

# Contrasting territorial policy perspectives for Northern Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

Northern Sweden is increasingly influenced by competing social interests striving for advantages and claiming territorial influence through “scalar politics”. The strategic deployment of scalar conceptions is an integral part of policy making and implementation. Increasing use of varying scalar conceptions follows from “new spatial planning” practices. Set territorial delineations and administrative responsibilities are opened up to complex associational relationships with varying spatial claims.

Focusing on territorial policies, this paper examines what orientations there are in territorial policy development in and for northern Sweden. The 29 municipalities embraced by the two northernmost counties Norrbotten and Västerbotten are the geographical delimitation of the study. As the analysis shows, the dominating scalar constructs relate to national and EU territorial policies rather than to competing constructs focused on Nordic, Barents and Arctic territorialization.

**Keywords:** *Territorial policy, scalar politics, spatial planning, northern Sweden, Arctic*

## INTRODUCTION AND AIM

The northern Swedish county of Västerbotten was established by the Swedish Government in 1638 in order to coordinate and implement state policies at regional level. Some 200 years later it was divided into the counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten, still with the same functions. While discussions on merging these and other northern counties have taken place during the last ten years, the counties still exist in their long-standing form (SOU 2007: 10). In the post-war period, however, a number of territorial policies have emerged claiming influence in these counties. National regional policies were introduced in the 1960s, and merged into European Union regional policy in the mid-1990s. Nordic regional cooperation was established in the 1970s, and 1996 saw the founding of the Arctic Council. No longer are attempts to exert influence on social processes through “scalar politics” (MacKinnon 2008) a state-run and Swedish affair only.

Rather, these changes are examples of “new spatial planning” where set territorial delineations and administrative responsibilities are opened up towards a “more complex relational world of associational relationships which stretch across a range of geographies” (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009, 619). These processes of (re)scaling, in turn, are consequences of new forms of neoliberal governance (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009; Brenner 2001), where a larger number of actors claim influence. Actors striving for social change can use scale as “a way of framing conceptions of reality” (Delaney and Leitner 1997, 94–95) through scalar politics (MacKinnon 2010). Importantly, these framings “can have both rhetorical and material consequences – [they] are often contradictory and contested and are not necessarily enduring” (Marston 2000, 221).

Actors engaged in scalar politics compete over influence. Those that are targeted and/or involved need to develop capacities to act within new and sometimes contradictory “spaces of engagement” (Cox 1998). At least since the mid-1990s, more intense scalar politics have challenged municipal actors’ long-term ambitions in order to gain influence. Municipal land-use planning provides a long-term and increasingly strategic perspective which can be contrasted against external actors’ ambitions to influence local territorial development. In this context, our study aims to examine scaling ambitions through territorial policies in northern Sweden. What are the orientations of territorial policy development in and for northern Sweden? And, what kind of influence on spatial organizing and hence planning have external policies been able to exert?

This study focuses on the 29 municipalities embraced by the two northernmost counties in Sweden, Norrbotten and Västerbotten, and the territorial policies that the state and other actors, nationally and internationally, impose on them (see map 1). In order to better understand contrasting policy aspirations, this paper rests on an analysis of policy documents representing local interests through municipal land-use plans, documents representing non-local interests through regional development policies, and documents from the Nordic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the European Union, and the Arctic Council.



Map 1. The counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten and 29 municipalities included in the study.

## CONCEPTUALIZING SCALAR POLITICS IN AND FOR NORTHERN SWEDEN

From a close reading of scalar debates within human geography and related disciplines, MacKinnon proposes that “it is often not scale per se that is the prime object of contestation between social actors, but rather specific processes and institutionalized practices that are themselves differently scaled” (MacKinnon 2010, 22–23; see also Brenner 2001). Fraser (2010, 332) agrees, stating that human actors “‘produce’ or ‘use’ scale in all manner of attempts to create some sort of advantage, to establish associations, connections, or solidarities”. Once established, they may bring material consequences. Interest-driven ambitions and aspirations hence make social actors engage in “scalar politics” (MacKinnon 2010) and “scalar practices” (Moore 2008; Fraser 2010).

