

## Culture



# The Politics of Community Relocation: An Eastern Cree Example

Richard J. Preston

Volume 2, Number 3, 1982

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078111ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078111ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Preston, R. (1982). The Politics of Community Relocation: An Eastern Cree Example. *Culture*, 2(3), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078111ar>

### Article abstract

In the fall of 1977 the Nemaska Band held a meeting with representatives of the Grand Council of the Crees (of Quebec), Peat, Marwick & Partners, Daniel Arbour & Associates, DINA, and some other consultants. The meeting was held at the proposed site for the new Nemaska community, and lasted four days. It began with a bear feast and ended with a community plan. In the five years following, much of the plan has been successfully implemented. This case study contrasts with the more typical studies of failure in planning, or failure in implementation. While the study of a success is no excuse for ignoring problems faced by other people, the Nemaska case can serve a constructive role in identifying the means to success in dealing with goals, obstacles, strategies, and practical steps for development.

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1982

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**Érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

# The Politics of Community Relocation : An Eastern Cree Example

Richard J. Preston  
McMaster University

In the fall of 1977 the Nemaska Band held a meeting with representatives of the Grand Council of the Crees (of Quebec), Peat, Marwick & Partners, Daniel Arbour & Associates, DINA, and some other consultants. The meeting was held at the proposed site for the new Nemaska community, and lasted four days. It began with a bear feast and ended with a community plan. In the five years following, much of the plan has been successfully implemented. This case study contrasts with the more typical studies of failure in planning, or failure in implementation. While the study of a success is no excuse for ignoring problems faced by other people, the Nemaska case can serve a constructive role in identifying the means to success in dealing with goals, obstacles, strategies, and practical steps for development.

*À l'automne de 1977, la bande de Nemaska a tenu une réunion avec les représentants du Grand Conseil des Cris du Québec et des conseillers, dont ceux de Peat, Marwick and Partners, Daniel Arbour et Associés et du Ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord canadien. Cette réunion a eu lieu sur le site choisi par la communauté de Nemaska. La réunion, ouverte par le rituel du festin de l'ours, a été conclue, au bout de quatre jours, par un accord sur un projet de planification communautaire. Pendant les cinq années suivantes, les grandes lignes de ce projet ont été appliquées. Cette étude de cas est exemplaire si on la compare aux projets de planification qui ont échoué dans le*

*passé, soit au stade de leur étude, soit à celui de leur application. Cependant le cas de Nemaska ne saurait servir d'excuses pour ignorer les problèmes auxquels doivent faire face d'autres communautés. Au contraire, il devrait donner l'exemple toutes les fois qu'on voudra définir les obstacles, les stratégies, les buts et les étapes qui précèdent la planification communautaire.*

This paper examines a case of planned community development, involving a small band of East Cree Indians and an aggregate of consultants from two multinational firms, a federal ministry, and other cosmopolitan sources, in the Nemaska Band Consult, 1977.

In general terms, the Consultative process is an example of organizational development strategies, and normally consists of a concentrated five day sequence arranged to :

- 1) engage people's ideals and aspirations, their "practical vision of what they would like to see happening in the next decade",
- 2) examine the various obstacles that seem likely to interfere with these aspirations, defining the "underlying contradictions" antitheses. And out

of the tension established by this juxtaposition of vision *vs* obstruction comes,

- 3) a moderated form of the vision, in the form of “practical proposals” for aspirations that appear most desirable and also most possible to achieve,
- 4) these possibilities are put into the form of strategies for action called “tactical systems” and finally,
- 5) these strategies are arranged and detailed as “actuating programs” that are to be carried out by the villagers, after the consult ends and the consultants depart.

To me, and probably to many social scientists, the consult plan appears too slick and pre-packaged to be likely to work well for a small and rather unorganized aggregate of hunter-trappers, giving us the impression of an overblown Madison Avenue T-Group program being parachuted into the bush. The consult plan was strange to be in more than sequence; to a solitary ethnographer, the large proportion of consultants (there were 27 of us) to Crees of the Nemaska Band (there were 95 men & women, plus children) looks like a kind of Orwellian submersion of the Crees, providing only fantasy and alien solutions to complex, overwhelming problems.

These qualms *never* were substantiated; the consult was a clear success. In a deliberate and sustained effort, a comprehensive relocation plan was developed. The event itself was a cooperative, pleasant combination of “grass-roots” discussion and decision, using information provided by the consultants. The Nemaska Action Program has been substantially realized over the five years that have elapsed since the consult, and the community is well established. The success is notable, and so it is interesting to inquire into how this case developed. A more hard-nosed question will be reserved for the end of the paper: Did the results justify the costs of the consult (around \$100,000) or could the same benefits have been obtained at less cost?

In order to understand how the consult worked, we will look first at the background of the Nemaska Band, then at the circumstances that led to attempting the consult, and then at the events of the consult.

The Nemaska Band takes its name from Lake Nemiscau, and the East Cree word meaning “lots of fish” (*nemis* = fish; *-ka* = many, plentiful) designating a practical and congenial place for people to gather during the summer for fishing, and for the excitement of aggregation after a winter of hunting in small groups dispersed thinly through the boreal forest bush in what is now northwestern Quebec. The forest is dotted with lakes that make travel smoother and straighter, but away from the wind-

break protection of the spruce forest. Here the ancestors of the present Northeastern Algonquian-speaking Indians have lived for an unknown length of time, hunting, trapping, fishing and fowling in a seasonal round of their ecological range that was defined by the periodic availability of particular species. Most of the year was spent in small groups of one or a few families that made up portable, personal, lifecycle communities (Preston, 1975).

