's place in the mental mapping of Canada. In particular, with the increasing attention to Arctic and high Arctic communities by government officials and industry leaders since the 1990s, leaders in Churchill are concerned about the spatial repositioning of Churchill between Northern and Southern Canada.

The Arctic Gateway initiative resonates with the local hopes that social and economic development will come if Churchill plays up its transportation infrastructure advantage. As noted in previous studies, hopes and dreams are linked more closely to a renewed interest in developing and upgrading the port and rail infrastructure than to upgrading the town's other assets such as the Rocket Research Range (Newton 2000; Newton et al. 2002; Chow 2012). If one views Churchill first as a port community, the steady demographic and business decline is explained by the under-utilization of the port, as well as the lack of common vision in local development strategies among interested parties such as the federal and provincial governments, private sector actors, and community leaders (Churchill GO #1). Specifically emphasizing that the Arctic Gateway may help support and incentivize the marketing, upgrading, and maintenance necessary for the port to be better utilized, one businessperson highlights that "it needs a major project tied to it" in order to get the public and private investment required for the port to be operational and attractive enough for local and international businesses (Churchill BP #1).

Even leaders who are critical of the port's privatization and management since 1997 and the potential adverse environmental effects such development could have on the environment, nonetheless welcome the benefits of becoming a more active port community, as this constitutes one rare advantage that Churchill has over other Northern Manitoba communities. According to one leader, "there are benefits and drawbacks but overall it seems positive. Development is limited in this kind of community, even if Churchill has been lucky" (Churchill CL #3). Presenting some concerns that the "community [does not get] its hopes up again for nothing" (Churchill CL #4), local leaders remain cautious but still welcome the project as it may be a way to attract public attention and investments and may have spillover effects in other sectors of activity (Churchill BP #1, GO #1, CL #3).

More interestingly, the Arctic Gateway vision provoked some reactions to the positioning of Churchill vis-à-vis Southern and Northern communities. The first reactions by local leaders were to associate this vision with a specific understanding of Churchill's assets and potential, a vision grounded in the perspective of Canadian Southern communities, and especially the Winnipeg-based businesses and government officials involved in the Churchill Gateway Development Corporation (Churchill CL #2). Whereas Churchill's Health Centre has provided the "best stable jobs" for many locals (Churchill CL #2), community leaders do not necessarily see the Arctic Gateway and related investments as the project that will match up with their social priorities, which are based on year-round stable and family-friendly employment (Churchill BP #1, CL #4). The type of temporary employment the Arctic Gateway vision implies for Churchill, and the potential critical pressures on the town's infrastructure it would create, are two major concerns that are examples of the South's deep misunderstanding of the Northern reality of Churchill (Churchill CL #2 and #3).

Moreover, the assumption that the town's assets are and would continue to be utilized by companies coming from the South (read: Southern Canada or the United States) partly explains the caution towards the Arctic Gateway vision (Churchill BP #1, CL #2, #3 and #4). As one businessperson noted, some of the big players in Churchill's economy, notably in the tourism sector, also have businesses in Southern Canada, mostly due to the seasonal nature of tourism in the North. Nonetheless, their interest in a sustained and sustainable growth for the community may be subordinated to profit: "they do not only work for the interest of Churchill but for their business mostly, which also happens in the South and in Winnipeg" (Churchill BP #1). Their decisions to grow their business in Winnipeg may even have a negative impact on Churchill. For instance, the 2011 announcement of an Arctic exhibit focused on polar bears and tundra buggy visits at Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park Zoo is perceived as being in direct competition with Churchill's effort to be the Polar Bear Capital of the World, with little concern for the fact that Churchill will lose one of its main sources of revenue (Churchill BP #1, CL #4; Kusch 2011).

The Arctic Gateway has also provoked strong community reactions by Churchill leaders towards other Northern communities. Pointing to past investments made in Churchill's transportation infrastructure, military, and educational research initiatives, local leaders emphasized how Churchill has been privileged over other Northern communities. As noted by a local businessperson, "the perception of small communities [is] that Churchill gets everything and we did get a lot of things" (Churchill BP #1). One community leader, highlighting that the community infrastructure in Churchill was built to accommodate four times the number of people it now has, noted that most of Churchill's recent disappointments have been with projects that were granted to more Northern locations and 'real' Arctic communities. As Churchill was able to attract investment in the past by marketing its local subarctic reality and identity in ambiguous ways—as Northern, Arctic, or subarctic—such a strategy has become less effective: "[i]t's a funny balancing act […] Churchill kind of played that game too and aligned with whomever" (Churchill CL #3).