MacKinnon (2010) suggests that scalar politics is defined through four elements. The first element is the comprehension that scale is an inherent quality in many political projects, especially those that opt for influencing territorial coordination and development. Political relations define the scalar construction. A second element is the realization that there is a “strategic deployment of scale by various actors, organizations and movements” (MacKinnon 2010, 29). This relates to the inclusion and exclusion of actors and interests through scaling practices. The third element concerns the recognition that these processes are not new, hence they are played out in a context with already existing scalar structures (see also Brenner 2001). The existing material and discursive structures do interact with new scalar constructs. This is, as a fourth element, where new scalar arrangements are created: “the interaction occurs between inherited scalar structures and emergent social and political projects, stressing that agency lies with the social forces advancing such projects (MacKinnon 2010, 31). Scalar practices then are those “processes through which specific scalar configurations solidify in consciousness and practice, and the effects these developments have upon social, political and cultural relations” (Moore 2008, 214).

One of the more prominent social forces in Sweden is municipalities (*kommuner* in Swedish). “Municipality” signifies both institutionalized territorial space at the local scale and the governing and managing organization of this territory. Understanding municipalities as “spaces of dependence” – those “more-or-less localized social relations upon which we depend for the realization of essential interests and for which there are no substitutes elsewhere; they define place-specific conditions for our material well-being and our sense of significance” (Cox 1998, 2) – points towards (municipal) agency. Municipal governments need to ensure material, social, and emotional well-being for their inhabitants, businesses, and organizations (Cox 1998; Luukkonen 2011). They need to deliver services.

In striving to realize their interests, municipalities need to be in charge of capacities to exercise territorial power. Ambitions towards territorialization express political aims and assumptions, as part of “constant reconstruction as [territories] become more relational and characterized by different functionalities” (Luukkonen and Moilanen 2012, 485). In securing and strengthening that capacity, “actors seek to construct ties – or are constrained to engage – with other, variously scaled centres of social power” (Luukkonen 2011, 256). While establishing these ties, social actors “construct a different form of space which is called a space of engagement [...]. This form of space is seen as providing a way of achieving resources or a justification for the existence of the spaces of dependence” (Luukkonen 2011, 256; Cox 1998). Resources flowing between territorially fixed spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement contribute to the associational establishment of “soft spaces” (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009) through scalar politics. Because territorial politics and land-use planning cross and merge policy sectors by their very nature, several and overlapping spaces of engagement are created by the actors involved. This is where “multiple spatial units are established, differentiated, hierarchized and, under certain conditions, rejigged, reorganized and recalibrated in relation to one another” (Brenner 2001, 600).

Of specific importance here are regional policy aims. Northern Sweden has experienced changes in its relative status in national politics, from positive expectations on northern development and growth in a number of interests, settlements, economic opportunities, and social functions, to decreasing expectations and growth. The downturn established a rationale for state intervention through regional policies during the 1960s and later through EU regional policies. These policies are not neutral but are rather, like any space of engagement, driven by interests. As such, regional policy needs to be reviewed with regard to the implications for territorialization, and with a consideration of the constructed and political nature of regional description (Haughton and Counsell 2004; Legendijk and Cornford 2000).

Adding to this is the Arctic policy, which in Sweden is a recently established policy field. In relation to the conceptual division between spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement, the Arctic provokes a conceptual twist as there are no obvious localized interests: no state can as yet claim Arctic territorial sovereignty. Instead, geopolitical and climate-related changes have pushed the Arctic into a space of engagement. In other words, a great variety of interests are now positioning themselves in order to establish new or influence existing spaces of dependence (Dittmer et al. 2011). This resonates with the argument that there is so far no “single, discreet, geographically

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knowable Arctic” (Depledge 2013, 164), but rather an interest-driven competition for the territorializing of various claims – be they related to international governance, strategic military ambitions, or economic opportunities (Keskitalo 2004; Dittmer et al. 2011; Depledge 2013).

Different internal (municipalities pursuing their own interests) and external interests from local to supraregional level are played out through scalar politics within the same geographic areas (Brenner 2001; MacKinnon 2010). They deserve to be contrasted in order to clarify the different uses and assumptions on the northern region and its development (Neumann 1999).

## **METHOD AND MATERIAL**

As Albrechts et al. (2003, 128) note, strategic spatial plans and frameworks may in particular serve to “frame concepts and images to mobilize and fix attention”, to create “policy discourses through which specific decisions and practices are focused”, and eventually become territorialized (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009; Luukkonen 2011; Luukkonen and Moilanen 2012). In this analysis, 29 municipalities in the two northernmost counties of Sweden – Norrbotten and Västerbotten – are the main spaces of dependence analysed in relation to policy fields that make territorial claims on or within them. Including the spectrum from municipal land-use planning to supranational policy level makes it possible to comment on the relevance of the various spaces of engagement. Arguably, the most relevant interests will be those made manifest in various policy documents, i.e. where the policy, context, facts, theories, and interests are integrated to achieve explicit policy positions (Sharp and Richardson 2001).

