



## NEWS LOCAL

### Is Sudbury still a 'northern' city?

By [Sudbury Star Staff](#)

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Gino Donato/Sudbury Star Steam rises from Ramsey Lake in this file photo.

*Northern Policy Institute analyst suggests we aren't*

Sudbury may be located in Northern Ontario, but that doesn't necessarily make it a northern city, a new commentary from the Northern Policy Institute suggests.

In fact, none of Northern Ontario's major cities -- including Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and North Bay -- may truly be northern cities any more, author Mike Commito writes.

Commito explores the concept of nordicity -- or what makes a community truly northern -- in his paper, "True North: How 'Northern' is Northern Ontario?", published by the Northern Policy Institute, a think tank based in Sudbury and Thunder Bay.

In it, he questions whether current language and policy decisions are keeping up with physical and socio-economic shifts in what is called Northern Ontario. He says being a northern city is not just a matter of geography.

Commito argues that how a region is defined or perceived has serious impacts on how government approach issues and ultimately makes policy decisions, including the calculation of income tax, isolation pay and upkeep of infrastructure, such as plowing roads in the winter.

The concept of nordicity was developed in the 1970s as a measurement tool to assess the northernness of a community.

Based on 10 physical and socio-economic variables, including latitude, annual temperature, and proximity to industry and infrastructure, it formed the basis for the federal government's index system for calculating northern working and living allowances for its employees.

Because of the implications that come with the term "northern", Commito used the most current data available to test the concept of nordicity on five locations: Timmins, Kenora, Sault Ste. Marie, Red Lake and Moosonee. Of the locations Commito studied, his findings reveal all have become less "northern" in just under 40 years.

Changes were due to increased settlement, advances in transportation, the development of natural resource industries in those areas, and changes to climate.

In fact, of the communities studied, only Moosonee would still be considered a northern, or nordicity. And even though Sudbury and Thunder Bay were not part of the study, they would not qualify under the nordicity model developed by Canadian geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin.

"Accordingly, the region's five largest cities are technically not 'northern,' based on the criteria in Hamelin's nordicity scale," Commito writes.

"What was 'northern' to our predecessors might not be for the next generation," Commito writes. "Policy makers and government officials must take account of the effects of changing climates and resource development when they issue directives on matters in Northern Ontario."

For example, according the concept of nordicity, changes to Red Lake, including an increase in annual temperatures, resource development and tourism activity would render it less northern than it was a few decades ago - even though it still sits at the 51st parallel, he says.

Looking ahead, highway development to the Ring of Fire would dramatically alter the level of nordicity for communities like Red Lake located along that route.

"Short of renaming Northern Ontario, it is time we change our perspective of the region and accept we live in a dynamic location," Commito writes. "As we increasingly find ourselves dealing with problems that are no longer inherently 'northern', we need to look outward if we hope to fix the challenges that confront the region."

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#### More info

- Mike Commito joined Northern Policy Institute as a policy analyst in June 2015.
- He has more than seven years of experience in researching and writing about the history of natural resource management questions that affect Northern Ontario, ranging from forestry to wildlife management.
- Commito is a graduate of Laurentian University with a B.A. (2008) and a Masters (2010) in History. He recently completed his PhD in Canadian history from McMaster University.
- Northern Ontario, which is nearly 90 per cent of Ontario's area, by itself would be Canada's second-largest province. Its population of 803,000 lives in settlements ranging from Parry Sound in the south to the shores of Hudson Bay.

## Poll

### Do you feel like a northerner?

Monday, August 1, 2016

- Yes
- No

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