

The Well-Being of Inuit Communities in Canada

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). While the research and analysis in the report are based on data from Statistics Canada, the opinions expressed do not represent the views of Statistics Canada.

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1. Introduction

Much emphasis has recently been put on examining the living conditions existing within Canada's Aboriginal communities. Of particular interest is the research challenge to produce a measure of the well-being of populations residing within such communities. As such, the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate (SRAD) at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) has measured and compared the well-being of First Nations in Canada with that of Other Canadian communities and has assessed disparities over time. (McHardy and O'Sullivan 2004; O'Sullivan and McHardy, 2004)¹

This initial exercise has led to several questions which warrant further research. Amongst the issues raised was the inclusion of other types of Aboriginal communities, such as Inuit communities within the larger grouping of "Other Canadian communities" to which First Nations were compared. It is also interesting to look at such Aboriginal community types in relation to one another and in relation to other communities in order to push further our understanding of Aboriginal well-being.

This article begins to address this issue by examining Inuit communities in relation to First Nations and Other Canadian communities. As such, it represents an extension of the previous work carried out by SRAD but giving more recognition to the specificity of Inuit communities.

2. Inuit Population and Inuit Communities in Canada

Of the 976,305 individuals who identified themselves as Aboriginal² in the 2001 Census, about 5% or 45,070 reported that they were Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2003). The majority (83%) of Inuit are living in communities situated in the Canadian Arctic. About half of the population lives in Nunavut, while Quebec's northern portion (Nunavik) is home to 19%. The north coastal and south-eastern areas of Labrador and Inuvialuit region in the northwest corner of the Northwest Territories are home to most of the remainder of the Inuit population with 7%, in each of these regions (Health Canada, 2004).

¹ Readers are encouraged to visit the following link for more details on research associated with well-being: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/index_e.html.

² In the Census, the Aboriginal identity population refers to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, i.e. North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo), and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada and/or who were members of an Indian Band or First Nation.

The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national Inuit organization in Canada representing the four Inuit regions located in two provinces and two territories – Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories³. ITK represents the interest of those Inuit living in one of the 53 communities dispersed throughout these regions: 6 in Labrador, 14 in Nunavik, 27 in Nunavut and 6 in the Northwest Territories.

This article focuses on 51⁴ of these communities representing all of those with a population size large enough to allow analysis (i.e. larger than 65, see Appendix A). These 51 communities have an average size of 1,021 inhabitants, but it should be noted that they present variations in size with the largest showing a population of 7,969 compared to the smallest at 114 in 2001. Table 1 shows the distribution of communities by region along with indication of the average size. A few of these communities have road access to southern points or even neighbouring villages, but the vast majority of Inuit communities are accessible by air only which impacts access to goods and services and as well as the cost of living. For most communities, a large majority of the population is of Inuit ancestry.

³ For more information on ITK, visit: www.itk.ca, and for additional information on the history and current situation on Inuit communities, see ITK, 2003.

⁴ Two communities from the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut (Bathurst Inlet and Umingmaktok) which are identified by ITK as Inuit communities were excluded from the analysis as their population was under the threshold of 65 used in this study.

Table 1
Community Size by Region

Inuit Region	Number of Communities	Average Population	Standard Deviation	Smallest Community	Largest Community	Total Population	Average Proportion of Inuit Population (%)
Labrador	6	1,767	3,057	215	7,969	10,603	76
Nunavik	14	688	517	159	1,932	9,632	93
Inuvialuit	6	876	1,029	114	2,894	5,254	76
Nunavut	25	1,063	1,007	163	5,236	26,583	91
Total	51	1,021	1,303	114	7,969	52,072	86

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.

3. The Community Well-Being (CWB) Index

The Community Well-Being Index is a means of examining the relative well-being of communities in Canada. It was initially developed in response to the growing concerns of the socioeconomic conditions that exist among Canada's First Nations but can further be used to assess such conditions in other types of communities. It is essentially an extension of the United Nations' methodology for calculating the Human Development Index(HDI) of populations which has been previously applied to the Registered Indian population of Canada (Cooke, Beavon, and McHardy, 2004).

The CWB index combines several key indicators of socioeconomic well-being into a single "CWB score". A score is generated for each community in Canada, allowing an "at-a-glance" look at the relative well-being of those communities. CWB scores range from 0 to 1 (with one being the highest) and are reported herein to two decimal points. Scores reflect the entire population of a community, regardless of their ethnicity and/or cultural background of its inhabitants⁵.