The summer aggregation after a long winter’s dispersal was time for the excitement of joining in a group perhaps ten times as large as the winter hunting group, with socializing, marriages, flirting, trade and perhaps travel, and ritual celebrations of several kinds. Contacts with external peoples were possible, too, with more southerly Indians, and after the establishment of the French at Tadoussac there was the lure of travel for European trade goods, and the possibility of trade with Indian middlemen from the south. Nemiscau Lake was on the route that led to James Bay, and before the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) became the power on the Bay, following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, there were French expeditions along this route, and a trading post manned by the French from 1695 until about 1713 (Preston, 1981). The French, and later the English, often placed their posts at sites favoured by the Indians, for trade convenience but also to utilize the subsistence resources that were available and the practicality for travel to other posts. But in the case of Nemiscau Lake, it remained an aggregation center for the Crees long after the French and English posts were established on the St. Lawrence and on James Bay. The Hudson’s Bay Company had a post at Nemiscau Lake briefly from 1794-99, and not again until from about 1923 to its final closing in 1970 (Preston, 1981). Until well into this century, then, the Crees aggregating at Nemiscau Lake in the summer would travel west, either to the Eastmain Post, or after 1776, to the Rupert’s House Post. Alternatively they could travel southeast to Mistassini post or to those beyond.

For the first 20 years or so, until the 1940’s, Nemiska Post had a post manager and perhaps one Cree family working for the manager, on a year-round basis. The rest of the (roughly 125) Crees came in the summer and set up their teepees and wigwams for the duration of their visit during July and August, and then left the post for their traplines. In the 1940’s some people built themselves summer houses there, and more buildings were built in the ‘50’s and ‘60’s, but we still have essentially a *summer* village. Government services added a summer school building, some materials for houses, an elected chief and two councillors, and

other features. The chief and councillors are according to the *Indian Act*, the proper form of political representation for Indian bands, and for the East Crees these band councils have gradually replaced some of the traditional and specialized leadership roles, and taken on new bureaucratic roles. Chiefs and earlier leaders were not likely to exert very coercive kinds of influence, although some individuals, at some times, have been powerful through personal charisma or through fear of sorcery.

Politics was, through the 60's, a rather diffuse affair at Nemiscau Lake. The chief tried to articulate with outside officials and differently, with band members. Other old men with strong personalities were influential beyond the limits of their own families, a catechist and later a white missionary were respected and listened to, the Post managers had relatively authoritarian roles until the '60's, and so on. Different men, different contexts, and different tasks made for a *casual* political organization, and the dispersed location for most of the year meant that individual hunting group leaders were the most important people, for their groups, most of the year. A few children went out to a residential school, and a very few stayed out to complete an academic programme. For the most part, life was pretty traditional for the Nemiska band, as the smallest and most isolated of the bands in the entire region. The province of Quebec was not much in evidence, yet, although field teams from Hydro-Quebec were making sorties into the area, as were Inco and other natural resource corporations.

While people were at the summer village in 1968, a member of either the Quebec National Assembly or the Federal Parliament (people do not recall which it was) came and read a letter of warning, in a band meeting. He told them that the HBC was going to shut down their store, that the land would be flooded, and that they would be well advised to move out of the area. This confirmed earlier rumours, and so the band made an appeal to the Indians of Quebec Association, but nothing came of it. The following year the HBC gave a year's advance notice that they were closing the store due to an annual net loss and their unwillingness to replace their buildings that had been condemned by the Department of Public Works. People talked about whether the HBC would actually close down, or whether the areas would actually be flooded, and where they might move or whether they might just stay on, but no initiatives were taken. The following year, the Hudson's Bay Company *did* close down the store, and about half of the people left for Rupert's House to the west, and the others went

southeast to Mistassini, returning the long distance to winter at their old areas, but abandoning their houses and their summer place of gathering and also their effective unity as a band (Jimmiken, 1977).

From 1970 to 1977, the Nemaska people summered in two enclaves, at the western extremity of Rupert's House, and at Mistassini. Both of these towns were larger (five to ten times the population) and more intensely and complexly in contact with the "outside world". Perhaps more crucial was the fact that these were year-round towns with much more extensive government services. In 1971 a young man returning home to Mistassini from the south bought a newspaper, and in this way the Crees learned that the Baie James hydroelectric project was launched. The four years of protest and negotiation that followed were the basis for a new unity and political awareness for the Cree communities. The Grand Council of the Crees (of Quebec) came into being, and The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was signed in 1975. Rights to lands, self-government, and services were established for each of the bands, but even the *existence* of the Nemaska Band was in question. The people were located in two other towns, with the chief in one and the two councilors in the other. Some people had transferred their membership to the other Bands, perhaps in hope of a better chance to obtain houses.