This study is therefore based on an analysis of three categories of documents. The first – municipal planning documents – consists of two groups of documents. One group is municipal land-use plans. These plans were produced as an outcome of The Planning and Building Act (SFS 1987: 10), and were required to be regularly updated, but were often not. Therefore, the oldest plans included here date back to 1990. A new planning regulation came into force in 2011 (SFS 2010: 900), and plans produced after 2011 are omitted from this analysis. The other group consists of municipal policy documents on (economic) development, which are regularly less than ten years old. These policy documents are inspired by EU regional policies and are not mandatory, which means that some municipalities do not have them. Measures and actions until the year 2013 are included.

The second category – policy documents related to the national and EU regional development contexts, from international to regional-municipal level – includes a set of documents produced after Sweden’s entrance into the EU in 1995 until the end of the previous programming period in 2013. The third category of documents – policy statements and documents related to organizations targeting northern and Arctic issues – are included from 1993 until recently. The starting year 1993 indicates the launch of Barents Region cooperation.

Scalar politics includes a discursive dimension (Delaney and Leitner 1997; MacKinnon 2010, Marston 2000; Paasi 2004). Therefore, this analysis has drawn broadly on a discourse analytical approach inspired by Sharp and Richardson (2001). They identify several characteristics for analysis, three of which are especially important in this context in pointing towards the productive or transformative, change-focused, aspect of discourses. Sharp and Richardson note that social change through scalar politics is understood as 1) “shaped by and shaping changes in communication”, as 2) “shaped by and shaping changes in practices”, and as 3) “shaped by power, conceptualized as competition between differing systems of meaning or ‘discourses’” (Sharp and Richardson 2001, 198). Along these understandings, each land-use plan has been analysed in terms of municipal aspirations and how they have changed over time. All other documents have been analysed in similar ways, but then resting on a more diverse set of documents and adding an actor focus, which indicates contrasting perspectives on territorial development in the 29 northern municipalities.

Where original sources are in Nordic languages, translations of quotations have been made by the authors.

## **CHANGES IN MUNICIPAL PLANNING IN NORTHERN SWEDEN**

Swedish municipalities are governed by elected representatives and earn revenues from income taxation of their citizens. A second important source of income is transferred state funding for certain functions. Coupled with a wide range of responsibilities and a strong mandate in land-use planning, municipalities are important social actors. Once the Planning and Building Act (SFS 1987: 10) was adopted, comprehensive land-use plans were developed in the following years. Some of these first generation land-use plans in Norrbotten and Västerbotten are still valid, dating from 1990 and 1991. They follow the same structure. First, a description of basic characteristics of the municipality in terms of territorial and population size and structure, a brief mention of natural resources, and local industry and population structure. Second, a more detailed and

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thematic account of planning preconditions within business sectors and societal functions – agriculture, forestry, mining, reindeer herding, fishing, aquatic production; and roads, railroads, airports, power lines, hydro-power, tourism and recreation, and settlements.

Typical pieces of information from these early plans – using Boden municipality as a representative case – include that “agriculture and forestry have been the dominating industries... [t]hrough rationalization within these industries, rural areas have suffered a relatively severe thinning out” (Boden 1990, 24); on business development, “the public sector is the dominating employer and the number of employment opportunities within the local industry is significantly lower” (Boden 1990, 91); and on reindeer herding, “The reindeer herding industry presupposes that reindeer herding on grounds defined by customary law shall be able to adjust to conflicting interests. Development within areas of interest for reindeer herding should be managed so as to not disadvantage Sami interests” (Boden 1990, 44). The approach is one of aligning land-use to social needs and changes. Strategic visioning is mostly absent. Altogether these early land-use plans describe and provide municipal guidance strictly on the use of land and water resources.

The second generation of land-use plans were introduced in 1998. The largest municipality, Umeå, came first. Most of the plans in this selection were revised and renewed from 2001 until 2011, when the new Planning and Building Act was put in place (SFS 2010: 900). Umeå’s land-use plan from 1998 is a typical representative of the second generation of land-use planning, where land-use planning is complemented with sustainable development measures as a consequence of changes in planning regulations. The Government Bill 1994/95: 230 states that land-use planning shall be considered a part of Swedish environmental policy. It also states that all land-use plans need to be reviewed regularly, once each political term. These regulatory changes were put into effect in 1996, and consequently environmental concerns were included in comprehensive planning. Such concerns were further strengthened by the creation of the Environmental Code in national legislation (SFS 1998: 808).

