Session Title: Life at the Edges: Isolation and Remoteness in the Age of Sustainability

Session Grouping: Urban & Community Sustainability

Session Organizer(s): Elizabeth Marino

Session Description:

For outsiders, the North has long been identified, romanticized, idealized and criticized as an isolated and remote place. Many Arctic and sub-Arctic landscapes and communities are far from centers of global commerce, devoid of large-scale infrastructure, and largely unconnected by transportation corridors. This relative geographical isolation creates a unique relationship between the centers of power in Northern nation-states and their peripheries—a relationship that is expressed, in part, through practices, performances, regulatory measures, struggles of power, relationships, and narratives of place. Through these, and many others, the historical and socio-cultural construction of “isolation” is glimpsed, and its importance as a still potent organizing principle of the North can be understood.

This panel explores notions of isolation in contemporary Northern settings. Allowing for a wide, interpretive framework for “isolation,” we explore how rural residents engage notions of isolation and remoteness in everyday experiences, and how those same concepts are deployed by more distant others when discussing the future of Northern communities. As the sustainability discourse gains momentum in popular imaginations and in decision-making centers, isolation and remoteness also have the potential to recreate, reframe, and problematize outsider perceptions of the long-term viability of communities in the rural, removed North. Subsumed into a new sustainability discourse, the rural North may find itself, once again, reimagined by outsiders as too (economically, socially, culturally) “isolated” to be considered a sound investment.

While we are particularly interested in these issues, we welcome paper proposals dealing with other aspects of isolation and remoteness. Related topics might include some of the following:

- Food security issues in Arctic communities as problems of remoteness
- The power of social media, the internet to transform isolation
- Histories of transportation, communications, development in northern regions as “remedies” to remoteness – and resistance to new development
- Rural-to-urban migrations (and back again?)