It may be fair to say that the Nemaska people not only developed a sense of town life (as contrasted with summer "Posting") when they lived at Rupert's House and Mistassini, but also found themselves in circumstances where they became more aware of the community they had left behind them, of the unity they had lost. Living on the outskirts of some other band's town had its drawbacks; in housing and in social definition as "other people" they found themselves disadvantaged. At Mistassini the housing was a little better, and some of the people left Rupert's House for Mistassini in hopes of a better situation. In one man's words, "Always, there was the wish that they had never left. There, at least, they were free" (Jimmikin, 1977 : 6).

Fortunately, in the design of the James Bay Agreement, the possibility for the Nemaska Band to reunite and relocate was given detailed provisions, with two requisites; that within one year of the date of the agreement at least 90 people have to formally pledge themselves to return to the area, and secondly that within 5 years of the Agreement at least 90 people must have established permanent residence in their new location. The formal pledge was made during the first year, as was an election for a new chief and two councillors, although the election was

restricted to those who had not shifted their membership to other band lists. The chief resided in Mistassini while the two councillors were in Rupert's House (Wapachee, 1977). During this same year, the Grand Council of the Crees became interested in the community consult process, and sent an observer to a consult held in North Dakota, and another held in early 1977 in an Acadian community in New Brunswick. They then tried the process within the Grand Council organization itself, as a means for helping the organization to develop. Satisfied with their efforts in this setting, they considered trying it for one of the Cree communities, probably at Wemindji, which was noted for its strongly held sense of unity and unanimity. At this point the Nemaska representative on the Grand Council pointed out that they had only three years left to meet the permanent residence requirement, and that nothing was happening to aid this process. He urged that the consult be tried for Nemaska, as the band with the most pressing need for development initiatives. His point was listened to, and it was decided that if the consult would work for the band with the least unity and experience with white experts and procedures, it would be well proven. A relocation site was suggested by the band member on whose trapping land it was located. Others visited the site and found it to have many advantages. And so the consult was planned.

The consult was held on the site where it was hoped that the new community would develop, and a team of Nemaska men arrived a week early to prepare the site by clearing the bush and building tent frames, a dock, and other amenities. It was thought, very wisely, that not only would this site provide the substantive basis for our planning, but it would be a good social equalizer. If the consult had been held in Montreal, with photos, maps, and other documents about the site, the Nemaska people would have been likely to feel unsure of themselves in the city setting, and to withdraw in the silence of caution. Far better, it was thought, to have the consultants adapting to living for a few days in the bush, where they would have the opportunity to feel a little less sure of themselves and be pleased to depend upon the Cree's hospitality and knowledge of the terrain.

A young husband and wife team from Peat, Marwick and Partners went in a few days before the consult, and prepared to guide the consult process. The other Nemaska people were brought in from Rupert's House and Mistassini, or from the bush where some had begun their fall camp activities. The various consultants converged on the Grand Council's offices in the town of Val d'Or, for

briefing. We were admonished not to succumb to the easy ploy of experts, stepping in to tell people what to do, but rather to work to keep the initiatives happening in Cree, and to act as resource people with technical data, and as interested observers, asking why the people wanted this or that alternative. I remember Albert Diamond telling me with a smile, not to get too spiritual! Then we collected our bedrolls together, and flew into Champion Lake, to the site.

We arrived in the afternoon, and after settling into our tents, we watched the erection of the large tent that had been rented for our general assemblies, which completed the building of the site. In the early evening, we were called to join with everyone in a bear feast in the large tent, where all were served their share by the older men. This was saying to the consultants, in effect, "Welcome, fellow older men, to our mutual task or planning a new community." It was a memorably congenial way to begin the consult.



General meeting Day 1. Opening prayer by old chief.

On the first morning, at the general assembly, we began with a prayer, given by the former chief and then a review of how we were going to proceed. There was a sequence of days and problems to be dealt with; each day would begin with a general assembly in the morning to review the past day's results as a whole, and the next step to be taken. Then in the afternoon we met with our particular task group, of which there were five:

- 1) Lands and Harvesting
- 2) Commerce and Industry
- 3) Community Life
- 4) Health and Education
- 5) Basic Services

Each task group was convened by a “facilitator”, a member of the Grand Council staff who had prior experience or preparation in the consult process. On the first day, for example, each of the task groups discussed, from their particular viewpoints, the “Operating Vision” or what they would like to see happen for the community in the coming decade. Ideas were listed by a recorder on a tearsheet tablet of newsprint for all to see and discuss. Then, in the evening, the recorders’ sheets were collected and the ideas were reviewed by the task group team “facilitators” and some of the consultants, and clustered into basic categories, giving an ordered and objective form to the collected ideas of the Nemaska people (see Plate 1).

The next morning’s general assembly included a summary of the operating vision, and each of the five task groups was given a portion of the whole to work with that afternoon, to identify the problems, whether material, social, or attitudinal, that were likely to be obstacles for the implementation of the vision. Where we had spent the previous day building pie in the sky, we spent this day bringing it all crashing back to the ground again.

An example of the discussion in the Community Life task group (of which I was a member) might be helpful. A major part of the vision was the establishment of 90 people at the site, in permanent residence. In discussions of the vision, it became clear that this meant the construction of houses. On the second day, we discussed the problems or obstacles. Houses would cost a great deal, but if there were not houses available, people would probably not come — or if they came they might not stay. If the community is not officially recognized, how can we get funding for houses? Without recognition by Indian Affairs, what status does the band have, and what status does the townsite have? If Indian Affairs requires that they are a recognized community before housing subsidies can be granted, and they can be recognized only if people are permanently settled here, and the people will only settle here if there is housing, how can we solve this dilemma and be a community? The regulations seem to make our community an impossibility. At that point, someone volunteered a simple but crucial bit of political awareness. “Well, he said, we are here.” It was a simple truth, but also a voicing of generally felt commitment that they *were* there, and they were there to determine how to stay there.

