

# A multidisciplinary approach to governance in the Barents Region

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*Monica Tennberg (ed.)*

***Politics of Development in the Barents Region***

*Rovaniemi, Lapland University Press, 2012. 384 p.*

*Politics of Development in the Barents Region* is a new book that aims ambitiously to “go beyond the study of regional institution-building for sustainable development”<sup>1</sup>. The book consists of 14 chapters and an introduction; the chapters are organized into three parts: 1) Rationalities of governing (four chapters), 2) Governance in practice (five chapters), and 3) Governing everyday life (five chapters). The book is based on multidisciplinary research co-operation between Russian and Nordic researchers, and followed four workshops and two conferences held between 2010 and 2012. The book is the main product of the researcher network, and it presents a new generation of scholars who are interested in the Barents region and its sustainable development. The book is edited by Monica Tennberg, who is a research professor at the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland. She is also the coordinator of the researcher network.

The first part of the book discusses issues related to state policy and its transition in post-Soviet times in the Russian North, soft (and softer than soft) law co-operation in the Barents region, legal pluralism and corporate social responsibility in the context of forest companies, as well as political and legal climate governance. The second part focuses on local self-government in the Russian part of the Barents region, pitfalls and

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<sup>1</sup> Tennberg, M., Riabova, L. and Espiritu, A. (2012). Introduction to politics of development in the Barents region. In Tennberg, M. (ed.) *Politics of Development in the Barents Region*. Rovaniemi, Lapland University Press.

challenges for Finnish projects in the Murmansk region, sustainable transportation and planning in the Far North, the issue of trust in the timber supply chain, and a multilevel governance perspective on renewable energy policies in the Barents region. The last part highlights the happiness of Northern Swedes, Pomor fishing villages' rights to traditional use of resources, life as an immigrant in Rovaniemi, and the idea of gendered economic development in the North. The last chapter presents some conclusions and outlines suggestions for further research.

On the whole, the book is an important and topical contribution to the issues of governance and sustainable development in the far north. It successfully highlights both the structures of governance in various contexts and the challenges of finding a balance between economic growth, human development and environmental considerations. As such, the book delivers what it promises, going well beyond the official and established structures of the co-operation in the Barents region. Accordingly, the book demonstrates that supranational 'neoliberal' regionalism results in a degree of asymmetry (which is often tolerated by the nation states) and alternative, often competing regional agendas and aspirations that occasionally splinter the region instead of helping in its construction. The chapters underline that there is a multiplicity of scales, actors and interests within the region. In a relational manner, some chapters point out that the politics of development is also defined from outside the region. This is the case particularly in the chapters that focus on the supply chain in the timber industry and state policy in the Russian north.

However, some points of criticism must be raised. Thematically, the book is rather loosely organized, particularly towards the end. Some chapters in the last part appear to go somewhat beyond the scope of the book and are not very well linked to the book's main focal points. Although sustainable development is a wide-ranging concept (like the politics of development), better interconnectedness of the chapters would have made the book thematically more uniform. Although the multidisciplinary approach is to be praised, it thus entails some thematic vagueness. Moreover, in a manner that is reminiscent of the fragmented nature of Barents co-operation as a whole, some chapters go well beyond the Barents region and some focus on only a small part of it, not anchoring themselves to the Barents region as such particularly well. With respect to that, it would have been interesting to read more about whether the multi-level governance in Barents co-operation has actually had a transforming effect on the issues associated with sustainable development, given the fact that the recent trend of neoliberalism and geo-economization tends to emphasize competitiveness, business and international

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trade networks. However, the chapters of the book are, as single articles, interesting, well written and informative for the most part. They also contribute to the discussions related to multilevel governance.

At the end of the book, some conclusions and suggestions for further research are made. The most tangible suggestion is to develop a joint Barents research program that would enable scholars to critically study the relationship between regional dynamics and sustainable development. Future studies should not only develop long-term Nordic-Russian research partnerships, but also challenge the dominant economically driven discourses of sustainable development and highlight issues related to various governance practices. While this idea deserves full support, it should also be considered whether there is a need for more research on the dynamics of cross-border cooperation and how supranational regionalization occurs through the territory/network interplay.

This book can be recommended to all who are interested in multilevel governance in the Far North. While it could have placed more emphasis on the transformation of the politics of development in the context of the official Barents co-operation since its establishment in 1993, it nevertheless presents several extremely interesting topics dealing with diverse issues of governing and governance in different scales and contexts.