Recent trends of associating Northern development with Arctic and high Arctic communities have worked against Churchill. With the explicit acknowledgement of Iqaluit and Nunavut communities in the development of the Arctic Gateway vision (Churchill CL #2), Churchill is no longer front-and-centre in the marketing of such a project because of its subarctic position: "we're not South enough and we're not North enough anymore" (Churchill CL #3). As the town is struggling with being considered Northern in order to attract federal interest, investments, and scientific research (Churchill BP #1, CL #3, GO #1), a local official links this disinterest to the political dimension of Canadian geography: "we're now overlooked in terms of opportunities […] Churchill has fallen under the radar because it's not above the 60 parallel. We're challenged on the politics" (Churchill GO #1). This misunderstanding of Churchill's Northern reality and leadership role in the North, while growing, is not new, as one community leader adds, "Churchill is caught in the middle. It's not South enough, and not North enough. It's too bad that Manitoba did not let it go to the Northwest Territories way back when. Churchill felt left behind" (Churchill CL #4).

Local leaders associate the lack of consideration Churchill gets for Northern initiatives with a changing political landscape since the late 1990s. It was during that time that the federal government's focus shifted gradually and more explicitly to the high Arctic and the creation of Nunavut, which came with Arctic communities advocating for the development of their own facilities and infrastructure for the purposes of self-reliance. Churchill's historical advantages in terms of local infrastructure, facilities, and services face growing competition from the development of Nunavut communities, especially in the latter's Kivalliq region. In part, due to Churchill's historical role in administrating relations with indigenous populations (Churchill BP #1, CL #2), political developments in Nunavut have reduced Churchill's importance in providing health care and maternity services, education, and access to specific goods and resources to Kivalliq and the Hudson Bay communities (Churchill BP #1, CL #2 and #3). Relations between Churchill and Nunavut communities like Iqaluit and Rankin Inlet are qualified by one local community leader as "good but increased tensions are to be expected" (Churchill CL #4). Moreover, the creation of a hospital in Rankin Inlet, when it was traditionally Churchill that provided these services, is increasingly worrying local leaders (Churchill CL #1, #2 and #3). The use of Churchill's transportation infrastructure to support the mining boom of Nunavut communities remains the fallback position because it is perceived as a possible way to alleviate what has been lost in other sectors of activity (Churchill GO #1, CL #3 and #4).

Conclusion

Over the last century, the hopes for a prosperous Churchill have been continuously linked to its spatial function as a transportation hub, integrated into national and international distribution networks. As a transport and Northern economic development initiative, the Arctic Gateway fits this conventional understanding of the town, and reflects the federal government's priorities of infrastructure investment and engagement with Northern communities. However, it also provokes some concerns from local leaders who perceive a shift in Churchill's standing, as the Arctic Gateway confirms that the town is losing investment and attention to other, more Northern locations. Despite this spatial repositioning, local hopes for a prosperous Churchill are still linked to its transportation infrastructure, if not as a Northern hub for Southern communities to export to foreign markets, then at least as a Southern outpost for supporting the booming activities of Kivalliq communities.

Government and business efforts have focused over the last 20 years on building momentum and promoting the development of an Arctic Bridge, an Arctic Gateway, a Mid-Continent Trade Corridor, and a Foreign Trade Zone in Manitoba, all at the same time. More recently, the Federal-Provincial Task Force on the Future of Churchill (2013) suggests that a prosperous Churchill may depend on the development of pipelines to transport crude oil from the Alberta oil sands through the Port of Churchill, on supporting the Northern and Arctic mining sector, and on diversifying shipping increasingly to various types of products. Reminiscent of the efforts of the On-to-the-Bay Association in the 1920s and echoing Innis's prediction of the crucial role of natural resource extraction for the future of the Port of Churchill, a new grouping of government and business interests promotes this path for Churchill's development and reiterates the direct link between prosperity and a more efficient use of its transportation infrastructure (Innis 1930; Tough 1996).