Again, as the second day progressed, each of the five groups recorded their ideas on the tearsheet tablets, and then in the evening the team facilitators

and some consultants made up a reordered and summarized chart. The chart identified ten major categories as headings for the 64 summary categories. These ten categories were identified as the underlying contradictions facing the Nemaska people (see Plate 2). The phrasing given in these charts is largely the language of consultants; you will have to take on faith that it reasonably reflects the very much larger number of phrasings given by the Crees. I was present at these evening sessions and saw the process of abstracting into categories. While there was some loss in content and Cree style, I think that the basics survived the process rather well.



Basic services (task group).

The general meeting on the morning of the third day included some presentations by visitors. An official of the James Bay Energy Corporation told of planned construction in the vicinity, the jobs that would be involved, and that the old site at Nemaska would be flooded to a level thirty feet above the normal one. People could only laugh at this latter assurance; such a flooding was hard to imagine. A Grand Council consultant told the people about the amounts of mercury pollution found in various species of fish in the major lakes of the vicinity, and how many of each species they could safely eat. Then, the summary of the previous day’s work was divided for each task group to work on during the afternoon, to formulate some strategies to overcome the obstacles that had been identified on the previous day. The proposals were worked out in terms of what would be required for practical actions.

For example, the proposal for housing included information on the approximate size for a house (24 x 38 or 40 feet), whether basements were desirable, or practical, or too expensive, how much could be built for the amount of the government subsidy and what was involved if more was spent and

mortgages became a factor. The relative advantages and costs of using locally cut logs for construction was compared to transporting materials to the site. The location of the water table and distance between wells and septic drains (100 feet minimum) and the possibility of having one septic system for 4 or 5 houses was discussed. We discussed the role of the Department of Indian Affairs funding procedure, CMHC loan requirements, and Canada Manpower training programs for Nemaska people, as well as problems experienced with mortgage payments on other reserves.



Morning report to General Assembly.

These proposals were collated and summarized in the evening session (see Plate 3), and on the fourth day the specific steps and budget estimates were worked out by the task groups, to fill out the proposals and give the whole project a preliminary estimate in terms of manpower needs, budget, and scheduling. Altogether, 155 steps were identified by the five task groups, and these were finally integrated in the final evening session into the "Nemaska Action Program" which is shown in schematic form in Plate 4. In the 90 page final report, 25 pages give a much more detailed summary for each of the 9 final programs, including a description of the program, its purpose, its specific projects, the scheduling for implementation on a three year basis, and the budget.

### *Discussion*

A number of questions are in order. Why weren't the Cree people overwhelmed by the consult, either by the nature of the problems and tasks required of them, or by the participation of so much external expertise? Why did we not see people becoming passive observers there rather than ex-

pressing their initiatives and commitment, given the kind of "aftermath of dependency" effects that one might have expected. Why didn't people become saturated by abstract planning talk, or become resentful of the expertise of strangers? Why didn't the consult prove to be merely a momentary success, leaving behind insufficient motivation or skills to implement the plan? And finally, could all this have been done in another way, more cheaply or more effectively? I will discuss these seriatim, but first I will indicate the results of the plans made during the consult.

The Nemaska Band is now permanently located at Champion Lake, notwithstanding delays in the scheduling that resulted from the many and commonplace snags affecting other projects in other northern towns. In 1979, two years after the consult, there were 37 households, all living in wood-framed tents, with a total population of about 210 people. Houses came later than scheduled due to snags in the architects' attempts to design something distinctively appropriate, to the Crees' doubts about the design, to CHMC officials' doubts about the design, sawmill costs and practicality, late decisions, and so on. Still, in August and September 1979, five foundations were begun, and these houses were completed during the next summer, in spite of a funding freeze. The number of houses was half of what had been hoped for in the first year, but in a sense the delays and the funding freeze on housing by DINA didn't matter, because people's stake in their renewed community was sufficiently strong to bring to the new town and to keep there, a larger number of people than anyone had been confident about at the time of the consult.

Community economic development started with one man buying a truck to bring supplies in by road to the other end of the lake, and by 1979, 4 large boats for ferrying had been purchased by band members, and a van for use as a taxi to points south. Most men still hunt and trap for their living, encouraged by the Crees' income security program which ensures that people can afford to winter in the bush even if there is a bad year for furs. The young, bilingual men who own the ferry boats also continue to trap, so that there seems not to be a separate class of town-oriented entrepreneurs, but rather a tendency to add to the traditional subsistence economy such other activities as appear practical and congenial to some individuals (Taylor Brelsford, personal communication, 1982).

With regard to band management, a training course was taken by the band manager, and in the summer of 1979, George Wapachee, the coordinator of the task force for implementing the action

program, was elected chief of the Band. He regards the consult and its overall plan to have been very useful, and as requiring very little modifications (personal communication, 1982) as the implementation has proceeded. Since this individual took the major role in implementing the plan, his evaluation should be taken quite seriously.

