

Back to our homes, back to the Barents roots

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This issue of Barents Studies is published in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected our lives in many respects. One of such impacts was bringing us back to our homes, both literally and figuratively. The pandemic reminded us that global challenges need local solutions, and for many researchers in social science, the local level implications of global processes became of greater interest than before.

For Barents social scientists, it was always of relevance to evaluate economic, political and other developments in the region from a local perspective. This issue focuses on small remote local communities in the Barents Region and contains papers based on the results of the NEO-BEAR project – "Neoliberal governance and sustainable development in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region". NEO-BEAR, led by Dr. Monica Tennberg (Arctic Centre, University of Lapland), was conducted in 2012-2015 and involved researchers from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The project aimed to study the role of neoliberal governance as a catalyst for sustainable development in the Barents Region. Neoliberal policies of government emphasise freedom and competition, and the expansion of the market and private sector engagement in all domains of social life. Ideas about sustainable development and neoliberal governance being spread worldwide are often viewed as conflicting. Rounding out the collection is the addition of one article that was not part of the NEO-BEAR project, but nonetheless is significantly relevant in the discussions of sustainability and infrastructural development and its indelible links with history of the region.

This journal issue was planned to be published by the end of 2017, but for many reasons (financial, practical and others, including the pandemic), it comes out with a delay. Most of the papers, young researchers' presentations, and authors' details contain information as of the end of 2017. This issue features four peer-reviewed scientific articles that foreground four studies located in the Barents Euro-Arctic region,

two book reviews, and three self-introductions of young scholars who dedicate their research to the Barents Region.

The contributions to this issue investigate how ideas about sustainable development and neoliberal governance meet in community development in the Barents Region. The first article, by Thomas Ejdemo from Luleå University of Technology, discusses sustainable local development in the context of a short-lived mining boom. Based on a case study from Pajala in Sweden, the research shows that the mining boom had a significant positive impact on the local economy until Kaunisvaara mine closed owing to bankruptcy. The study concludes that the mining boom failed to provide sustainable development and suggests that the local economy would have been better off without this turbulent experience, as the local effort consumed by preparing for the mining era could instead have been devoted to more lasting activities.

Elena Tonkova and Tatyana Nosova (Syktyvkar State University) examine the cultural policies and practices in Ust-Tsilma municipality (Komi Republic, Russia) from neo-liberalism and sustainability perspectives. This study shows that the cultural sphere in Ust-Tsilma is moving towards the neoliberal principles of organization of life, marked by economic and managerial efficiency, cultural consumerism, state-private financial partnership, and contract-based relations. The authors argue that a sustainability approach to culture (giving priority to social-cultural capital, cultural access and participation) is highly relevant for the Ust-Tsilma municipality and for the rural communities in general because it brings an adaptive potential for local development.

Larissa Riabova (Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the Kola Science Centre, Russian Academy of Sciences) addresses sustainable development of small Arctic communities through the lens of seven community capitals. A study from Teriberka, a coastal village in Arctic Russia, confirms that the balanced development of community capitals is both a path to and an indicator of sustainable development in communities facing neoliberalism. The study reveals that initiatives undertaken mainly by outside actors have not invested Teriberka's capitals in a balanced way and have thereby not promoted sustainable development. The study concludes that in communities with scarce human, social, and political capital this model can work effectively only if local interests are not ignored by the state and external business actors.

Ritva Kylli (University of Oulu) and Juha Saunavaara (Hokkaido University) investigate transport infrastructure in the Sámi area of Finnish Lapland of 1920-1930. The

paper shows how the modernisation process accelerated the use of natural resources, and the first roads in northernmost Finland facilitated mining industry and logging sites. The study emphasises the importance of understanding indigenous peoples as active agents, some of whom lobbied for plans to build roads. While the Sámi resistance to roads referred to their ability to erode the traditional way of life, the supporters underlined the benefits to be gained from the improved connectivity. The authors note that the ideas which have been discussed more recently – such as remoteness as an asset and the value of being disconnected – were already present in the development debates in the early twentieth century.

Kylli and Saunavaara remind us that looking back at how communities in the Barents Region responded to the multiple and sometimes difficult challenges can help to plan for the future. In this respect, we believe that this issue, though delayed, has value and gives insights about how small remote communities can develop further under pressing circumstances.

This issue also contains book reviews of “*The Barents Region – A Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe*”, chief editor of which is Lars Elenius, Professor of History and Education, Umeå University, the review is offered by Adrian Braun; and that of “*Society, Environment and Human security in the Arctic Barents Region*”, co-edited by Research Professor Kamrul Hossain, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, and Dr. Dorothée Cambou, University of Helsinki, the review is written by Yulia Zaika. Finally, there are three exciting essays of young researchers from the Barents Region about their work relevant to the region.

We thank the authors for their efforts, patience and understanding attitudes, and the peer-reviewers for the high-quality voluntary service to the academic community. We are pleased with the excellent copy-editing done by Pirkko Hautamäki. And I express my gratitude to my co-editors Monica Tennberg and Aileen A. Espiritu for their continuous support and friendship.

These days, because of the pandemic, many of us stay tied to our homes. In the time of closed borders it is natural to turn our attention inwards, to our Barents roots, and this issue of Barents Studies gives us a chance to do so. At the same time, despite the disconnections, we continue to work together supporting the cross-border Barents cooperation, also by publishing this issue.