

Moving forward: Strengthening cooperation in today's Barents Region

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When the 1993 Kirkenes Declaration was ratified, the governments of Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway “expressed their conviction that expanded co-operation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) will contribute substantially to stability and progress in the area and in Europe as a whole.” (Kirkenes Declaration 1993). Over 20 years later, and as we move forward, this goal is even more important and urgent as Europe and Russia find themselves on opposite sides of a geopolitical conflict in Russia’s southern borders with Ukraine. Economic sanctions employed by both sides have placed a significant halt to the trading and economic exchange between Russia and the rest of the Barents Region – the Northern municipalities of Norway, Finland, and Sweden. These have had significant impact on small and large communities that have relied on the economic, social, and cultural interrelationship across the Schengen-Russia border zones.

There have been very real economic impacts on communities within and beyond the Barents region – from Murmansk to Kirkenes, from Joensuu to St Petersburg, from Kaliningrad to Gdansk. The developmental goals that constitute the heart of the Kirkenes Declaration initiatives seem very distant indeed. Thus, for those of us who live and work in the Barents Region space at the local level, it is even more important to engage the values at the foundation of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region initiative.

How do we do this in the face of high politics and geopolitical conflicts? The answer is that we must go beyond questions of geopolitics and to focus on local-level actors and their everyday lives. The challenges may seem insurmountable. But, even if small, there are numerous pockets of ongoing relations that have been fostered over the last two decades, and that have not been summarily terminated. There are, for example, continuing and strengthening student, research, and academic exchanges between

Russia and the Nordic countries and other parts of Europe; capacity-building research projects funded by the EU under its European Neighbourhood Policy; and ongoing art and cultural exchange between Russia and Northern Europe. Moreover, Kolarctic programmes have also promoted very necessary and practical projects including the “Oil Spill Response System” project that tries to find solutions to the eventuality of oil spills in the Barents Region; the “A School for All” project on creating inclusive education; among many others. Nor have the Norwegian, Finnish, and Swedish research councils and the Norwegian Barents Secretariat stopped programmes of cultural, social, and academic exchange funding despite the sanctions. Russia also continues to finance cross-border cooperation programmes at the local level and to committing to the co-financing of Kolarctic projects (Russian Ministry of Economic Development, 2015). Indeed, the bilateral cooperation between Norway and Russia at the local level is poised to increase with greater funding to the Norwegian Barents Secretariat. (Nilsen 2015) These mechanisms of exchange lead us to find synergies and commonalities across borders despite sanctions and high stakes politics. The cooperation between people and among organizations in Russia and Northern Europe must continue to capitalize on the strengths and the enduring foundations that have been built since the early 1990s. Only then can we fulfill the eminently important goals of the region-building initiatives that define the relations between Russia and Northern Europe: that “confrontation and division that characterised the past would be replaced by cooperation and partnership” (Kirkenes Declaration 2013) and to foment peace in the region. Another enormous challenge that will mark the next decade of cooperation is the question of sustainable development: how do project participants sustain the gains made during the funded periods of Barents projects? How do we translate what has been learned or created into long-lasting success and impact?

Research and academic exchange, and public engagement, I argue, are some of the most effective ways of continuing and strengthening the important cross-border relations in the Barents Region. The Barents Studies journal, a refereed publication that showcases the intellectual academic exchange in the BEAR continues to do this with this third issue of Volume One. The four double-blind refereed articles, one book review, and the four young scholars featured here exemplify the cooperation in the region and also its international character. While all of the articles and research communications that we have published thus far in Barents Studies have been refereed, we now proudly call more attention to them by using the Finnish symbol denoting peer-reviewed beside each refereed article and on the journal itself. Over the next few months we hope to also earn a ranking for peer-reviewed publications in the journals ranking system in Norway.

