

# Barents in the air!

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This has been a good autumn for Barents Studies. The Barents Encyclopedia, a project which many of us know from years back, is now complete and has led to the recent publication of *The Barents Region: A transnational history of subarctic Northern Europe*. The book covers 1200 years of history in the region from different perspectives: state formation and borders, social history, economic systems and industrialization, regionalism, and globalisation. This history started with small local communities and hunting groups connected to networks of farmers and traders. The local networks still function today, but “now within the framework of global market and the unforeseen risks of remote powers that depopulate the countryside, environmental problems that defy management on either the local or national level, a mass media society that has moved from hegemony to autonomism, migrations and ethnic inter-marriages that threat minority cultures and languages...” (Elenius 2015, 471).

Such current and future challenges in the region are discussed and assessed in another comprehensive and ambitious project. Under the Arctic Council and AMAP (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme), the project will assess climatic and socio-economic changes, their impacts, ways of adaptation, and options for adaptation measures in the short term (2030) and the long term (2080) in the Arctic region in general and the Barents Region in particular. The aim of this project, Adaptation Actions for a Changing Arctic (AACCA), is to “enable more informed, timely and responsive policy and decision making in a rapidly changing Arctic” and help local and decision-makers to develop adaptation measures and tools. The Barents Regional Integrated Report (BRIT), based on multidisciplinary and broad international collaboration by experts from different parts of the region, is due to be published in 2016.

Some of these questions are also covered in the new issue of Barents Studies, the first to come out – only electronically from now on – after project support ended from the Kolarctic CBC Programme 2013–2015. This issue features two peer-reviewed scientific articles, a research communication, a book review and introductions of young scholars

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of the region. Collaboration between the partners – the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland, The Barents Institute at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø, and the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the Kola Science Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences – ensures the continuation of the journal while we are exploring funding opportunities also for a printed version of the journal. The journal has now been recognised (level 1) in the journal ranking system in Norway.

This issue of *Barents Studies* represents the diversity of questions and concerns in the region. Larsson and his colleagues investigate one of the mysteries of Barents Studies: the Swedish approach, or lack thereof, to its northern, Arctic region. The authors discuss Swedish territorial thinking with the concept of “scalar politics”, which challenges set territorial boundaries and administrative responsibilities. The result is an analysis of complex associational relationships with varying spatial claims. After studying data from over 20 municipalities in the two northernmost counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten, the article concludes that the most relevant scales for territorial thinking in Sweden relate to national and EU territorial policies rather than to competing constructs focused on Nordic, Barents and Arctic territorialization.

Our second research article, by Sander Goes, focuses on concepts of informal networks in higher education institutions (HEIs). The article highlights the differences in Western and especially Norwegian and Russian thinking on informal networks. The nature of the article is more theoretical, as it aims at a comparative conceptual analysis of understanding the informal networks. These informal networks operate in both public and private organizations, including socially based and employment-related networks within these organizations. Such networks are often the result of many years of close cooperation in student exchange, research projects, and joint academic programmes. The author claims that understanding both Western and Russian perspectives to informal networks is essential in order to describe them across different HEIs in the Barents Region and to study their impact on the formal decision-making process.

An extensive research communication informs us about the main findings of the SUMILCERE project (Sustainable Mining, Local Communities and Environmental Regulation). The authors tackle three dimensions of “sustainable mining”: economic, social and environmental considerations, and identify factors relevant for it. In terms of environmental sustainability, protection of the environment calls for a framework and functionality of environmental regulation. To secure economic sustainability, one has to secure the competitiveness of the mining industry in light of environmental

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regulation and its enforcement. And, finally, social sustainability hinges on public participation, social acceptance of mining projects in their different phases, and the protection of indigenous cultural rights. The authors conclude that “smart environmental regulation and minimum standards without compromises set the main boundaries for sustainable mining that leave no room for compromises and is essential for economic and social sustainability”.

The end of summer vacations also brought some sad news. A colleague and a friend from years back, Vladimir Didyk, Research Director of the Luzin Institute of Economic Studies, Kola Science Centre of Russian Academy, died unexpectedly in the summer. As Larissa Riabova, his close colleague, says in the obituary, “since the early 1990s Vladimir participated in international scientific collaboration and was one of the enthusiastic Russian pioneers of research cooperation in the Barents Region and beyond”. We miss Vladimir.

## REFERENCE

Elenius, L., 2015, chief editor. The Barents Region: A transnational history of subarctic Northern Europe. Oslo: Pax Forlag.

