
Made in Nunavut fills an important gap. Up to now little has been written about the process through which the new territory was formed, in the period from 1993 to 1999, and on the extent to which the hopes and aspirations for that territory have been realized in the years following its establishment. This is the subject matter of Made in Nunavut, with a particular focus on the decentralization of certain functions of the Nunavut government to various communities across the territory. It is a work well suited to students of political science, public administration, and northern studies, primarily at the university level, but for some at a college level as well: it provides an enormous information base. It is written in a non-technical manner, and in this sense is also suited to the general reader.

The authors describe this study as a work of two decades. Jack Hicks, we are told, “literally lived the Nunavut decentralization experience” (p. xi). From 1994 to 1996, he was Director of Research for the Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC), which was the body charged with the administrative design of the first Nunavut government. Later he served as Director of the Evaluation and Statistics Division for the Government of Nunavut, a body that was decentralized to Pangnirtung: a move of which he is very critical (see note 127, p. 361). He thus brings to the study the knowledge of a direct participant.

Graham White is a professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. He has studied and written extensively on the North, and he provided advice to northern governments throughout the two decades referred to.

Made In Nunavut is based on a review of available documentary material, supplemented by interviews that were given by some notable former officeholders: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) Ministers Ron Irwin and Jane Stewart, Premier Paul Okalik, Minister of Finance for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) John Todd, and Interim Commissioner of Nunavut Jack Anawak. From his personal experience, Hicks provides additional knowledge far more extensive than could be attained simply from a documentary review.

Officials from various institutions, journalists, and academics were also interviewed and provided numerous unattributed remarks, the use of which gives rise to some concerns. One understands that officials may have informative comments on policies and their execution and that such assessments may be politically sensitive. However an “on the record” remark will usually be made with more careful consideration, and the reader may more easily assess both the experience, and the possible bias, that may underlie a remark. An unattributed remark may be made more loosely and does not allow the reader to similarly weigh it.

This difference is important, for despite its subtitle, Made in Nunavut is far from being simply a study of administrative planning and organizational design. Decentralization in Nunavut, in both its planning and its implementation phases, has occurred in a sometimes tempestuous political and administrative environment. In the period leading up to 1999, relations between the federal government, the GNWT, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, as well as relations between these bodies, the NIC, and the Office of the Interim Commissioner, were often strained. Indeed, even within these institutions there were stresses and conflicts.

The establishment of a separate territory of Nunavut was a major accomplishment of Inuit organizations and political leaders from the 1970s to 1999. Although established by statute as a territorial public government, similar to those of the Northwest Territories and Yukon, at another level this establishment appeared to provide an unrivalled opportunity for the creation of innovative political and administrative structures.

As Hicks and White put it: “The creation of the GN [Government of Nunavut] in the 1990s was as close to fashioning a government on a blank piece of paper as anyone is likely to see…nowhere in Canada had there ever been an opportunity to, in effect, design a government of this scale or importance, virtually from scratch” (p. 4). Yet from this process emerged “a decidedly conventional government leavened with a few distinctive features: its departmental structure . . . a commitment to Inuit values…” (p. 5).

The authors consider one very definite element in the organizational set-up of the new government to be novel. This was the geographic decentralization of its structure and operations. They describe this “design feature” of the government as “ambitious and distinctive, perhaps unique” (p. 5).

“Decentralization” can be variously defined. The authors acknowledge that the organizational approach to the structuring of the Nunavut government could more aptly be described as “deconcentration,” that is, “the dispersal of government jobs outside the capital as opposed to the dispersal of policy-making authority” (p. 9). Within Nunavut, however, the dispersal of government jobs, rather than of policy or decision-making responsibility, has been described almost universally as “decentralization,” and in this regard, the authors’ usage follows the Nunavut practice.

Other Nunavut-specific terms include “decentralized communities,” meaning communities assigned a number of decentralized government positions, and “non-decentralized communities,” meaning those not so favoured.

Certain figures and institutions fare better than others, in the way the tale is told. In some cases there is additional information, which the authors may not have had, that would have provided a more rounded picture. For example, the apparent antagonism of some GNWT politicians to the
The authors’ conclusion is that “Ultimately, the success of this effort will be measured in large part by both how efficient and appropriate a government the GN evolves into and by how much the decentralized communities themselves feel about the economic and social impacts” (p. 327). Another way of expressing this would be to say that the success of the effort depends on how effective the Nunavut government is in overcoming its capacity problems and, as part of this process, in training and recruiting local Inuit to fill the decentralized positions.

REFERENCE


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Utkuhikšalingmiut is a Canadian Arctic dialect spoken by three Inuit groups who used to inhabit the lower reaches of the Back River, in the southeastern part of the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut. Its speakers now live in the communities of Taloyoak, Gjoa Haven, and Baker Lake. Together with Nattilingmiut and Arviligjuarmiut, Utkuhikšalingmiut belongs to a larger dialectal group that is characterized by, among other traits, the phonemic distinctions that it makes between /j/ and /ř/ and between /h/ and /š/ (see below). These shared traits explain why general descriptions of the Inuit language (e.g., Dorais, 2010:34) often consider this group as forming only one dialect, Natsilingmiut (or Nattilingmiut), subdivided into three subdialects, one of which is Utkuhikšalingmiut.

The Natsilingmiutut (sub)dialects are among the very few forms of the Inuit language that, until recently, had not been the object of thorough lexical compilation. The book under review is therefore particularly welcome, as is Miriam Aglukark’s draft Nattilingmiut dictionary (Aglukark,