Through the sustainability approach, Umeå’s land-use plan relates to more visionary and strategic policy making. While the bulk of the plan is made up of 18 thematic sections covering municipal land and water use as well as basic functions for everyday life, the intention in the plan is to:



*... develop Umeå towards a good, equal and sustainable living environment for people to settle and the local industry to develop; to strengthen Umeå as a centre for higher education, research, advanced health care, culture and communications, and as an innovator of Swedish industry; to strengthen Umeå's attractiveness and develop Umeå as one of the most dynamic municipalities in northern Europe. (Umeå 1998, 35, authors' translation).*

From these intentions follows one output objective: "Employment growth shall be such that women and men can work to the same extent and that employment levels can remain on a high level" (ibid., 35). A further change from previous land-use plans is that actors and factors outside the municipality are included in analyses and strategic agenda-setting. Swedish membership in the EU in 1995 is highly significant, not least because of the resulting access to development funds. For instance, relating to the policy change that the EU membership brought, it is noted that:

*... national development planning has recently established [economic] growth as a central objective for measures on regional level. [...] To master this development a pooling of regional resources needs to take place in order to, through cooperation, use all available opportunities in the inter-municipal competition for economic growth (Umeå 1998, 37, authors' translation).*

The most recent land-use plans show a more pronounced economic and competitive approach in understanding municipal development opportunities. The ambition is to identify and promote certain strengths and specificities. Social aspects of municipal development are also clearly stated, over time presenting a stronger focus on inclusion and diversity. Visioning and visionary statements and communication of comprehensive planning processes are more prominent features. While the first generation land-use plans included fairly static descriptions of municipal land use, recent plans and complementary growth programmes always develop a much stronger strategic approach. Northern municipalities of today are aware of and identify important spaces of engagement where municipal ambitions and interests can be forwarded.

## THE LOCAL–REGIONAL–EU LINKAGE

Applying a strategic approach in municipal planning allows linking municipal plans to new spaces of engagement, such as EU policy. The Regional Structural Fund Programme for Upper Norrland (Tillväxtverket 2011) is a key document in understanding EU influence on planning. The perhaps most decisive part of this influence is its provision of funding for development projects which should be co-funded by those actors that apply for project funding. The programme was produced through a partnership process where a wide set of actors from Västerbotten and Norrbotten counties influenced its contents. Guided by EU and national policies, the planning process identifies the following priority areas: winter testing of vehicles, safety and vulnerability; creative industries, experiences and tourism; energy and green technology; process industry – development of technology and services; information, communication and services; and biotechnology (Tillväxtverket 2011).

Norrbotten's Regional Growth Programme identifies preconditions and ambitions for Norrbotten only and acts as a prioritizing document in relation to the Regional Structural Fund Programme. The present situation is painted in broad and optimistic strokes, presenting regional aspirations as a “new” regional space:

In the new Norrbotten we shall fulfil the work by stimulating sustainable regional development and strong economic growth. The county now finds itself in a position where the economy grows and the labour market situation gets brighter in a number of areas. This does not mean that we can rest on our laurels. Rather, it gives us a solid ground for further intensifying the work with entrepreneurship, businesses and the ability for young people to participate (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten 2007, 5, authors' translation). The Regional Growth Programme aligns itself neatly to the Structural Fund Programme in terms of focus areas (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten 2007). Both the Structural Fund Programme for Upper Norrland and the Regional Growth Programme were managed and owned by the County Administrative board, a coordinating state actor.

Västerbotten's Regional Growth Programme (Region Västerbotten 2008), managed by a municipal cooperative organization, resembles that of Norrbotten, but aligns to the Regional Structural Fund Programme in a less straightforward way. Reference is rather made to the Västerbotten Regional Development Programme (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten undated), although objectives are phrased in similar terms of economic growth. The Regional Development Programme thus provides a strategic framework for development activities in Västerbotten, aiming at guiding a somewhat wider set of activities than merely those for economic development:

Västerbotten County is a leader among northern European regions in working towards sustainable development signified by knowledge-driven and competitive trade and industry. The county has northern Sweden's most attractive living environments with cultural diversity and access to work, housing, culture, leisure, studies, and care. Here, people feel included and involved (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten 2008, 5, authors' translation).

