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# The need to know: Governing a region and its economy

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the ways in which the economy has been incorporated into the political reasoning and practice of region-building in the Barents Region among experts. While economic regionalism has been a key strand of studies on historic regionalism, this is not the case for the Barents Region. Yet, the natural resources of the region continue to raise high expectations about cross-border economic cooperation and development. Full appreciation of any regional development is underpinned by research and knowledge combining both political and economic considerations, but this basis is somewhat less solid in the Barents area. The knowledge base about the region and its development is therefore fragmented, limited and partial. This is an obvious problem, as many of the recent developments in the Barents Region, and also in the larger Arctic context, relate to economic opportunities, cooperation and development with implications also for political cooperation and governance. The paper analyses the development of political Barents studies from early 1990s until today, in particular its relation with economic developments in the region.

**Keywords:** *Barents Region, governmentality, knowledge, regionalism, economy*

## INTRODUCTION

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region was established in 1993 on political grounds as a region for cooperation on security and sustainable development in Northern Europe. It is a product of the 1990s era of “new regionalism”, which advocated comprehensive, multi-sectoral and inclusive region-building (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000). Knowledge and expertise on the region was essential for the establishment of the Barents in the early 1990s, and the relationship between scholars and political region-builders in the Barents Region was “intimate” (Tunander 2008, 171). Experts participated in region-building

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through publications, networking, conferences and exchanges with decision-makers supporting intellectual practices “integral to the processes of regionalism” (Larner and Walters 2002, 423). In general, regional political studies were characterised by a geopolitical approach combined with constructivism (Tunander 2008; Moisiu and Harle 2010).

One of the defining features of Nordic academic endeavour in the 1990s was the interest in identity politics, evident in political Barents studies as well. The integration of economic and more cultural, identity-based explanations into studies of regionalism has been a controversial issue. An example of these difficulties is the exchange between Christine Ingebritsen (1998) and Nordic scholars in the early 2000s (Tiilikainen 2001; Neumann 2001), who disagreed about the use of cultural and economic factors in explaining the Nordic states’ integration to the European Union. In Barents Studies, analyses of economic cooperation and development are often kept as a feature of functional cooperation, as a topic separate from other forms of regional cooperation such as administrative and cultural collaboration (Dahström et al. 1995). In the larger context of Arctic studies, it is also a current challenge to combine administrative, cultural and functional aspects of regionalism. Arctic research is mostly dominated by geopolitical and governance perspectives in tackling regional development.

This paper explores the ways interactions between political and economic aspects of regionalism have been described, discussed and constituted by regional experts. This combination of economic and political dimensions of regionalism can be discussed within the framework of “governmentalisation of a region”, which emphasises the contribution of knowledge and research in region-building. In order to govern a region, one needs knowledge about the region as a whole, its main elements and characteristics and connections between various developments in and outside the region. Governmentality studies (Foucault 1991a; b) provide both a theoretical approach and a methodology to study knowledge about regional governance.

The material studied in this paper covers primarily Nordic academic literature on the Barents Region from the early 1990s until today. Russian literature has not been included. Over the years, academic interest in the Barents Region has varied. In the 1990s, much of the research material was published in collections of articles, in multidisciplinary books such as *The Barents Region: Regional cooperation in Arctic Europe*, edited by Tunander and Stokke (1994); *The Barents Region: Security and economic development in the European North*, edited by Dellenbrant and Olsson (1994); and *The East-West Interface in the European North* edited by Dahlström, Eskelinen and Wiberg (1995). The

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books represented and combined knowledge produced by historians, political scientists and geographers and many others. The connection to everyday political developments was a close one, and the experts followed these developments carefully. Several books on the economic geography of the region were also published at the time (Seppänen 1995, Jumppanen and Hyttinen 1995; Lausala and Valkonen 1999; Statistics Finland and Goskomstat 2001), constituting the region as a rich resource region with potential for economic cooperation and further resource use.

In the 2000s, possibly reflecting a general change in academic publishing practices, most of the contributions directly related to the Barents have been single articles in peer-reviewed international journals. Another feature of the 2000s is that the books dealing with the Barents Region are connected to the overall political development in Northern Europe, examples being *Remaking Europe in the margins: Northern Europe after the enlargements*, edited by Christopher Browning (2003) and *The European Union and the making of a wider Northern Europe* by Pami Aalto (2011). The driving force for this literature is academic debate, concepts and theories, not a connection to political developments – perhaps because those developments have been more modest than in the 1990s. The only exception here is Norway, whose new High North policies since the mid-2000s have attracted the interest of political scientists (Jensen 2013).