This spatial ordering is nuanced and complemented by local leaders, who hope that Churchill will once again assume its regional leadership role among the Hudson Bay communities. With the current development of a road from Winnipeg to Kivalliq that runs through Churchill, some hopes are also put on building closer community linkages, notably by emphasizing the everyday under-the-radar yet important linkages between Churchill residents and Northern communities. These include linkages forged through inter-marriage, and Nunavut leaders who had been born and raised in Churchill (Churchill BP #1, GO #1; CL #3 and #4). In this view, the road connections will represent a qualitative change for Churchill in various ways, building on its current transportation infrastructure and consolidating its traditional—but yet increasingly emphasized—role as an access hub, caught between North and South.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by funding received through a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Assistance to Small Universities Grant awarded to the University of Winnipeg. Thanks are due to Dan Bousfield, Alan Diduck, Patricia Fitzpatrick, Serene Tan, and the Churchill Northern Studies Centre for their insights and support. The anonymous reviewers and the editorial team of this journal are also thanked for their guidance. The views expressed in this article are my own and should not be attributed to anyone else.

References

Arctic Bridge Gateway. 2014. *Key to Northern development*. http://arcticbridge.com.

APGCI (Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridors Initiative). 2012. *The Asia-Pacific Gateway: A path to prosperity*. http://www.asiapacificgateway.gc.ca/gateway-news-2012.html.

Burns, J., and G. Goldsborough. 2012. Roblin City: A gleaming metropolis on Hudson Bay. *Manitoba History* 68: 40-43.

CanNor (Canadian Northern Economy Development Agency). 2011. *Report on plans and priorities, 2011-2012*. http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2011/sct-tbs/BT31-2-2012-III-134-eng.pdf.

CentrePort Canada. 2011. *Winnipeg CentrePort can become Canada's centre for global trade*. http://www.winnipeginlandport.ca/centreport_canada.html.

Certeau, M. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chow, L. 2012. *Youth and elders: Perspectives on intergenerational knowledge transfer*. Master's Dissertation. University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

Churchill Gateway Development Corporation. 2014. *About*. http://www.churchillgateway.ca/about.

Cohen, M. 1971. The Arctic and the national interest. *International Journal* 26(1): 52-81.

Cormie, J. A. 1917. The Hudson Bay route. *Geographical Review* 4(1): 26-40.

Dimitrakopoulou, H. 1994. Women entrepreneurs in the north. *Canadian Woman Studies* 15(1): 51-53.

Evans, P. 2008. The Asia Pacific gateway and the reconfiguration of North America. *Canadian Political Science Review* 2(4): 93-98.

FPTFCC (Federal-Provincial Task Force on the Future of Churchill). 2013. *Final report*. https://www.gov.mb.ca/mit/pdf/churchill.pdf.

Fleming, M. 1988. *Churchill: Polar bear capital of the world*. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press.

FAITC (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada). 2011. *Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy: Exercising sovereignty and promoting Canada's Northern strategy abroad*. http://www.international.gc.ca/arctic-arctique/assets/pdfs/canada_arctic_foreign_policy-eng.pdf.

Government of Canada. 2009. *Canada's Northern strategy: Our North, our heritage, our future.* http://www.northernstrategy.gc.ca/cns/cns-eng.asp.

Government of Manitoba. 1969. *Royal commission inquiry into Northern transportation*. Winnipeg: Queen's Printer.

—. 2008. *CentrePort Canada Act, C.C.S.M. c. C44*. http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/c044e.php.

Innis, H. A. 1930. The Hudson Bay railway. *Geographical Review* 20(1): 1-30.

Kusch, L. 2011. Zoo to hold world-class polar bear exhibit in 2013. Winnipeg Free Press. March 2. http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/zoo-to-hold-world-class-polar-bear-exhibit-by-2013-117223033.html.

Milloy, J. S. 1999. *A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system, 1879 to 1986*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Newton, S. T. 2000. *Sustainable development for Canada's Arctic and sub-arctic communities: A case study of Churchill, Manitoba*. Master's Dissertation. University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

Newton, S. T., H. Fast, and T. Henley. 2002. Sustainable development for Canada's arctic and sub-arctic communities: A backcasting approach to Churchill, Manitoba. *Arctic* 55(3): 281-290.