Additional information pertaining to the methodology of the CWB index is available in McHardy and O'Sullivan (2004). While that report also provides a lengthy discussion of the limitations of the CWB model, the main issues should be highlighted here. First, the CWB focuses primarily on the socioeconomic aspects of well-being. Limitations of the Canadian Census prevented the incorporation into the model of equally important aspects of well-being such as physical, psychological and cultural well-being. It is also important to note that the socioeconomic indicators of which the index is comprised may not capture fully the reality of the Inuit communities economic situation. Many Inuit are still heavily involved in traditional economic pursuits, which, although contributing to their material well-being, are not manifested directly in monetary income or paid employment (Usher, Duhaime, and Searles, 2003).

The CWB index consists of the following four equally weighted components.

3.1 Income

This component is defined as "income per capita": a community's total income divided by its total population. To make them amenable for inclusion in the CWB index, community income averages had to be converted into income scores running from 0 to 1. The following formula was used to this end:

⁵ Inuit communities are to a large degree inhabited by individuals of Inuit ancestry and/or identity. In this analysis, only four communities had less than 75% of their population not identifying themselves as Inuit.

$$\frac{\text{Log (income per capita)} - \text{Log (2,000)}}{\text{Log (40,000)} - \text{Log(2,000)}}$$

The theoretical minimum and maximum (\$2,000 and \$40,000, respectively), were derived from the actual range of income per capita across Canadian communities. The log function was incorporated into the income component to account for the “diminishing marginal utility of income” (Cooke, Beavon, and McHardy, 2004). According to this principle, those who occupy the lower income strata will benefit more from additional income than those at higher income levels.

3.2 Education

This component is comprised of two indicators: a) functional literacy and b) high school attainment or higher. The former is afforded a weight of 2/3 of the education component and is operationalized as the proportion of a community’s population, 15 years and over, that has completed at least a grade 9 education. The latter is defined as the proportion of the population, 20 years and over, that has graduated from high school, trades, other non-university post-secondary programs or university.

3.3 Housing

This component is comprised of indicators of both housing quantity and quality. The former is operationalized as the proportion of the population living in dwellings that contain no more than one person per room. The latter is defined as the proportion of the population living in dwellings that are not in need of major repairs (i.e repairs to walls, floors, ceilings, or major structural replacements such as: a new roof or new external siding). Both measures are equally weighted.

3.4 Labour Force

This component is also comprised of two indicators: the labour force participation and the employment rate. The former is operationalized as the proportion of the population, 20 years and over, that is involved in the labour force. More specifically, the labour force participation rate refers to the population who was either employed or unemployed but who was either on temporary lay-off, was scheduled to start a new job within the next four weeks or was actively looking for paid employment. Employment rate refers to those who are employed divided by the total labour force, aged 15 years and over. Both measures are equally weighted.

4. Community Type Comparisons

For the purpose of this report, Inuit communities are compared to First Nations and to Other Canadian communities. The distinction between First Nations and Other Canadian Communities is based on Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's 2001 geography hierarchy defined by INAC (INAC, 2002). The INAC listing of communities includes the legal list of Indian reserves and Indian settlements as well as a selection of other Census sub-divisions (CSD) types selected from Saskatchewan, Yukon and Northwest Territories. It is the same as the listing used by the department to report on reserve population counts from the Census. A total of 539 First Nations were available for analysis for the purpose of this study. Other Canadian communities excludes those communities identified as Inuit communities or as First Nations for a total of 4095 communities. Both First Nations and Other Canadian communities were located in all Canadian territories and provinces with the exception of Nunavut which contained Inuit communities only.

The purpose of comparing Inuit communities to these two groupings separately is to avoid inducing bias. As First Nations typically present lower levels of well-being (McHardy and O'Sullivan, 2004) and because they are sufficient to influence overall Canadian scores, a decision was made to present comparisons of Inuit communities to these two sets of communities separately.

5. Time-Series Component

When assessing disparities between communities in terms of well-being, it is important to take time into consideration. Demographic changes, migration to and from communities and economic developments are just a few of the factors which, over time, may affect well-being either positively or negatively.