It is striking that the Barents Region is not analysed in economic terms in the recent literature discussing the nature and development of Arctic economies (Glomsrød and Aslaksen 2006; 2008; Political economy of northern regional development 2010; Megatrends 2011). There is a multitude of assessments, studies and reports tackling the Barents Region and different aspects of its development, such as energy and transportation. These reports are called “grey literature”, but they benefit from and use political science expertise. The political expertise on the region has focused on the effectiveness of the existing institutions (Aalto et al. 2011; Aalto, Blakkisrud and Smith 2009a; 2009b). A recent development, under the auspices of the Arctic Council and Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), is to produce a pan-arctic integrated assessment report, including a Barents-focused sub-report, by 2017. In this “Adaptation actions for a changing Arctic” (AACCA) report, the aim is to assess both environmental and socio-economic changes in the short term (2030) and long term (2080), to produce scenarios for regional development, evaluate impacts and adaptation to them, and identify adaptation measures needed. This is a report that seeks to combine multidisciplinary and multi-sourced lay and indigenous knowledge – including scientific knowledge – and to produce policy-relevant information for support adaptation measures.

## GOVERNMENTALISATION BY KNOWLEDGE

One of the intriguing aspects of Michel Foucault's idea of governmentality is his description of it as the "introduction of economy into political reason" (Foucault 1991a, 92). For political scientists, the economy is often understood as a pre-political, clearly definable and separate area of activity from the sphere of politics. The idea of governmentality challenges this separation. Goede (2003) suggests that the economy should instead be seen as socially and discursively constructed, and closely connected to the political sphere. Most importantly, from this perspective the economy is not an organisation or a process outside of or at odds with the state and regional cooperation. From the point of view of governmentality, the "economy" appears as "an inextricable, but also very invisible part of modern political rationalities" (Tellman 2009, 5). At issue is not a particular economic fact, theory or approach by economists, but "the very structure of association established between political reason and truth" (Tellman 2009, 15). The economy should be seen as "a machine for seeing, whose epistemological privileges, lines of exclusion and technologies of knowledge need to be dissected" (Tellman 2009, 8).

The role of experts is important here, as they translate the relationship between politics, economy and region through language. Language works as "a translation machine", establishing a kind of identity and mutuality between political rationalities and regulatory aspirations (Miller and Rose 1990, 6). Governmentality relies for governance on intellectual practices, which are based on knowledge, research and experts. This being the case, governmentality directs our attention to specific kinds of knowledge and experts in governmental activity – not only within the territories of certain states, but beyond state boundaries. Governmentality requires or must articulate some knowledge of the reality in which it seeks to govern (Gordon 1980, 248; Miller and Rose 1990, 6–7). The region needs to be known in order to be governed. Therefore, knowledge plays a fundamental role in "rendering aspects of existence thinkable and calculable and amenable to deliberated initiatives" (Miller and Rose 1990, 3). Governmentality works through the "particular way in which it conceptualizes the space, objects and subjects of the domain in which it is to operate, such that they become governable at a distance" (Donegan 2006, 31).

Governmentality is relational: it is about organising things and their relations, such as territory, region, resources, people and wealth (Foucault 1991a; 2009). The need to govern these relations has to be established to justify intervention. Miller and Rose (1990, 6) note that "before one can seek to manage a domain such as an economy it is

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first necessary to conceptualize a set of processes and relations as an economy which is amenable to management”. Discourse on the economy – made of objects, subjects, concepts, strategies and enunciative modalities – should be conceived of as doing something, as a practice “in a describable relationship with a set of other practices” that entail an art of government (Foucault 1991b, 63–64). The relational approach in governmentality makes a region into “a vibrant entity” instead of a static terrain, but also an object of calculation (Elden 2007, 575). This is much the case of the Barents Region, presented often as a rich resource region with potential to fulfil the needs of international, even global markets. Governmental reason is related to a particular way of thinking, reasoning and calculating.

The governmentality approach focuses on the identification of an issue as a problem, in this case as a combination of economic and other considerations; the need to engage and network between various governmental and societal actors to solve the issue, and the production of identities and agencies in connection to the efforts to solve the issue (Colebatch 2002). My analysis discusses material produced by regional experts, mostly political scientists but also some others such as economic geographers, to discuss regionalism in the Barents Region, political developments and future of the region. The material is restricted in the sense that: 1) the material chosen to the analysis had to discuss the region as a whole, not any particular part of it; 2) the material chosen for the analysis did not deal with only one sector of economic activity, such as oil and gas, forestry or something else and 3) the material chosen for analysis was written in English, not in any national languages in the region. This meant that the material analysed was manageable in size and discussed the region and its development as a whole. These restrictions also meant that a large part of existing literature on Barents Studies was left outside of the analysis, but this literature did not focus on the relationship between political and economic aspects of regionalism.