Patton, H. 1929. Canada's advance to Hudson Bay. *Economic Geography* 5(3): 215-235.

Payne, M. 1990. *Fort Churchill 1821-1900: An outpost community in the fur trade*. Manitoba History 20. http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/20/fortchurchill.shtml.

Pearson, L. B. 1947. Canada looks down North. *Foreign Affairs* 24(4): 638-647.

—. 1953. Canada's Northern horizon. *Foreign Affairs* 31(4): 581-591.

PPM Management. 2010. *Canada's Arctic gateway: Discussion paper*. Arctic Gateway Summit: Northern Directions, November 8-10, 2010. http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/conferences/arctic-summit/arctic-gateway-discussion-paper.pdf.

Reid, A., and J. Frideres. 1971. *Factors affecting membership in voluntary associations in Churchill, Manitoba*. Research Reports no. 5, series 2. Center for Settlement Studies. University of Manitoba.

Ridout, D. 1931. Port Churchill. *Canadian Geographical Journal* 3(2): 105-128.

Rogge, J. R. 1972. Recent economic developments in Northern Manitoba. *Geography* 57(3): 207-216.

Spearman, L. B. 1975. Comparison of social welfare needs with service network in two northern Manitoba communities. Research Report no 24. Center for Settlement Studies. University of Manitoba.

Stewart, E. J., and D. Draper. 2007. A collaborative approach to understanding local stakeholder perceptions of tourism in Churchill, Manitoba. *Polar Geography* 30(1-2): 7-35.

Stewart, E. J., A. Tivy, S. E. L. Howell, J. Dawson, and D. Draper. 2010. Cruise tourism and sea ice in Canada's Hudson Bay region. *Arctic* 63(1): 57-66.

Tannis, T. R. 1999. *Ecotourism in Churchill, Manitoba: Principles, attitudes and opportunities*. Master's Dissertation. University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

Taylor, A. 1993. *Churchill chapter 1931*. Manitoba History 25. http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/25/churchill1931.shtml.

Taylor, C. J. 2003. Exploring northern skies: The Churchill research range. Manitoba History 44. http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/44/exploringnorthernskies.shtml.

Tough, F. 1996. *'As their natural resources fail' Native peoples and the economic history of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Town of Churchill. 2014. *Community information*. http://churchill.cimnet.ca/cim/75C122_207T10791T278T8360T413T16694.dhtm.

Transport Canada. 2009. *National policy framework for strategic gateways and trade corridors*. http://www.canadasgateways.gc.ca/media/documents/en/NationalPolicyFramework.pdf.

University of Winnipeg. 2011. *UWinnipeg establishes the Arctic gateway initiative*. October 7. http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/uw-news-action/story.672/title.uwinnipeg-establishes-arctic-gateway-initiative.

Waldram, J. B., 1987. Relocation, consolidation, and settlement patterns in the Canadian Subarctic. *Human Ecology* 15(2): 117-131.

Winnipeg Inland Port. 2014. *The CentrePort initiative*. http://www.winnipeginlandport.ca.

Annex 1: Selected interview questions

How do you feel about the development of an Arctic Gateway? In your view, will it contribute to the broader goal of developing Canada's North/Churchill?

What have been some of the major challenges in dealing with development for Canada's North/Churchill (either from community members, business or others)? Would these apply to the Arctic Gateway?

How can this project be developed in a way that would respond to the needs of Churchill/your sector of activity?

In your view, how will this Arctic Gateway impact the relationships between Canada's Northern and Southern communities?

Figure 1
Town of Churchill and selected surrounding communities

Figure 2
Planned routes for the Arctic Gateway

---

[i] These designations are for interviewees. Following is a list of interviewee designations and interview dates.
Churchill BP #1: Churchill businessperson #1, May 28, 2011.
Churchill CL #1: Churchill community leader #1, May 20, 2011.
Churchill CL #2: Churchill community leader #2, May 27, 2011.
Churchill GO #1: Churchill government official #1: May 28, 2011.
Churchill CL #3: Churchill community leader #3, May 28, 2011.
Churchill CL #4: Churchill community leader #4, May 28, 2011.