In the spring and summer of 1980 there was a major tragedy that is related to the plan. Contaminated water, taken from the lake near to the houses and possibly unsafe due to sewage draining at the shore or to some subsequent contamination, led to the deaths of 4 children. The case was publicized and debated by the Grand Council, and Federal and Provincial officials. An infirmary was supplied by the province, and safe water supplies and adequate sewage facilities are now seen as a major problem area in community planning and construction.

By the summer of 1982, five years after the consult, 23 houses had been built and another 16 were due for completion in a few months. The infirmary was staffed by 2 nurses, a police station was staffed by a Nemaska constable, the temporary store run by a Nemaska man for the Hudson's Bay Company was expected to be replaced by this man's own store in the near future, and a community church (for all denominations) and community center were expected within a year. The Cree Trapper's Association has a Nemaska man who buys the furs, looks after transportation for trappers, two way radios for trapper's camps, and other harvesting support services. Another man has a transport business with 4 vehicles, and there are 6 other private vehicles, although the road is still accessible from the community only by crossing the lake.

Why weren't the Cree people overwhelmed by the problems and tasks involved in the consult? Part of the answer lies in the strongly felt need to re-establish themselves as a community, after seven years spent in two towns, or rather in enclaves attached to two towns. There was a clear sense that they might have the material advantages that they had seen but rarely enjoyed in the two towns, in a new town of their own. They had, then, not only a felt need, but also a demonstration effect, in seeing what was already possible for Rupert's House and Mistassini. If it had happened for those towns, then it was possible for Nemaska as well. There was a tangible, plausible goal; the problem was how to go about reaching the goal. The suggestion of the consult was made to a general meeting of the band members, and they decided to try it. To try the consult was, then, *their* decision. These factors combined to support a strong motivation to deal

with problems and tasks, however unfamiliar they might be, and to utilize outside experts in the consult process.

Why weren't the people overwhelmed by the participation of so much external expertise? They might have been snowed under by technical terms and the ambience of a group of professional experts. This hazard was well anticipated, and there were practical steps taken to avoid this kind of breakdown of the consult process. The location, with consultants in an unfamiliar environment but the Cree people feeling quite at home, served effectively to moderate the sense of who were the guests and who were the hosts in charge of the daily comfort and safety of the outsiders. The symbolic and social functions of sharing in a feast are familiar to anthropologists; the bear feast that marked the start of the consult was the tangible and congenial demonstration of hospitality, and of who the hosts were. And before the experts were flown to the site, they were given clearly to understand that the *assertion* of their expertise was to be actively avoided. There were very few instances when some consultant forgot himself or became a bit excited, and these incidents were absorbed without much difficulty, sometimes with humour.



Consultant providing civil engineering information regarding access to road. (Basic services, task group).



Why did we not see people becoming passive observers rather than expressing their initiative and commitment, given the kind of “aftermath of dependency” effects that one might have expected? The factors identified in answering the first two questions just above set the conditions for people to adapt with relative facility to a new role vis-à-vis the decision making for their future. Having left it for two years in the passive expectation that Indian Affairs would do something, and then deciding that they would wait forever at that rate, it was part of the collective understanding that the consult was an event where they *would* take new initiatives. Years of dependency relations notwithstanding, people are capable of adapting with some alacrity when the conditions are supportive. Dependency theory does explain a good deal, but dependency does not cast an immutable pall upon lives whose circumstances it has defined. In the case of the Nemaska consult, functional theory and innovation theory have explanations to contribute as well.

Why didn't people become saturated with abstract planning talk, or become resentful of the expertise of strangers? If the consult had gone on for long in the vein of the first day's “pie-in-the-sky” vision, it is very likely that people would have lost confidence in the activities as a practical means to tangible goals that they held in mind. But by following a day of defining hopes with a day of looking straight at the problems that were in the way of these goals, a sense of reality developed and stayed through the remainder of the consult. As I stood with a friend who works with the Grand Council, waiting for a plane to take us south on the day after the consult ended, an older man came to him and asked in Cree, “Oh, it is over? You ought to stay a little longer.” This illustrated to me the fact that we had not ended on exhaustion, but on practical optimism. The expertise of strangers was made available at their request, and to serve their questions and definitions of problems to be solved. Most of the task groups' work was conducted in Cree, with translation for the people there who did not understand the Cree. English and expertise did not dominate the conversations or the decisions, with few exceptions. So the expertise was drawn upon for practical and congenial reasons, and gave little cause for resentment.

Why didn't the consult prove to be only a momentary success, leaving behind insufficient motivation or skills to implement the plan? Some of the answers should be obvious at this point, since people were convinced that the consult had worked and that the results would prove useful. This was the consensus of the Nemaska people, the Grand

Council staff, and probably most of the consultants. Part of the final plan was the establishment of a Nemaska Task Force group to work on the implementation of the plan. The group did not develop, but the one key person who carried the larger part of this work was dedicated and capable. The support of the Grand Council was crucial, in arranging interim funding and support for the Task Force, and in assisting in relations with Indian Affairs and other government agencies. Government funding and other assistance completed the external picture. Then, the Nemaska people had become committed to the community. As one man said (in Cree) in the last general meeting, “In the past I have thought only of my family; now I must also think of my community.” People were ready to work at the tasks involved, both in entrepreneurship (as in purchasing transport vehicles and boats) and in labour (as in building construction) as well as working as managers (of a store, or other services) in addition to their work as hunter-trappers.