I claim that regionalism in the Barents Region should be understood as a very limited mode of governance, as an example of “neoliberal regionalism” (Larner and Walters 2002) with specific requirements for knowledge about the region. A region in the neoliberal sense is built both politically and economically as a part of the global economic space through free mobility of goods, people and capital and in the frames of global markets and international competition (Larner and Williams 2002; Larner 2000; Cotoi 2011). According to Larner and Walters (2002, 415), “neoliberal” regions govern themselves from a distance by interaction, communication and reform within and between authorities, companies and non-governmental organisations.

Using a governmentality approach, two discourses can be identified in Nordic Barents research: the need to be governed and the need to have an identity. These needs are in my interpretation indicative of neoliberal regionalism and governmentalisation of the region by intellectual practices. The problems of establishing regional governance over an economy result in governance through self-identification. The efforts to govern regionally need to be justified by knowledge, that is, by turning issues into political and governable problems with the help of knowledge and experts. The mismatch with the needs for knowledge for governance and political aims at distant governance are at odds: the result is that we know very little exactly what is happening in the Barents Region as a whole. Although the Barents Region has a relatively strong educational and research basis with many universities and other educational institutes, even today knowledge about the region is fragmented, partial and limited. It is difficult to obtain an overview of the region and its development. This is for a reason, I argue. The limited knowledge base about the region serves a neoliberal agenda of regional development and cooperation based on the idea of governance at a distance, non-intervention and self-identification.

### **THE NEED TO BE GOVERNED – AT A DISTANCE**

One of the early academic ideas for regional cooperation in the Barents Region was “transregionalisation” (Svensson 1995; Wiberg 1996). A trans-region is an integrated political and economic region which has strong internal networks yet is connected to global markets. Transnational regionalisation is a political-economic process involving actors from both the political and economic domains whose relationships are important to the outcome of the process (Svensson 1995, 58; Aalbu and Wiberg 1997, 87–88). There were doubts about the opportunities of transregionalisation in the Barents Region. Rune Castberg (1994, 112) warned that “the complementarity of the economies of the various parts of the region is only partial. This puts a limit on the scope of such cooperation”. Economic cooperation between the northern parts of these countries is limited “due to structural similarity, export specialization and established patterns of integration in other geographical directions” (Dahlström, Eskelinen and Wikberg 1995, 2). The economic connections between the northern and southern parts of each country in the region are far more significant than those across the region and its boundaries.

The transregionalisation of the Barents Region would have required strong regional governance, in particular regional agency. Castberg (1994, 111) has pointed out that

“there is a strong need to control, direct and release the cooperative forces in the region”. Svensson (1995, 70) stresses the importance of the regional level in supporting economic cooperation, observing that “in the Barents Region, the regional level is the dominating operative level”. Lacking financial resources on a sub-national level makes the development of cooperation difficult. In Svensson’s assessment, at the inter-regional level the Barents Regional Council has not yet managed to find or even identify its role, particularly in relationship to transnational business (Svensson 1998, 259). According to the experts, regional cooperative bodies have invested their resources in matters on which they have very little influence instead of seeking a more problem-solving function in relation to firms in the region in the early phases of cooperation. Svensson (1998, 260) argues that “an indirect, even passive government role in matters of transnational business, is thus not a solution good enough for accomplishing true economic integration in complicated cross-border contexts”. Lausala and Jumppanen (1998, 78) conclude that the political nature of Barents cooperation has led to the “political interests of states [being] combined with the mainly economic, functional interests of the region. This has not been easy in the Barents cooperation”.

In the mid-1990s, it was noted that “the possibilities of economic integration and cooperation remain limited and little progress has been made so far” (Lausala and Jumppanen 1998, 80). The experts were divided on the issue of the best regional strategies: to be self-sufficient or to open to global markets (Lausala and Valkonen 1999; Lausala and Jumppanen 1998, 75). In this sense, the fear in the late 1990s was that the region faced the threat of becoming “increasingly marginalized in the global economy” (Lausala and Jumppanen 1998, 75) due to slow and vulnerable economic development that relied on natural resource extraction. The concern remains in the 2010s whether the region is too vast to be integrated as whole; partial integration may be possible, however, whereby the Barents Region would be seen as comprising sub-regions, more or less integrated to the world economy (Wiberg 2013).