The peripheral position has led to the municipalities in and county representatives of Norrbotten and Västerbotten to develop network relations among several societal sectors within each county and in the neighbouring county. They have also established relations with actors strategically positioned in new spaces of engagement. The most prominent of these is the EU. From territorial and cohesion points of view, the EU has responded to differing territorial capacities within the union. Frameworks for EU funding and its funding programmes are the most important spaces of engagement that Norrbotten and Västerbotten counties are eager to influence.

In order to better capitalize on localized assets, municipalities are not only formulating visionary planning statements or responding to EU and related policy initiatives. They also strive to secure resources within various other spaces of engagement, often through relating to EU ambitions. In various constellations, across regional and national borders, North Sweden, Europaforum Norra Sverige and Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) are the three most prominent network organizations. The North Sweden European Office was established in 1997 as an organizational framework for direct mutual links from the counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten to the European Union. North Sweden's general mission has a proactive ambition in influencing the forming of "policy areas in the EU of importance for economic and sustainable growth in the region" (North Sweden 2013, 3). The task is strongly associated with regional development policy and includes influencing EU budget profiles through concerted actions with the organizations Europaforum and NSPA (see below). Another ambition is to support and encourage actors in the two counties – public, private, organizational – to make use of EU funding. Second, Europaforum Norra Sverige was launched in 2000 as a partnership of the four northernmost counties of Sweden – Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Västernorrland, and Jämtland. Its mission is to create a meeting place between actors on local, regional, national and EU levels for direct links into the decision systems of EU. This is because:

*[t]he present emphasis on exports of raw materials gives low regional value added which means that the natural resources in northern Sweden mainly generate wealth in other parts of Sweden and in the surrounding world. Through systems of innovation who stimulate refinement of natural resources and surrounding development of services create dynamics on local and regional level (Europaforum Norra Sverige 2013, 10, authors' translation).*

The following six focus areas are identified to achieve this (Europaforum Norra Sverige 2013, 6): “infrastructure; energy, environment and climate; regional development/cohesion policy; attractive living conditions/demography; business policy; research and innovation”. To strengthen its influence, Europaforum Norra Sverige coordinates proposals among the four counties as inputs to the NSPA network.

NSPA is a network organization of administrative regions in the north of Sweden, Finland and Norway, created in 2008. Similarly to Europaforum, it includes Sweden's four northernmost counties. NSPA expresses its policy aim as follows: “The NSPA network consists of 14 regions in three countries sharing common circumstances and objectives, working together to raise awareness of the region in the EU-institutions, influence EU policy and to provide a platform for best practice” (Northern Sparsely Populated Areas 2013, 1). The territorial context, i.e. the space of dependence, is presented thus:

*The NSPA region is rich on both renewable and non-renewable resources. Energy, fisheries, fish farming, mining, forestry and tourism are important industries. NSPA is also home to the Sámi, the only indigenous people in Europe. These two factors; the indigenous population and the richness of resources, are specific regional traits that provides unique opportunities for the region and Europe at large, but require policies dealing with these challenges (Northern Sparsely Populated Areas 2013, 3).*

Finally, policy development relevant to the regions also involve EU cohesion initiatives. These include:

- Interreg IVA North, which includes Norrbotten and the northern part of Västerbotten counties. It contains a sub-programme, Cross-border Sápmi, which follows the Swedish-Norwegian mountain ridge and covers the counties of Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland and parts of Dalarna further south ([www.interregnord.com](http://www.interregnord.com)),
- Interreg Botnia-Atlantica, which includes Västerbotten and the northern part of its neighbouring county to the south Västernorrland ([www.Botnia-Atlantica.eu](http://www.Botnia-Atlantica.eu)), and
- Northern Periphery Programme, which includes Norrbotten and Västerbotten and the two bordering counties further south in Sweden – Västernorrland and Jämtland ([www.northernperiphery.eu](http://www.northernperiphery.eu)).

The territories for these programmes partly overlap, but all are cross-border organizations designed along established domestic administrative scales which fall within the scope of regional development. Typically, they focused on issues such as these from the Interreg IV North Programme 2007–2013: “the development of trade and industry; research, development and education; regional functionality and identity; Sápmi – borderless development; and technical assistance for programme delivery” (Interreg IV A North Programme, 42, authors’ translation). Among these, a significant share of funding was devoted to development of trade and industry.