Finally, could all this have been done in another way, more cheaply or more efficiently? The consult cost over \$100,000 for the event itself, and subsequent work by consultants was an additional cost. As to the consult process, I am very doubtful that the same benefits could have been gained through a more piecemeal use of small group work or consultation. For one thing, the social function of having the whole band involved in the process was probably a major factor in terms of long-term feelings of commitment, including people coming to live in tents and with few services or goods available, not just for one year but two or three or more. For another, the piecemeal approach often produces piecemeal results, and uneven degrees of success in those results. The plans' holistic scheme may have been somewhat idealistic, but perhaps it is also more useful to see each component of the plan in relation to others, and to the overall goals. Had the consult been less successful in its immediate results or in the following years of implementation, perhaps there would be a better case for finding alternative ways to plan. But as it stands, the comment made shortly after the consult by Grand Chief Billy Diamond is still the best sum-up: “Show me a better way to get people to talk to each other, and we'll try it.”

#### NOTE

Photographs by Ki Morawski.

**Plate 1**  
**NEMASKA CONSULT PRACTICAL VISION**

SECURING AND EXPANDING ECONOMIC BASE		BUILDING THE PHYSICAL BASE			ESTABLISHING THE COMMUNITY BASE	
TRADITIONAL PURSUITS	LOCAL ENTERPRISES	PHYSICAL FACILITIES	BASIC UTILITIES	SOCIAL SERVICES	SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	
<b>1. LAND RE-ORGANIZATION</b> Band Territory Confirmed Lands for Trapping Reorganization of Trapline Harvesting Guarantees	<b>5. ARTS &amp; CRAFTS</b> Arts and Crafts Center Heritage Presentation Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association	<b>10. HOUSING</b> 20 New Homes Appropriate Materials Family Input Housing Design Mix	<b>14. TRANSPORT</b> Transportation Link Trapline Services Barge Subsidized Transportation to Traplines Airstrip/Marina Garage Fuel Station Community-Owned Transportation Vehic.	<b>19. BAND ADMINISTRATION</b> Band Office Local Policing Serv. Skidoo Traffic Regulations Band Administration Local ISP Administration Mutual Insurances	<b>23. LOCAL SCHOOL</b> Survey Educational Needs Elementary School Summer Day School Adult Education Center	
						<b>2. WILDLIFE CONSERVATION</b> Conservation Officers Game Warden Environmental Protection NBR Information Fish Consumption Forest Fire Protection
<b>3. HARVEST MANAGEMENT</b> Scaling Officers Fur Marketing Service Wildlife Management Future Harvesting	<b>7. LOCAL CONSTRUCTION</b> Carpentry Skills Heavy Equipment Local Resources Construction Material Sawmill	<b>12. TOWN PLAN</b> Community Master Plan Physical Planning of the Community Community Site Selection Values Trapline Accessibility Champion Lake Community Building Facilities	<b>16. POWER</b> Power Link-up Community Service & Utilisation Heating, Electricity & Telephones Street Lights Temporary Generator Services	<b>21. CHURCH</b> Community Church Religious Services Cemetery Location Bible Camp	<b>25. NATIVE TEACHERS</b> Teachers Training Residence for Teachers	
<b>4. HERITAGE PRESERVATION</b> Traditional Skills and Crafts Traditional and Other Ways of Life Advantages of Isolation						<b>8. TOURISM &amp; OUTFITTING</b> Tourism Industry Outfitting Camps Non-Native Sportsmen Guide Profession Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association
	<b>9. NEW INDUSTRY</b> Service Center Motel Unit Mink or Fur Farming Cree Organization Office Other Sources of Income Poultry Farm		<b>18. SANITATION</b> Sewage System Garbage System Septic Tank System			
<p>1. This lists, by brief title, all of the ideas that were listed and discussed by the 5 working groups, as things that they would like to see in the coming years, for their new community. People were encouraged to suggest even those things which were not likely to really materialize, in order to get a full sense of what people's aspirations consisted of. The resulting 119 items (there was some redundancy between groups that is not shown on the plate) were then inductively organized into 26 numbered categories and then into 6 columns during the evening session of Grand Council 'facilitators' and some consultants.</p>						

