

Exercise G – Material G5

Large differences in settlement development

Behind the overall growth of the population of Greenland, as shown by the large graph on the material G1, there are major differences in development between the cities and the diverse types of settlements in Greenland. Although the three diagrams presented at the bottom of G1 show that the larger part of the population growth has happened in the cities, local disparities between settlements and between cities are considerable. Explanations for these different developments can be illustrated by looking at two different villages: Isortoq that has been shrinking and increasingly is deserted and Innaarsuit that has grown.

Greenland's government distinguishes between cities and settlements. The larger cities were until 2009 were centres of a municipality. The largest city is the capital Nuuk with 17,300 inhabitants, and the smallest is Ittoqqortoormiit on the east coast with 380 inhabitants. This will make Ittoqqortoormiit slightly smaller than the largest settlement, which is Kullorsuaq in Upernavik district with 450 inhabitants, the smallest settlement is Kangerluk with 19 inhabitants (Statistics Greenland 2016).

Since the 1960s, there has been an overall move from the settlements to the cities, but in the same period, some settlement have been growing too. Hence, the need is to find out why some people move away from the settlements, while others stay or even return from city to settlement.

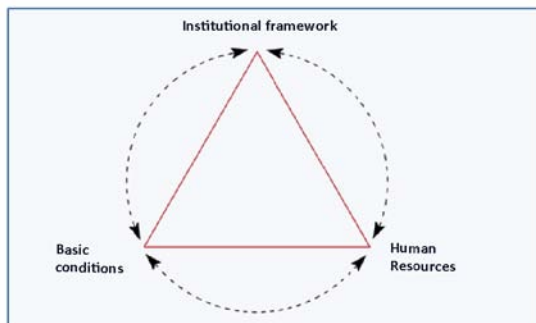
There has always been high mobility in Greenland where people move for opportunities to gain employment or education, or they move for family reasons like moving to your girlfriend or boyfriend or back to your parents or close family. Mobility measured in relocations is many times bigger than the net migration to the cities which is known 'urbanization'.

What determines habitat development?

The individual settlement has traditionally been located where the Inuit people found good living conditions, meaning either a good catch of sea mammals or a good fishery. When people found such a place, they moved there. If the livelihood deteriorated or even disappeared, they typically had to relocate. Until the beginning of the 20th century there have been cases, where people have died of hunger as the hunted animals disappeared and it was not possible to move because of weather conditions.

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In the colonial period until the early 20th century, trading posts were erected in places where it was possible to construct a port. Especially after World War II, those cities grew that the Danish administration were considered to have good opportunities for development. Even at smaller villages primary schools, shops and purchase of fish catch were established as part of a general improvement of standards (modernisation) and eventually also a healthcare stations, power plants and water supply, etc. were provided. However, vocational education, municipal offices, etc. were located in the largest cities.



These developments made the hunting base have less of an impact on decisions on city and settlement development, although the local basis for hunting and fishing continued to play a significant role. But the importance of the support from society has also grown in importance for each settlement. This support is ensuring shops, schools, and particularly good opportunities to sell catch, fur and fish. If you cannot trade your catch, you cannot earn money to pay for fuel for the boat, cartridges for the gun, fuel for heating, television, etc. (Hendriksen 2013). Where this is not possible, the settlement ends up having to live by either local government jobs such as school teaching, shop managing, office assistant at the village office, power plant managing, etc., and there are not enough of that type of jobs. As the catch is limited, many hunters also become dependent on having a wife employed in public works, on who receives welfare benefits.

In the following, we look at the development of two very different settlements.

Isortoq

Isortoq is a typical hunting settlement in the Ammassalik district on the east coast of Greenland. It is located where large ice sheets ('storisen') float down along the east coast. The large ice sheets and the calving glacier close to the settlement, create good hunting conditions for seal, small whales, polar bears, etc. This is due to the ice providing oxygen to the water giving life to a lot of plankton and small creatures which provide food for fish and mammals. This provides a good livelihood which is the basis for the population to be considered among the best hunters of East Greenland.