### **FROM NORDIC TO BARENTS TO ARCTIC COUNCILS, AND A NORTHERN DIMENSION**

Whereas municipal and regional ambitions have fairly smoothly related to and partly merged with EU policies, a somewhat different perspective is apparent through territorial policies of an alternative international character. Rather than relating to the local geographies per se, these policies stem from insights pertaining to international matters, and where policy responses include northern Sweden.

### **NORDIC AND BARENTS COOPERATION**

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of cooperation. The Nordic Council, which was established in 1952, at the start of the Cold War, is the official inter-parliamentary body representing the Nordic countries. An early outcome was the introduction of a

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common labour market and free movement across borders for the citizens. In 1971, the Nordic Council of Ministers was set up for operative collaboration on the national level. The organization has to a large extent manifested a welfare state focus, with a particular focus on economic development and growth as well as collaboration in the Nordic region. This is exemplified by operative collaboration on the regional level, with eight cross-border organizations, two of which include the counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten.

The first of these, the North Calotte Council was established in 1967 with Norrbotten County as the Swedish partner. It is steered by representatives from regional authorities, municipalities, and business interests in the participating regions. ([www.nordkalottradet.nu](http://www.nordkalottradet.nu))

A corresponding organization, including the county of Västerbotten, is the Kvarken Council, which was created in 1972 ([www.kvarken.org](http://www.kvarken.org)). It is steered by representatives for the regional authorities and municipalities. The two Councils have similar aims, and they both target collaboration either for “shared service solutions across national borders” (North Calotte Council 2014) or to “encourage collaboration [and] reduce and eliminate border crossing obstacles” (Kvarken Council 2012, 2). Beyond this, focus is placed on “development of the economy and the infrastructure, communication and traffic services, research and educational cooperation” (North Calotte Council 2014), and to:

*... utilize preconditions in the region and encourage development of the region within primarily the following fields: business, communications and transport infrastructure, research and development and education, culture, sustainable energy solutions, environment, waste management and recycling issues, tourism, sports, children and young people, public health and health care (Kvarkenrådet 2012, 2).*

The collaborative profiles are thus characterized by traditional regional policy dimensions with equalization of preconditions for development in mind and they therefore also address a wide range of welfare and related social issues.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region was established in 1993 as a Norwegian post-Cold War initiative to normalize and stabilize the relationships between the Nordic countries and Russia. The point of departure was a transnational geopolitical perspective, but the

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initiative became operationalized to also address regional development issues. Hence, the Barents Region operates both on national level as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, including Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, and on regional level as the Barents Regional Council. The latter initially included Norrbotten as a partner in the already existing North Calotte cooperation described above. However, from 1998 neighbouring counties were included; Västerbotten in Sweden as well as regions in Finland and Russia. The Barents Regional Council of today thus has a wide east–west extension, including 13 administrative regions (Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2014).

Conceptually, the Barents Region initiative was characterized by a transnational region-building logic combined with a gateway dimension where both shared identity, with historical common roots, and proposals for functional links across borders were emphasized (The Kirkenes declaration 1993; Barents Programme 1994/95; Paasi 1996; Aalbu and Wiberg 1997). In the first generation of Barents programmes, reference was made to ongoing European debate on regionalization and region-building. Identity and functionality were explicitly stressed: “By basing co-existence in the Barents Region on a shared cultural heritage and common historical traditions and by bridging ethnic and religious differences, it is envisaged that a common identity and a stable situation will be created in the Region” (Barents Programme 1994/95, cited in Aalbu and Wiberg, 1997 84–85). At the same time, however, it was noted that “Industrial and economic development is necessary in order to create a peaceful and stable situation in the Barents Region. This requires a functional region where structures are developed to facilitate practical cooperation and reduce obstacles to communication and trade” (Barents Programme 1994/95, cited in Aalbu and Wiberg, 1997 84–85). Since then there have been several programme generations with changing priorities. The Barents Programme 2009–2013 argues that the “overall objective for the Barents cooperation is to generate social and economic growth through a knowledge driven economy and the sustainable development of the region’s natural resources. Moreover, the objective is to make the Barents Region competitive on the world market” (Barents Programme 2009–2013, 5).

Following the entrance of Sweden and Finland into the EU in 1995, the generations of Barents programmes have been linked to both national funding and various funding options within the EU, especially the Interreg programmes. As for the North Calotte and Kvarken Councils, their activities are mainly carried out through projects co-financed by authorities in the trans-regional context and EU funding through Interreg IV A.

