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How 'Northern' is Northern Ontario today? Current language and policies need to reflect changing realities of the region

July 26, 2016 – A new commentary from Northern Policy Institute re-visits the concept of *nordicity*, and questions whether current language and policy decisions are keeping up with physical and socio-economic shifts in “Northern” Ontario.

In the new commentary “*True North: How “Northern” is Northern Ontario?*”, author Dr. Mike Commito argues that how a region is defined or perceived has serious impacts on how we approach issues and ultimately make policy decisions, including the calculation of income tax, isolation pay and upkeep of infrastructure.

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

Based on ten 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 today; Timmins, Kenora, Sault Ste. Marie, Red Lake and Moosonee. Of the locations Commito studied, findings reveal all have become less “northern” in just under forty years.

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

“What was “northern” to our predecessors might not be for the next generation. 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”, cites Commito.

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 fifty-first parallel. Looking ahead, highway development to the Ring of Fire would dramatically alter the level of *nordicity* for communities like Red Lake 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,” states Commito. “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.”

To read the full commentary, [click here](#)

Media Interviews: Author and NPI Research Coordinator, Dr. Mike Commito is available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

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About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern Communities. Our Operations are located in Kenora, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.