**Plate 2**  
**NEMASKA UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS**

UNCERTAIN ACCESS TO LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES		LIMITED USE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES		INADEQUATE CONTROL OF CULTURAL CONFLICT		INSECURE SUPPORT FROM REGIONAL SERVICES			
UNRESOLVED ACCESS (1)	SPECIALIZED SKILLS SHORTAGE (2)	MATERIAL & EQUIPMENT SHORTAGE (3)	UNDEFINED COMMUNITY IDENTITY (4)	UNCONTROLLED CULTURAL CHANGE (5)	PASSIVE RELATIONSHIP TO OUTSIDE RESOURCES (6)	THREATS TO HARVESTING SECURITY (7)	UNFAMILIAR FUNDING PROCESS (8)	UNCERTAIN COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES (9)	LIMITED OUTSIDE RELATIONSHIPS (10)
Isolation C.L. (2)	Absence of local labour force B.S. (3)	Simultaneous availability of manpower, machinery and material. B.S. (10)	Uncertain community membership C & I (2)	Breakdown of traditional life-styles. L & H (5)	Lack of support B.S. (14)	Unpredictable wildlife resources L & H (4)	Ineligibility for funding L & H (1)	Uncertain educational facilities H & E (9)	Inappropriate fur marketing services L & H (8)
Professionals hesitant to relocate H & E (5)	Lack of local trained manpower B.S. (4)	Lack of machinery and tools B.S. (2)	Uncommitted band membership C.L. (8)	Fear of domination C & I (10)	Improper installation of services B.S. (19)	Threat of development projects L & H (13)	Uncertainty of government commitments L & H (10)	Uncertainty of medical facilities H & E (8)	Limited outside relationships C & I (7)
Costly and difficult access to community H & E (6)	Scarcity of native teachers and candidates H & E (3)	Supply shortage L & H (2)	Unofficial community status C & I (1)	Cultural conflicts C & I (9)	Language barrier with outside sources H & E (7)	Trapline boundary conflicts L & H (12)	Unknown funding sources C.L. (7)	Uncertain educational program(s) (accommodation) H & E (13)	
Uncertain access and isolation C & I (6)	Lack of professional expertise B.S. (5)	Quality materials are costly H & E (11)	Fragmented band C.L. (4)	Threats to traditions C & I (4)	Inability to control outside resources C.L. (3)	Imbalance between trappers and resources L & H (6)	Inexperienced in approaching sources of funding B.S. (1)		
Problems of transportation of material and equipment B.S. (7)	Untrained for community jobs C.L. (11)	Insufficiency of local materials B.S. (6)	Unknown corporate potential C & I (8)	Conflict of development on Cree perception C.L. (10)	Dependency C & I (5)	Lack of organized environmental protection L & H (3)			
No transmission line by Hydro-Quebec B.S. (15)	Untrained for employment opportunities H & E (13)	Lack of hot water facilities B.S. (16)	Small population C.L. (1)	Resistant toward changes C.L. (6)	Lack of consultation between people and planners B.S. (13)	Non-native disruption L & H (9)			
No. 1 priority: uncertainty about the access road B.S. (8)	Educational training programs geared to younger people H.E. (4)	Geographical problem B.S. (18)	Small population C & I (3)	Conflict between formal and traditional way of life L & H (7)	Inadequate community consultations C.L. (9)				
Inadequate transportation services H & E (12)	Technical know-how shortage H & E (10)	Inadequacy of generator services B.S. (12)	Changing leadership roles C.L. (5)						
Restricted personal mobility C & I (11)	Lack of Cree or Indian contractors B.S. (11)								
Uncertainty for the timing of the construction of Hydro-Quebec sub-station									

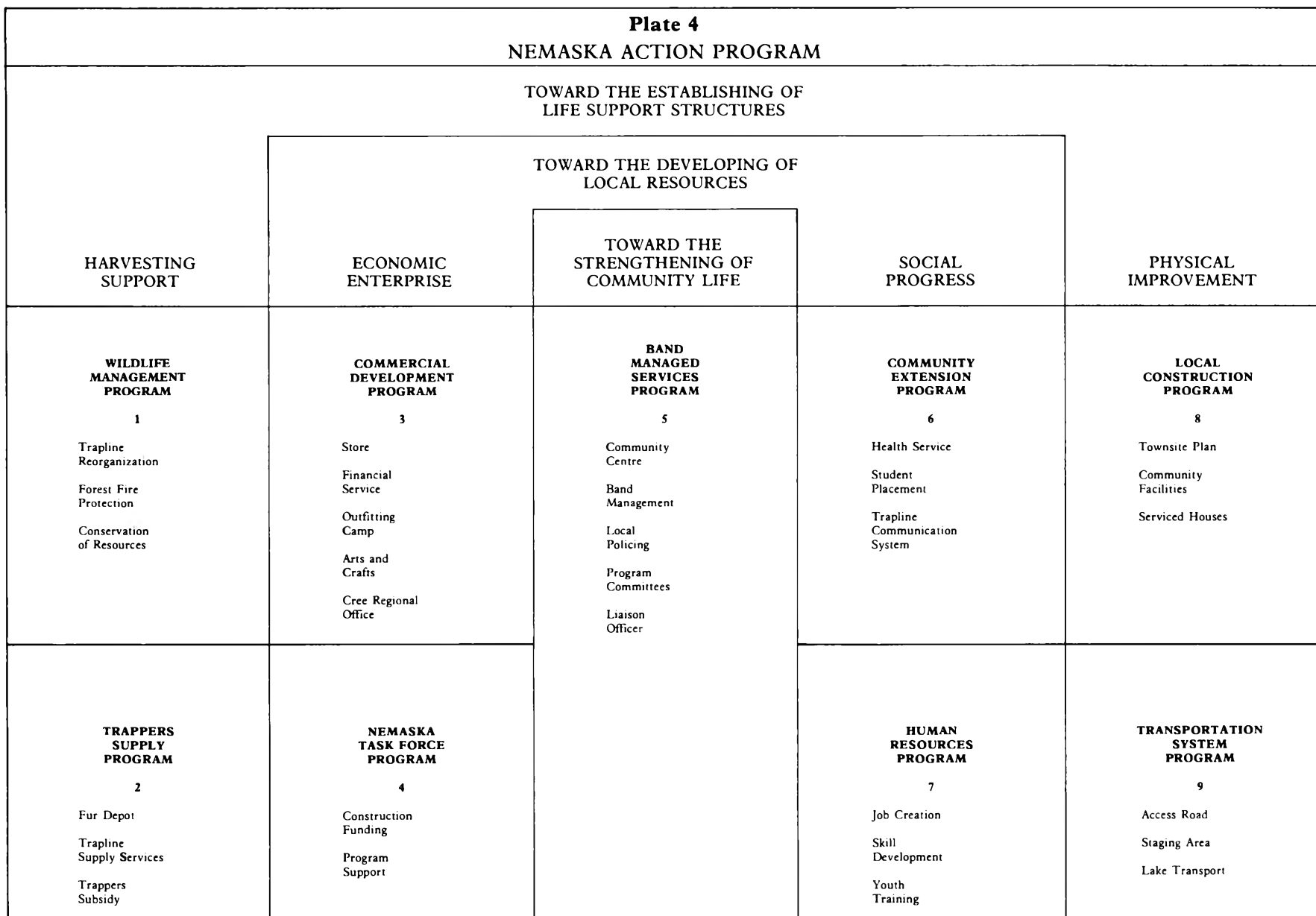
2. Here the obstacles that were foreseen by each of the 5 groups were brought together. As with the other plates, the organization of ideas was made by putting up the tearsheets from each working group, side by side on a wall, and looking at them and discussing which ideas seemed to go with which others, working inductively by suggestion and consensus. On this plate, the process is especially well illustrated since the lower right corner of each box has the initials of the working group and the number on their tearsheet, which identifies the source of each item. The 4 items that did not make it onto this chart were probably redundant with those that are shown.