## THE ARCTIC COUNCIL AND AN ARCTIC DIMENSION IN SWEDISH POLITICS

An initiative following the end of the Cold War was the Arctic Council, which was established in 1996 to cover Canada, the United States, Russia, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Sweden. Each member state provides funding for Council activities on a voluntary basis.

Council priorities notably diverge from a focus on economic development and growth regularly highlighted in regional development discourses. Emphasis is rather placed on environmental and indigenous issues, which aims at “the sustainable use of resources, economic development and environmental protection” (Kiruna Declaration 15 May, 2013, 1) as well as recognizing “the special relationship and unique contributions to the Arctic of indigenous people and their communities” (Arctic Council 1996, 1). In contrast to the more regional development-minded bodies described above, the operative work within the Arctic Council is divided into six working groups, of which five broadly centre on environmental protection. The groups are the Arctic Contaminants Action Programme; Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme; Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna; Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response; Protection of the Arctic Maritime Environment; and Sustainable Development (Arctic Council 2014). The goals for the one broader working group, on sustainable development, are formulated as follows:

*... to propose and adopt steps to be taken by the Arctic States to advance sustainable development in the Arctic, including opportunities; to protect and enhance the environment and the economies, culture and health of Indigenous Peoples and Arctic communities, as well as to improve the environmental, economic and social conditions of Arctic communities as a whole. The guiding tenet running throughout the work of the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) is to pursue initiatives that provide practical knowledge and contribute to building the capacity of Indigenous Peoples and Arctic communities to respond to the challenges and benefit from the opportunities emerging in the Arctic Region (Arctic Council – Sustainable Development Working Group 2014).*

With regard to areas that are targeted in the Arctic Council and Council-related work, there is a difference between work in the Council itself, and in reports such as the Arctic Human Development Report (2004) developed in relation to the Council. While the



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Arctic Human Development Report analyses areas based on domestic county borders, including reference e.g. to Norrbotten and Västerbotten, Arctic Council work in general utilizes an external boundary not necessarily related to domestic territorial/administrative divisions.

Thus, in a comparison between these three Council orientations, North Calotte and Barents cooperation are similar in that they take their inception in existing administrative delineations in the areas, such as Norrbotten and Västerbotten (county level). The Arctic Council is an exception in that it takes as its delineation the Arctic Circle – which has no basis either at county or municipality level, and had until the Swedish Arctic Strategy (2011) not been used in domestic delineations. A further difference is that while the main aims in North Calotte/Nordic and Barents cooperation are within the regional development policy, Arctic Council aims target the environment (five working groups) and social development with a focus on indigenous people.

However, the Arctic Council initiative has over time, coinciding with the focus on the resources that will be made available due to climate change in the Arctic, gained further interest from other actors as a space of engagement, among them the EU applying to join the Arctic Council as an observer. A European Commission report notes that “[a]s climate change and economic development accelerate in the Arctic Region, the European Union should step up its engagement with its Arctic partners” (ibid., 2), and that the EU aims to link itself closer to the Arctic. Such developments may in the future further come to influence what has so far been a relatively structural fund-oriented approach. It has already influenced domestic policy development as can be seen in how Sweden related to these publications prior to developing the Swedish Arctic Strategy (Keskitalo 2014).

We should also take note of the Northern Dimension Policy, which seeks to enhance regional cooperation and improve synergies of regional organizations. This policy was initiated in 1999 and renewed in 2006, between mainly the EU, Russia, and Norway, and with a special focus on North West Russia. While an EU initiative, it is operated on a more conceptual level than that of the programmes, which carry with themselves funding to influence sub-regional priorities. Prioritized areas in the Northern Dimension Policy are more similar to Barents Council aims than to broader Arctic Council aims, and target economic and juridical cooperation, external security/civil protection, cooperation in research and culture, environmental protection, and social

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welfare and health care (Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document, effective as of 1 January 2007). The priorities on environmental protection are formulated as follows:

*Environment, nuclear safety and natural resources, including reduction of the risk of nuclear and other pollution, maritime safety, protection of the marine environment in the Baltic and Barents Seas, biodiversity, forests, fish stocks and protection of the Arctic ecosystems; cooperation in the field of water policy, climate change, environmental legislation and administrative capacity building (Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document, effective as of 1 January 2007, 4).*

In 2006, the Northern Dimension Policy also made the Barents Region a priority, stressing that both sub-national and municipal authorities are regarded as actors of the Northern Dimension Policy (Barents Programme 2009–2013).