In order to reflect such potential changes in the well-being of communities, CWB scores have been calculated for three censuses— 1991, 1996 and 2001. This time-series obviously involves concrete steps to ensure that communities may be compared adequately over time. It is worth mentioning that out of the Inuit communities initially available for analysis in the CWB database, all 51 were also deemed as "consistent geographic entities" over time. This was neither the case for First Nations nor Other Canadian communities, several of which could not be tracked over time⁶.

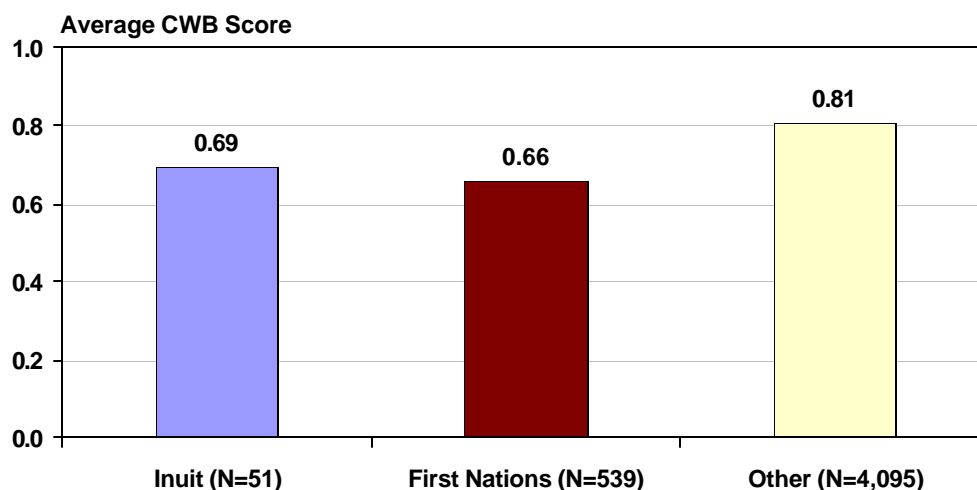
⁶ In some cases, the boundaries of communities are changed so extensively between censuses that the communities cannot really be regarded as the same entities. For an in-depth description of the steps taken to ensure comparability as well as details on the resulting set of communities, see O'Sullivan and McHardy, 2004.

6. Results

6.1 Overall Community Well-Being Scores

Figure 1 indicates that the average CWB score for Inuit communities is slightly higher than that of First Nations but that both are much lower than the average score for Other Canadian communities. This initial finding points to the overall lower level of well-being in Inuit communities and First Nations when compared to other Canadian communities.

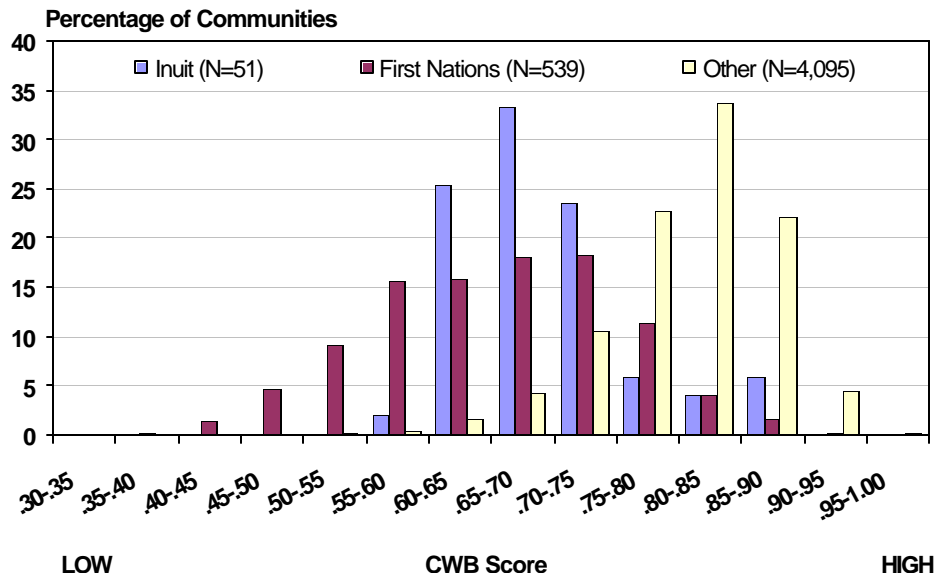
Figure 1
Average Community Well-Being Score by Community Type, 2001



Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

Figure 2 further illustrates the clear disparities between Inuit, First Nations and Other Canadian communities. Inuit communities are typically distributed towards the middle point of the CWB range. When compared with Other Canadian communities, it can also be observed that their CWB scores are overall higher than those of First Nations who are more concentrated towards the bottom of the range of scores. It is also worth mentioning that Inuit communities while showing a significant disparities in their levels of well-being are more densely concentrated than First Nations whose range of scores is wider and spreads across more categories. In other words, Inuit communities tend to share more “even levels” of well-being than First Nations for which the gap between “have” and “have not” communities is wider.

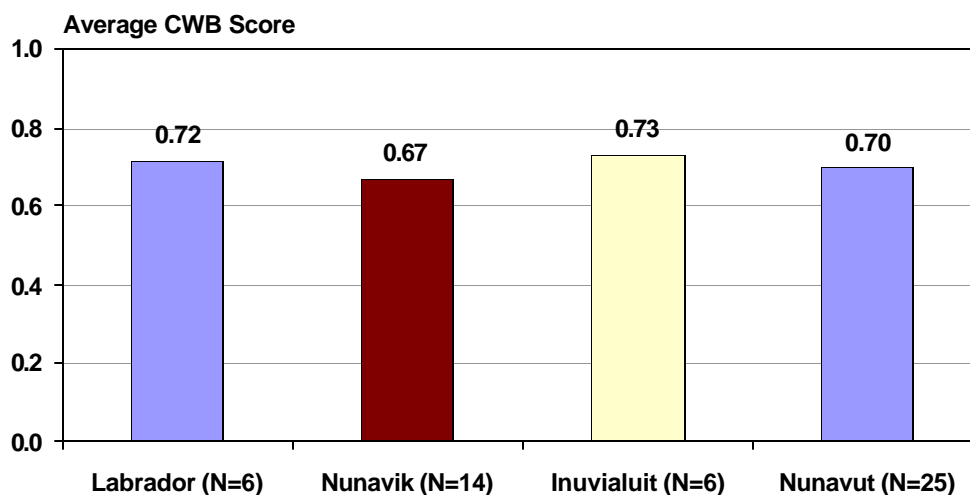
Figure 2
Distribution of Inuit, First Nations and Other Canadian Communities by
Community Well-Being Score, 2001



Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

Inuit communities can vary in terms of well-being across regions. As such, looking at the national picture may in fact hide such interregional variations. Figure 3 presents average CWB scores for Inuit communities by region. It can be seen that Nunavik presents the lowest average CWB when compared to other regions.

Figure 3
Average Community Well-Being Score by Inuit Region, 2001



Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

Table 2 further breaks down the distribution of Inuit communities by looking at the distribution of CWB scores by Inuit region. While it deals with very small numbers, it can nevertheless be observed that well-being scores are not distributed evenly across regions with Nunavik showing lower levels of scores. This finding points to the distribution of CWB scores across Inuit communities in Canada. This kind of disparity between lowest and highest communities in terms of their CWB scores was also previously observed to an even higher degree with First Nations communities (McHardy and O'Sullivan, 2004). While the average CWB score for all 51 Inuit communities is .69, the range of scores actually is quite large, going from a low of .58 to a high of .87.⁷

⁷ See Appendix B for a map representing CWB levels of Inuit communities for all regions.

Table 2
Community Well-Being (CWB): Distribution of Inuit Communities by Inuit Region, 2001