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But the large ice sheets also now and then makes it difficult for the hunters to transport their catch by boat to the district capital of Tasiilaq when they have planned to do so. When the large ice masses closes the waters around the settlement, it is impossible to sail by boat. This temporarily cuts off the population from the outside world. When the hunters are not able to calculate with some certainty that they will be able to sell their catch while it is still fresh, they obviously will limit their catch to what the family and the settlement itself can consume. This limits at times how much of the catch is converted to money with the consequence that the local population cannot buy goods and improve their houses and living standards.

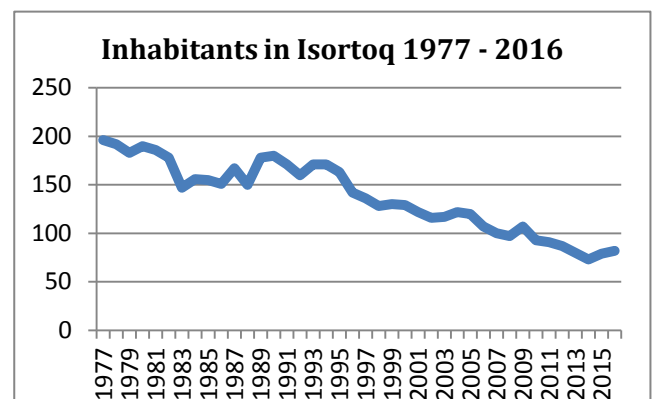


In Isortoq the old traditions of 'meat presents' is retained. If a hunter comes home with a large prey like a small whale or polar bear, the children are sent around to all the families in the settlement with meat. While the settlement is not wealthy, no person living in Isortoq is starving.

The hunters do find it very difficult to make money out of their catch, and therefore they often rely on their wives to earn money by working in the school, shop, healthcare station,

etc. Alternatively women receive welfare benefits, while the men are hunting and procure food. This means that the average income in money terms in Isortoq is 120,000 kr. annually and is one of the lowest in Greenland.

Over the past generations there has been a gradual emigration from Isortoq towards primarily Tasiilaq, and far from all persons have found work to do in the city. If a small freezing factory were to open for hunters to sell their catch locally and to transport the catch into Tasiilaq when the sea ice allows for it, this would dramatically change the development path of the settlement.



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Innaarsuit

Innaarsuit has been a permanent settlement in Upernavik district since about 1910, when some families settled on the island because there was a good catch, of seals and beluga whales, and by 1950 the settlement had grown to about 30 residents. Until the early 1980s Upernavik was known as a poor district, and the population lived mainly from their own catch of sea mammals.

But then the people of the district gradually began to fish for halibut with long lines. In summer from a dinghy and in winter by running out on the ice on dog sled and putting the long line down holes in the ice. The prerequisite for the Innaarsuit hunters to fish halibut was that some trading posts and fish factories were established with high-capacity freezing in the large district. And Innaarsuit was among the first places for this because the settlement is located in one of the best places for fishing for halibut. Gradually, the population has changed from hunting to primarily fishing.



The factory and the fishery has meant that the population today is reasonably prosperous. The average individual gross income in the village is 246 300 kr. (Statistics of Greenland 2014) and the second-highest in Greenland, only surpassed by the capital Nuuk (and a few airports that have the status of settlement).



In Innaarsuit the factory provides employment for many people, and often the men are fishermen, and their wives work in the factory or have some of the few public jobs in the school, the health station, the village office or the shop. Even some children work in their spare time in the factory or fishing. This means that the household income in Innaarsuit is Greenland's highest (apart from the two airport settlements) at 557,000 kr.

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Innaarsuit is an example that a settlement with a good economy and good opportunities for selling produce. It also has good possibilities for urban development, as shown by the growing population and the income level.

Good progress in fishing combined with hunting and good seafood trading opportunities have also meant that the village functions well in other areas such as school and shop and has relatively few social problems to handle.

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