In the late 1990s, the Nordic countries discussed integration in the European Union context as an option for the Barents Region. In Wiberg’s (1996, 204) view, “The EU policy to support functional integration programs for transnational regions could be the most useful reference and guide to similar integration efforts”. EU programmes promote a neoliberal agenda of economic growth with diverse regional effects (Filtenborg, Gänzle and Johansson 2002; Johansson-Nogues 2009). Wiberg concluded in 2002 (82) that the accession of Sweden and Finland to the EU and the development of the EU’s Northern Dimension “added more political and administrative capacity for dealing

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with the complicated needs for restructuring of local and regional economies” in the Barents Region. However, he went on to point out (Wiberg 2002, 83) that the role of regional bodies depends to a major extent on the financial resources and degree of decision-making capacity given to them by the governments of the four countries and the EU. He continued (2002, 83) that “up to now very limited financial resources and decision-making power have been decentralized directly to these institutions”. The effort to Europeanise the Barents Euro-Arctic Region did not succeed after 2006, when the EU’s attention was turned toward the Arctic (Palosaari and Möller 2004).

Svensson (1995, 68) notes that in the Barents Region dependency on national governments and international institutions is high: “In other words, the fate of this region is to a great extent decided elsewhere, mainly confirming a long tradition of these peripheral areas’ dependency on subsidies from central governments”. For example, federal policies have affected the Russian regions and their possibilities for regional cooperation: “all federal political changes, for instance concerning foreign relations and policies on promoting foreign investments and trade, will also greatly affect regional development in the Barents territories” (Lausala and Valkonen 1999, 227). Indra Øverland (2008) points to the fact that some of the most important economic developments in the region have been “irrelevant to the multilateral cooperation in the region”. A case in point is the development of the Shtokman gas field in the Barents Sea. Øverland concludes that “all discussion about Shtokman and other major petroleum developments in the north is generally disconnected from the Northern Dimension, the Barents cooperation, the Arctic Council and other multilateral frameworks for collaboration”. Many of the most important political and economic changes have happened outside the region. Slow progress in Russian negotiations for WTO membership, the past and current complications in EU-Russian relations, domestic disagreements on sharing power and resources for regional and environmental cooperation, among other things, and increasing international interest in the Arctic have influenced the way Barents governmentality has developed over the years. The region is seen as part of the global economic space, but is governed “at a distance”.

## THE NEED TO HAVE AN IDENTITY

One distinctive trend in Nordic IR research is a “tidal wave of identity studies, which swept over the Nordic region in the early and mid-1990s” (Friedrichs 2004). This is also true for studies on the Barents Region (Tunander 1994; Hønneland 1995, 1998; Tunander 2008). The constructivist approach to regionalism, typical of the



Nordic scholarship, claims that “regions are defined in terms of speech acts; they are talked and written into existence” (Neumann 1994). In economic terms, the “Barents Region” has multiple meanings, but is most often described as a resource region. A bold Finnish statement from 1995 claims that “the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is today one of the world’s most interesting regions economically” (Seppänen 1995, 3). This attraction lies in “the huge economic potential offered by the natural resources of North-West Russia” (Seppänen 1995, 3). The region was depicted as comprising resource regions that serve global markets, complementing rather than competing with each other. Castberg (1994, 103) described the Barents Region as made of “open economies, with undiversified production structures and high dependence on externally produced goods and services”. In his view, the region was “marked by a balanced asymmetry: an uneven but partly complementary distribution of various material and non-material resources”. Moreover, this asymmetry could be “the key driving force for economic cooperation in the Barents Region” (Castberg 1994, 104). From the perspective of neoliberal governmentality, as “a rich resource region”, the Barents Region serves European and global markets, making the feature a regional marker (see Larner and Walters 2002, 413). As an exception to this general view, Lehtinen (2003, 37) has provided a positive interpretation of the Barents Region: “It has been established as an arena formulating economically feasible alternatives to the postcolonial regional division of labour”.