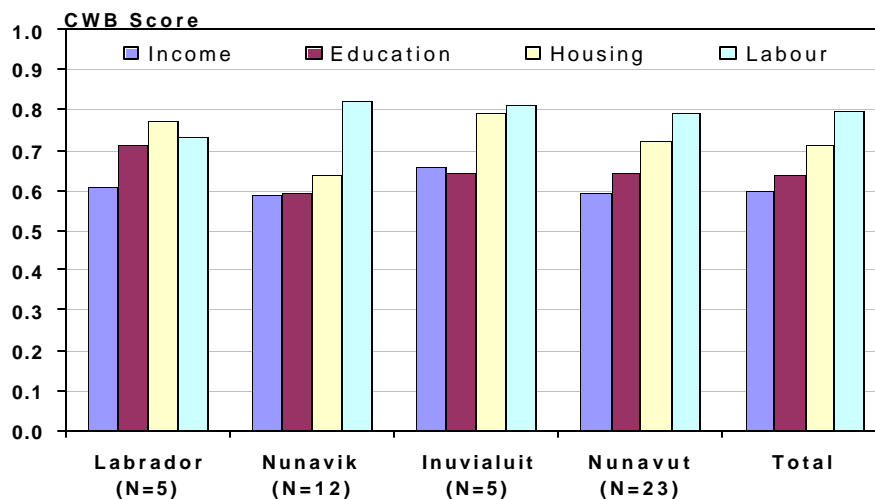
Region	CWB Score Range							Total
	0.55-0.60	0.60-0.65	0.65-0.70	0.70-0.75	0.75-0.80	0.80-0.85	0.85-0.90	
Labrador	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	6
Nunavik	1	6	3	3	1	0	0	14
Inuvialuit	0	1	2	2	0	0	1	6
Nunavut	0	5	10	6	1	2	1	25
Total	1	13	17	12	3	2	3	51

Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

6.2 Component Scores

As variations are outlined between Inuit regions on the overall CWB score, it is interesting to assess which components of the CWB may be responsible for the overall observed differences. Figure 4 shows that while all components show some variations from region to region, education and housing are the two components for which the larger variations are observed. For both of these components, lowest scores are observed in Nunavik which explains the overall lower scores obtained by that region. It is worth mentioning that on the other hand, Nunavik shows the highest level of the labour component of the CWB. Another interesting element is observed for the Labrador communities which show the highest level of the education component while also presenting the lowest labour characteristics. This last finding highlights the specific economic and labour market characteristics of this region in contrast to other Inuit regions.

Figure 4
Community Well-Being Average Component Scores by Inuit Region, 2001



Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

Housing in Inuit Communities: Quality and Quantity

The CWB index housing score is comprised of two distinct measures: quantity and quality. The resulting scores presented here are thus an aggregation of these two measures, each equally weighted.

Upon assessing each sub-component separately, it can be seen that Inuit communities typically show lower levels of quantity than of quality. The average Inuit community score for quantity was 0.69 while the sub-component score for quality was 0.75. This specific pattern is different than what is seen in either First Nations or Other Canadian communities where quality is usually more of an issue than quantity. Even when looking only at Northern non-Inuit communities (either First Nations or Other Canadian communities), we see that while overall scores are lower than in the south, quality typically is more of an issue than quantity.

This pattern highlights the significance of the issues associated with crowding in Inuit communities. The Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate at INAC has partnered with the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami to produce reports on several main themes linked to Inuit communities. These reports point to the high proportions of multiple family households and the high fecundity levels of Inuit (INAC, forthcoming).

When assessing individual CWB components by community type, interesting differences are highlighted. Differences by component are not systematic between the three community types examined in this report. Table 3 shows that Inuit communities fall about midway between First Nations and Other Canadian communities on the income component, slightly behind First Nations in education, slightly above First Nations in terms of housing and very close to other Canadian communities on labour force. When looking more closely at these patterns, it can further be seen that First Nations minimum score on each component are much lower than those of Inuit communities which tend to be closer to the minimum observed for Other Canadian communities.

Table 3
Average Community Well-Being Component Score by Community Type, Canada, 2001

Community Type	Income	Education	Housing	Labour
Inuit	0.57	0.64	0.71	0.80
First Nation	0.47	0.68	0.69	0.69
Other Canadian	0.70	0.76	0.93	0.81

Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

6.3 Community Well-Being Time Series

The evolution of the CWB score in Inuit communities between 1991 and 2001 is presented in Table 4. It can be seen that while scores have progressed during that period, much of the growth has been observed between 1991 and 1996. This finding mirrors what has been previously found for First Nations (O'Sullivan and McHardy, 2004).