**Plate 3**  
**NEMASKA CONSULT PROPOSALS**

LIFE SUPPORT				COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION			SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT A	TRAPPERS SUPPLY B	LOCAL CONSTRUCTION C	TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM D	COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT E	NEMASKA TASK FORCE F	BAND MANAGED SERVICES G	HUMAN RESOURCES H	COMMUNITY EXTENSION I
Trapline Reorganization 1	Fur Depot 5	Serviced Houses 8	Access Road 13	Outfitting 17	Housing Package 22	Band Programs 27	Job Creation 32	Cree Curriculum 35
Forest Fire Protection 2	Supply Service to Trappers 6	Permanent Community Facilities 9	Sub-Station Link 14	Financial Services 18	Hydro-Employment 23	Community Policing 28	Skills Development 33	Cultural and Education Exchange 36
Resource Conservation 3	Trappers Subsidy 7	Community Roads 10	Snow Train System 15	Local Industry 19	Community Funding 24	Band Office 29	Youth Training 34	Trapline Communications 37
Resource Development 4		Townsite Plan 11	Barge System 16	Small Business 20	NBR Talks 25	Local Committees 30		Trapline Health Services 38
		Equipment Procurement 12		Joint Ventures 21	Cree Organization Office 26	Outside Recruiting 31		

3. The titles of 38 proposals here represent the collective product of the 5 working groups, once again ordered inductively during an evening session. Note that here, as in the previous two charts, the working group results are not isolated in "their own business" but are allowed to usefully overlap and are easily

combined to make up the whole. It was simply and often true that an idea from one group would apply usefully to the task of one or more of the other groups. This holistic attitude was both practical and congenial.



4. The 9 columns of Plate 3 have here become the 9 component programs of the final resulting general program. This plate is only a schematic view of the detailed program statements contained in the final report of the consult, and provides a simple and symmetrical view of the whole Nemaska Action Program.

The 38 proposals of Plate 3 were merged or pruned to 30 sections within the 9 programs shown here, and the progress made in each program is described in the "Discussion" portion of the text of this article.

## REFERENCES

### ANONYMOUS

1978 A Report on Nemaska Band Consult : Doethawagan '77.

### ARBOUR, D. & ASSOCIATES, INC.

1978 Community Plan for Nemaska Band.  
de la BARRE, Kenneth, *et al.*

1979 Relocation of the Nemaska Band : Review of the Nemaska Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Statement by the James Bay Environmental and Social Impact Review Panel, Secretariat of the Review Panel, Quebec.

### JIMMIKEN, Lawrence

1977 The Nemiscau Situation — Background, Manuscript.

### LARUSIC, Ignatius, *et al.*

1979 Negotiating a Way of Life : Initial Cree Experience with the Administrative Structure Arising from the James Bay Agreement, Montréal, ssDcc, Inc., and Ottawa, Indian and Northern Affairs.

### NEMASKA BAND

1978 Nemaska Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Statement.

### PRESTON, Richard J.

1975 Eastern Cree Community in Relation to Fur Trade Post in the 1830's : the Background of the "Posting Process". In W. Cowan (ed.), Proceedings of the 6th Algonquian Conference, National Museum of Man, Canadian Ethnology Services, Mercury Series Paper No. 23 : 324-335.

1981 East Main Cree. In J. Helm (ed.), The Subarctic, Volume 6, Handbook of North American Indians, Smithsonian Institution : 196-207.

### WAPACHEE, George

1977 Orientation Brief II : Terms of the Agreement, Manuscript.