While the natural resources of the region were identified as the basis for cooperation, the state of the Barents environment was a common concern. This was closely linked to the need for investments to upgrade production facilities and infrastructure (Lausala and Valkonen 1999, 17; see also Brunland et al. 2004, 65). There were many reasons for investors to steer clear of the region rather than to invest in it (Lausala and Valkonen 1999; Jumppanen and Hyttinen 1995, 159; 172) if they calculated the risks and benefits: unclear ownership rights of natural resources and the principles governing their exploitation; the need to develop and harmonise commercial and economic legislation, especially legislation on foreign investments and projects; incomplete and underdeveloped infrastructure; and the lack of support for new enterprises and collaboration. The development of the Barents Region was viewed by some writers as being very dependent on Russian developments: “The future development of the Barents territories is very dependent on general economic and political conditions prevailing in the Russian Federation and also partly on cross-border cooperation in North Europe” (Lausala and Valkonen 1999, 19).

However, despite its economic potential, the Barents Region is not seen as a market. According to the experts, the attractiveness of the territory as “a market” for imported goods and services is limited due to the dispersed population, low level of economic diversification and weak buying power of consumers (Aalbu and Wiberg 1997; Wiberg 2002, 83). In Wiberg’s view, “the comparative advantages of the regional economies are based on the presence of natural resources, which serve markets far away”. In a similar vein, Brunland and colleagues (2004, 57) note that the Barents economy is based “mainly on isolated pockets of natural resource exploitation and primary processing, including minerals, forestry and fishing [and that] [d]ue to low population density, dispersed location of resources, limited infrastructure, and the legacy of the socialist planning, it is difficult to speak of ‘the Barents Market’”.

In the 2010s, the Barents Region has expanded to include the Barents Sea area, which is not covered by the frame of cooperation. The economic focus has been redirected from the Barents Region itself to the Barents Sea, most likely because the delimitation agreement between the Norwegian and Russian governments in 2010 made economic use of the Sea possible. The Barents Sea is depicted as a site of varied economic activities, such as oil and gas exploration and fisheries (Glomsrød and Aslaksen 2006, 2008; Megatrends 2011). According to the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment report (2009, 75), the Barents Sea has “the highest concentrations of marine activity in the Arctic region”, including bulk cargo carriers, oil tankers, LNG carriers, coastal ferries, fishing vessels, cruise ships and other smaller vessels. The calculative logic of the region focuses on the assessments of when the Arctic Ocean will be free of sea ice and the Northern Sea Route will open for shipping year round. Instead of being viewed as a territory filled with valuable resources, the Barents Sea, with the opportunities it offers, now constitutes a site of activity, furnishing the basis of a calculative logic. With the heightened interest in its marine area, the Barents Region is seen in a global context as offering transportation routes as well as natural and human resources for the global economy (Kazantseva and Westin 1994; Nijkamp and Rodenburg 2011).


We therefore see the Barents Region described as a resource region, a region to be developed, a transregion and a European region – and many other characterisations of the regional identity are on record. Scholars have debated whether it is a functional, administrative or identity region (Dahlström, Eskelinen and Wiberg 1995; Wiberg 2013; Castberg 1994; Wiberg 1994; Svensson 1995) or some combination of the three. The economy is considered to be a central part of a region’s functional identity. These discussions play a role in governing the region, its resources and people through a process

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of regional identity-building. Experts have contributed to inventing and operationalising regional governance, first by being involved in attempts to implant such identity-building practices and, second, by promoting self-regulation in a way that minimises the need for direct political intervention (Miller and Rose 1990, 14-15).

### **NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALISATION OF THE BARENTS REGION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE**

Knowledge – in various forms such as maps, statistics and interpretations of available information – helps us to know the Barents Region and render it an object of governance. However, knowledge about the region and its development is partial, limited and fragmented. It is very difficult to have an overview of the region and its development as a whole. This allows us to maintain the view of the region as “a rich resource region”. The scholarship has furthered this self-identification in the name of a European or global resource region, which makes this particular feature of the region a regional marker (see Larner and Walters 2002, 413). Most importantly, the academic debate about regional identity helps the self-identification of the region: governing operates through agencies committed to the regional idea of a “resource region”. The fragmented nature of knowledge and knowledge production in the Barents Region supports non-intervention. Knowledge is needed for governmental intervention, but neoliberal governmentality promotes non-intervention. In terms of governmentality, a region emerges as a site of competing political strategies and as an instrument of government (Larner and Walters 2002, 423) such as the needs to be governed, practices of distant governance and regional identity politics. I claim that the best way to understand the region is through the idea of neoliberal regionalism and its relationship to knowledge production as a means of governance. From this perspective, the Barents Region is not necessarily only a rich resource region, but a region made up of fragmented peoples, resources and territories linked by many asymmetrical relations, flows and networks of political and economic power (refer Larner and Williams (2002, 411). The research should reflect this multitude of issues, connections and developments in the region better than before.



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