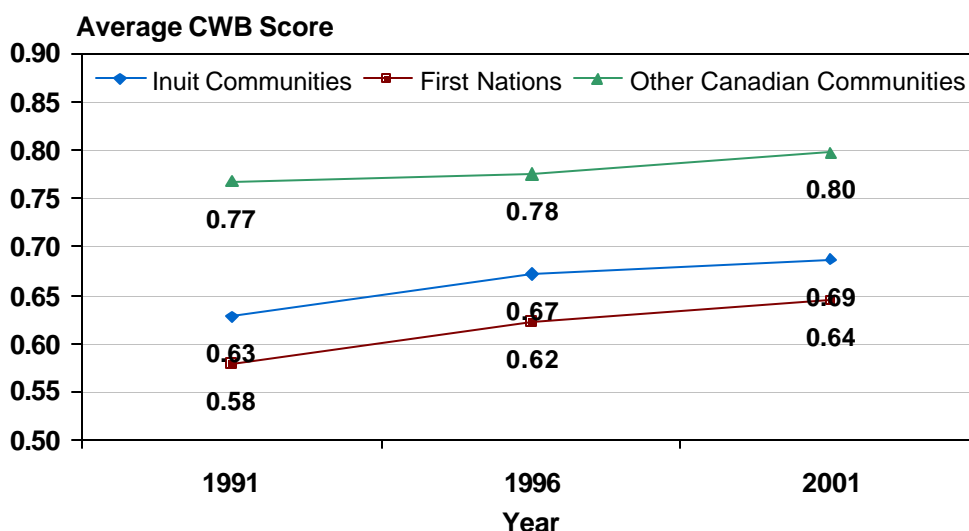
Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of the CWB Index Across Time for Inuit Communities (N=51)

Census Year	Minimum CWB Score	Maximum CWB Score	Average CWB Score	Standard Deviation
1991	0.50	0.85	0.63	0.078
1996	0.58	0.84	0.67	0.069
2001	0.57	0.87	0.69	0.068

Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

The increase of well-being of Inuit communities, First Nations and Other Canadian communities is further compared in Figure 5 and Table 5. An almost perfect parallelism is found between the two types of Aboriginal communities along with a closure of the gaps with Other Canadian communities in the first intercensal period (1991-1996) followed by a somewhat more static gap in the subsequent period (1996-2001).

Figure 5
CWB Average Scores by Community Type, 1991-2001



Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

Table 5
Community Well-Being Gaps Between Community Types, 1991-2001

Gap Between Community	1991	1996	2001
Other Canadian - Inuit	0.14	0.10	0.11
Other Canadian - First Nations	0.19	0.15	0.15
First Nation - Inuit	-0.05	-0.05	-0.04

Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

When looking at the individual evolution of CWB scores for Inuit communities in the 1991-2001 time period, it can be seen that the vast majority (47 communities) have seen some form of increase in their well-being while just a few communities (4) have actually experienced a decline, with two of these actually showing a very small decline of .01. Table 6 further assesses changes between 1991 and 2001 and shows that the average variation of scores for Inuit communities is comparable to that of First Nations and that both are experiencing higher positive variations than Other Canadian communities. It can also be seen that the highest increase in Inuit communities is much smaller than that of both First Nations and Other Canadian communities. On the other hand, the largest decline is similar to the largest decline in First Nations with both showing smaller declines than Other Canadian communities.

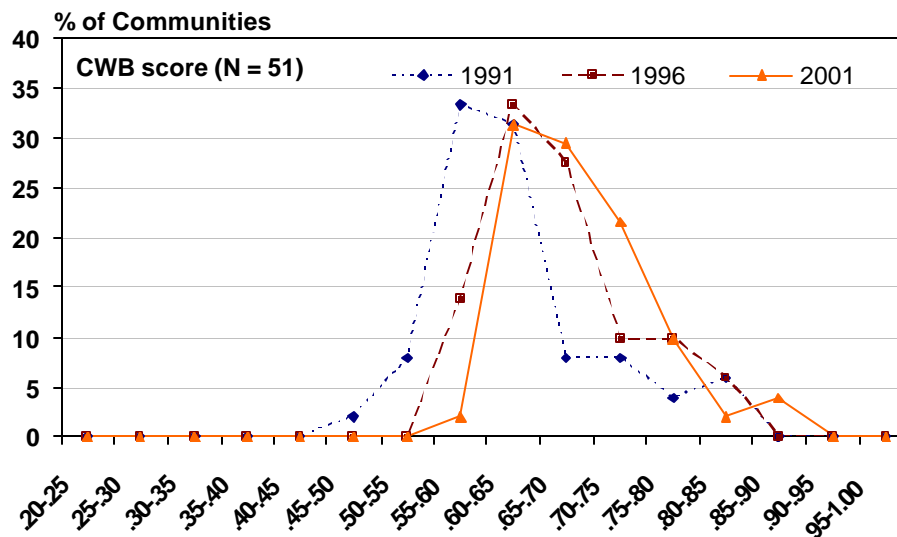
Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of the Evolution of Community Well-Being Scores by
Community Type, Between 1991 and 2001