These developments fed into the formulation of a Swedish position in the Arctic context. Until 2011, when Sweden took over the chair for a two-year period, all states of the Arctic Council except Sweden had launched a national arctic strategy. The Swedish strategy was launched to coincide with Sweden's chair and followed upon the EU-level developments (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2011). The Swedish Arctic strategy report discusses the agreement on the territorial delimitation as follows: "In connection with the establishment of the Arctic Council its members adopted a common political definition. According to that definition the Arctic encompasses all territory north of the Arctic Circle and the associated eight Arctic states" (ibid., 11). Thus, Sweden accepted a territorial projection and priority framework which is in contrast to the regional development and Russian-Nordic gateway cooperation logics applied by the Nordic Council's cross-border regional organizations. In Sweden this means inclusion of only the northernmost part of the county of Norrbotten.

The Swedish Arctic strategy states three priority areas; climate and environment, economic development, and the human dimension (ibid.). Economic development focuses on the potential for further business development in a collaborative Barents Region context, especially within mining, forestry, energy production and tourism in harmony with the ecosystems and with social responsibilities for the inhabitants

in mind. Related to this, “the right of indigenous people to maintain and develop their identity, culture, knowledge transfer and traditional trades must be upheld” (ibid., 4). The Arctic Strategy document thus provides a stronger resemblance and reference to Arctic Council and related EU Arctic policies than to Barents and Northern Dimension policies, in particular in highlighting a bottom-up focus with special attention to the role of indigenous peoples. However, it also includes a part of the more growth- and economically-oriented agenda of the Barents and Northern Dimension policies. The document points in two directions. Parts of it target the north of Sweden from a bottom-up perspective, even if the accepted delineations only target very small parts of the area, such as reindeer husbandry. At the same time, parts of the strategy are oriented towards areas outside Sweden.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

An increasing number of actors claim territorial influence in northern Sweden. To better understand these interests and the scalar politics they involve, this paper has analysed territorial policies that include some or all of the 29 northernmost Swedish municipalities.

Regional development policies are the dominating spaces of engagement in terms of municipal attention. Since the 1960s, structural imbalances in the Swedish north have been addressed in national policy making, which has formed a well-anchored regional development discourse. Initially it emphasized needs to equalize welfare and business conditions across the country through redistributions and relocations, while in recent decades national policy making has turned towards exploitation of potentials for economic growth through mobilization of regional resources (SOU 1970: 3; Westholm 1998; Tillväxtverket 2011).

Scaling of regional development policies is a backbone of territorial policies in the north, but other constellations challenge and complement it. The municipalities in Norrbotten and Västerbotten are embedded in several national and trans-border organizational frameworks with overlapping elements, partly coordinated for reinforcement of each other.

Even though Nordic policies for collaboration and economic development have been created since the 1970s, they have left no traces in municipal planning. Especially from the mid-1990s and the second generation of land-use plans, one could have expected

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to find evidence of Nordic scalar politics in land-use plans. There are none. Instead, and as indicated in the results section, Nordic and other regional collaborations in the north have been adjoined with EU policies, further strengthening the regional policy discourse.

Scalar processes that are supported by EU and national regulations and funding gain momentum from the late 1990s on. EU, national and regional public actors establish ways to deploy scalar functions along established administrative delineations (such as Barents Regional Council, North Calotte cooperation and EU-funded schemes), hence strengthening the existing spatial organization. In some cases, as with the Structural Fund Programme for Upper Norrland, merging of existing scales occurs (Tillväxtverket 2011).

Documents and policies characterized by an Arctic discourse have a broader territorial perspective and a clearly contrasted view regarding regions in the north. The Arctic Council strives to establish the Arctic Circle as the territorial reference for its territorial claims, which most likely will gain limited municipal attention. The Arctic Circle has, as yet, no material effects on municipal functions and funding. No or few scalar practices have been established on municipal level.

Skilful interaction with existing scalar practices and thereby the reinforcing of existing spaces of dependence allows for successful territorialisation, as is the case with EU regional policy. The new approach to spatial planning has enabled new actors to seek influence through a large number of initiatives which have strategically included northern municipalities. None have been as successful as the EU. Supported by regulations and funding, and only to a minor extent challenging existing spatial delineations, EU regional policy has attracted attention among northern municipalities and influenced planning.

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