The refereed academic articles published in this issue represent the salient and relevant questions facing the BEAR as it undergoes economic, political, and social transformations brought about by climate change, globalisation, and geopolitical decisions extant in the individual countries of the region. One theme that unites these very different articles is that they all reference economic region-building that has preoccupied the member regions of the Barents Region since 1993, and what that may mean for its future regional- and socio-economic development. The importance of the article by Marina Nenasheva, et al. cannot be overstated as the Barents Region countries intensify exploration and exploitation of natural resources on land and at sea. Environmental impact assessments will become the norm for the Barents countries as local communities become engaged in the debates and conversations about extractive industries and their impact on the environment, everyday life, and health of Northern populations. Complementing the article by Nenasheva, et al. and closely related to environmental impact assessment is that of Leena Suopajärvi's on the social impact assessment of local communities where mining is taking place. Suopajärvi focuses on the discourse analysis of three recurring story lines in their study in order to elucidate the voice of the local-level actors in Northern Finland. While predictably regional and local economics and politics play a great role in the developmental ambitions of the Barents Region, these goals are inextricably linked to world markets and global concerns. Tuomas Suutarinen's article gives us a detailed analysis of the attitudes towards foreign direct investment (FDI) in a small one-industry town, Kovdor, on the Kola Peninsula. He analyses how Kovdor's "local life-worlds" affects how communities form opinions and make decisions about how they will participate in globalisation. To round out the collection of refereed articles, Monica Tennberg challenges us to see that politics and region-building in the BEAR is inextricably entwined within questions of economics. She interrogates the collusion of scholars in building the Barents Region and how that has led to a conflation of political governance and economic development. Tennberg cogently demonstrates that knowledge about the Barents Region is necessary for it to be governed rationally, and yet, expert knowledge about this vast region is limited. What we need as scholars, community members, decision-makers, and curious bystanders is more detailed expert knowledge about the Barents Region.

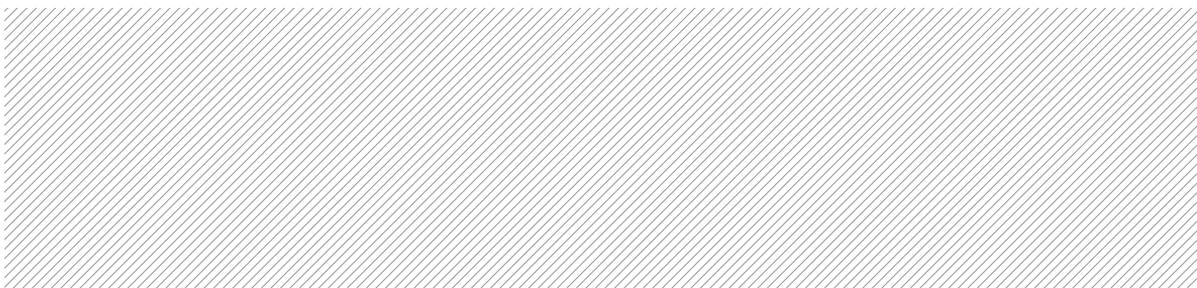
One of the major themes of research in the BEAR is the question of cross-border exchange and relations between and among border regions in the municipalities and countries that make up the Barents Region. Of particular interest is to question how the local population negotiates the hard border between Russia and Norway. Tatiana

Wara offers a review of Arvid Viken and Bjarge Schwenke Fors' edited volume *Grenseliv* (2014). This is a book in Norwegian which elucidates some of the complex and varied cross-border relations between Russia and Norway.

Tennberg (ref) argues that in building the Barents Region we must recognize the importance of creation of knowledge and expertise. Thus, it is of great significance that we again present four young scholars living and studying in the Barents Region, and engaging in research relevant to the BEAR. It is decidedly a multidisciplinary group of young scholars who are passionately engaged in their research. I am happy to introduce them to you here.

And so we move forward with the Barents Studies journal, with the ambition to strengthen the scholarship on the Barents Region, and also to solidify the ongoing people-to-people relations between and among the Barents Region countries.

I would like to thank the eight anonymous reviewers who expertly and constructively reviewed one of the refereed articles published in this issue. I thank you for your freely given professional service to the academic community. I also thank the meticulous and excellent copy-editing done by Pirkko Hautamäki lending a consistent style and language to the articles. I am very grateful to Gaute Svensson who translated the book review from Norwegian to English, and who edited the young scholars' brief biographies, and to Marjo Lindroth for patiently answering all of my questions. And importantly, I would like to acknowledge my co-editors Monica Tennberg and Larissa Riabova for their enduring collegiality, support, and friendship.



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