Community Type	Minimum Variation	Maximum Variation	Average Variation	Standard Deviation
Inuit	-0.06	0.14	0.06	0.04
First Nations	-0.07	0.29	0.07	0.06
Other Canadian	-0.17	0.26	0.03	0.04

Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

Over time and in general, the distribution of the CWB scores of Inuit communities present a shift to the right, while retaining the same shape which can be seen in Figure 6. This is associated with an “across the board” improvement of well-being in Inuit communities and is consistent with what is observed for both First Nations and Other Canadian communities (see O’Sullivan and McHardy, 2004, for these data).

Figure 6
Inuit Communities CWB Distribution Over Time: 1991-2001



Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.

7. Conclusion

The CWB index is a first step towards a deeper understanding of the socioeconomic conditions in Inuit communities and of their well-being relative to First Nations and to the broader Canadian population. The descriptive statistics contained herein illustrates clearly the marked disparity in socioeconomic well-being between Inuit communities and Other Canadian communities. This places Inuit communities closer to First Nations than to Other Canadian communities in terms of well-being. These statistics also highlighted the great disparities that exist between Inuit communities and have shown that some communities are enjoying fairly high levels of well-being while others are faced with more difficulties.

While this report highlights the relative well-being of Inuit communities respective to Canada's First Nations and Other Canadian communities, it should be kept in mind that these Inuit communities present some key characteristics that can influence such direct comparison. First and foremost, Inuit communities are located very far from urban centres, in isolated northern locations. This is associated with high costs, especially when it comes to goods which have to be «imported» from southern locations. As such, high cost of living probably has an impact on income which is incidentally the lowest component score in Inuit communities. On the other hand, a widely acknowledge traditional economy still exists in many communities (Usher, Duhaime, and Searles, 2003) which may contribute to soften the impact of cost of living on the overall well-being.

In this article, Inuit communities are compared to all First Nations and all Other Canadian communities, regardless of size and location. If, as proposed above, the specific geography of Inuit communities has an impact on well-being, it would be interesting to compare Inuit with other Northern communities. Future research plans are aimed at this very issue and will try to establish a comparable community framework which could help in refining the findings of this study.

Results from the initial CWB analysis should not be perceived as posing a final “diagnostic” on Inuit communities. Several factors which may play a key role in the well-being of individual inhabitants of Inuit communities are not discussed here. As such, the analysis provided here can serve as a starting point in assessing issues associated with well-being. Further analysis aimed at causes and correlates of community well-being are required. Elements such as the cultural composition of communities in terms of Inuit versus other cultural/ethnic identities, isolation, size and the like would refine our understanding of the relative well-being of these Inuit communities.

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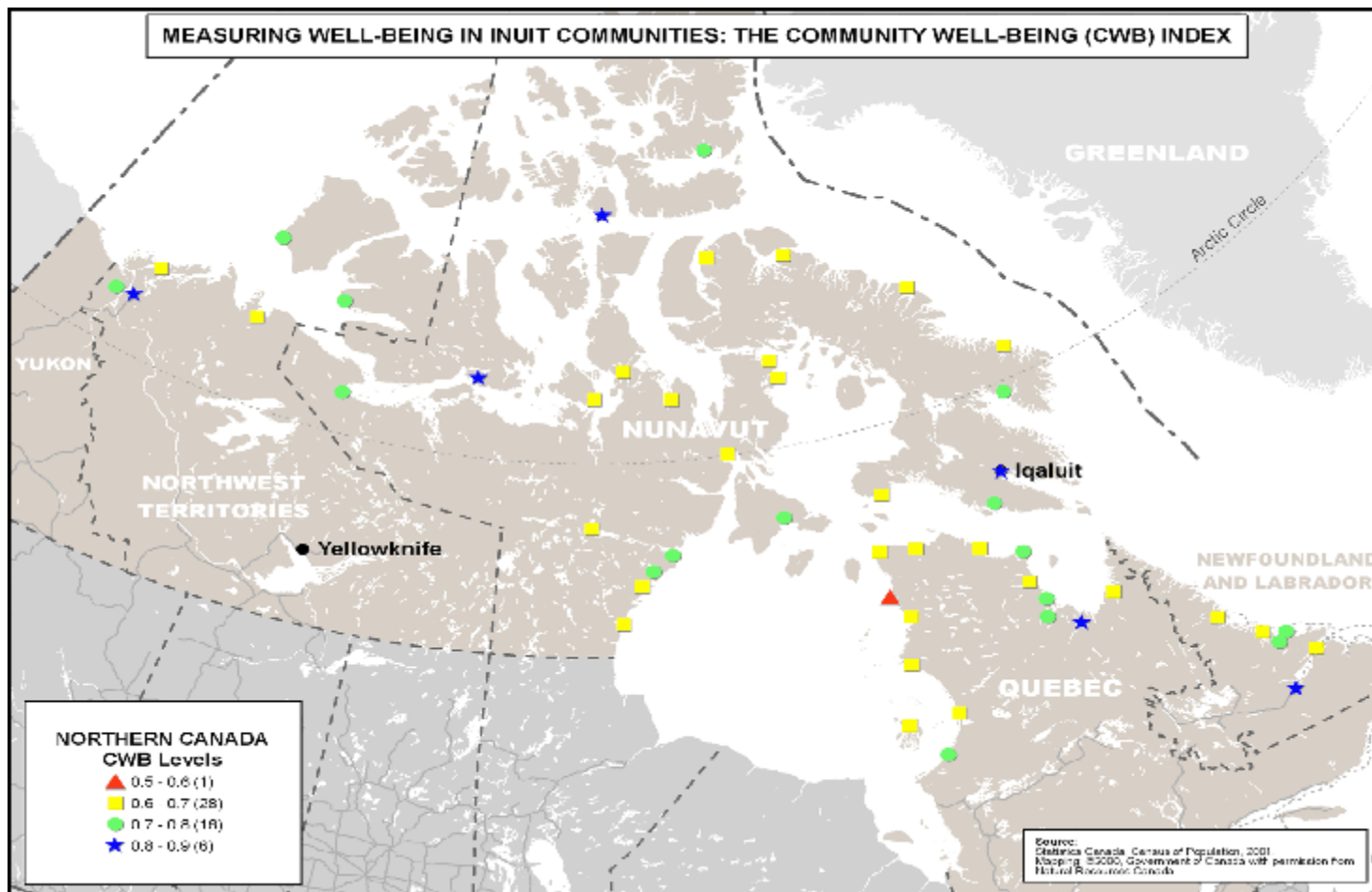
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Appendix A
Table of Inuit Communities

Region	Name	2001 Population
Labrador	Rigolet	317
	Happy Valley-Goose Bay	7,969
	Makkovik	384
	Hopedale	559
	Nain	1,159
	Postville	215
Nunavik	Kuujuarapik	555
	Umiujaq	348
	Inukjuak	1,294
	Kangiqsualujuaq	710
	Kuujuuaq	1,932
	Tasiujaq	228
	Aupaluk	159
	Kangirsuk	436
	Quaqtaq	305
	Puvirnituq	1,287
	Akulivik	472
	Kangiqsujaq	536
	Salluit	1,072
	Ivujvik	298
Inuvialuit	Paulatuk	286
	Inuvik	2,894
	Aklavik	632
	Tuktoyaktuk	930
	Sachs Harbour	114
	Holman	398
Nunavut	Sanikiluaq	684
	Iqaluit	5,236
	Kimmitut	433
	Cape Dorset	1,148
	Pangnirtung	1,276
	Qikiqtarjuaq	519
	Hall Beach	609
	Igloolik	1,286
	Clyde River	785
Arctic Bay	646	

Pond Inlet	1,220
Resolute	215
Grise Fiord	163
Coral Harbour	712
Arviat	1,899
Whale Cove	305
Rankin Inlet	2,177
Chesterfield Inlet	345
Baker Lake	1,507
Repulse Bay	612
Kugaaruk	605
Kugluktuk	1,212
Cambridge Bay	1,309
Gjoa Haven	960
Taloyoak	720

Appendix B Map 1 Levels of Well-Being in Inuit Communities



Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census.