

EDITORIAL



The value of comparison

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This issue of the *Barents Studies* journal includes three double-blind refereed articles and four young scholar profiles.

We present three very different articles that foreground three important studies located in the Barents and Euro-Arctic regions. Despite their diversity, one of the overarching commonality among them is that they all use comparison in order to make cogent observations about historical and present-day communities in the Barents High North and Arctic. The use of comparative method had its academic heyday in the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Collier, 1993). The value of doing comparisons in academic research still remains and the articles in this issue speak to its strength as a tool of analysis. Comparisons also permits scholars to move beyond micro level analysis, in effect, giving us the advantage of seeing the forest for the trees. And it allows us to make important analysis relevant for communities and governments outside of our geographic space and purview.

Bjørnå and Mikalsen's clearly written and richly analysed "Working for development in the High North: Mayoral strategies and leadership styles" gives readers a valuable, and somewhat surprising, conclusion that mayors from diverse locales and economies in the Norwegian High North employ the same strategy of emphasizing "their role as political/policy entrepreneurs". Such an inference could only be garnered by doing on-the-ground local interviews of the municipalities on which they focus, as Bjørnå and Mikalsen had done. The authors' cogent analysis of these three communities' mayors and then their comparisons among each other leads us to conclude that such model comparisons in the specific geography of Northern Norway warrants replication in other regions in the Arctic and in other parts of the world.

Moi's article "Imagining Northern Norway: Visual configurations of the North in the art of Kaare Espolin Johnson and Bjarne Holst" also employs comparison. It introduces us to how the beguiling art of these two artists, compared and contrasted by Moi, and filtered through Benedict Anderson's seminal work on nationalism, *Imagined*

Communities, created a Northern identity for those living in Northern Norway. Through Moi's article, moreover, we are pleased to present these mesmerising images of Northern Norway as interpreted, imagined, and painted by Espolin Johnson and Holst. It is not coincidental that a mural copy of Espolin Johnson's powerful *Grenselandet (The Borderland)* appears in the waiting area of the police building in Kirkenes, calling attention to the local geography and this Northern border region's historical relationship with Russia and how such powerful interpretive images still have the potential to intrigue, awe, and reflect local identities.

In our third refereed article in this issue, Nilsen and Jøhannesson gives us detailed case study analyses of three energy megaproject developments in Northern Norway and Iceland in their article "Assessment of the firm–region coupling in the Arctic: Local content and innovative institutional regulations", confirming once again the saliency of doing comparative analysis. Concluding that there is a symbiotic relationship between the combination of "local content and innovative institutional regulations" and Global Production Networks (GPN) can be beneficial to local communities with megaproject developments. Of particular note is the authors' conclusion that "external regulations on GPN behaviour facilitate regional development" – useful knowledge for a seemingly peripheral High North and Arctic on the cusp of further industrialisation and development. It would serve local communities planning large projects that have global implications to take note of this useful study.

Featured young researchers

As varied as the refereed articles are in this issue, so are the featured young researchers we introduce to readers here. Young scholars Camilla Brattland, Morgan Ip, Maria Lvova, and Gerald Zojer are either from or have decided to live and/or work in the Barents Region. Their research foci and approaches ensure academic analyses of the Barents Region that reflect the complexities of everyday life, environmental concerns, transnational relations, and political economies found in Barents Arctic communities. Already well-versed in their own research fields and research production, our featured young researchers for this issue also demonstrate that they are engaged in the communities that they research, often involved in activities outside of and relevant to their research fields. As Brattland avers, her lived experience and involvement in her own Sami community informed and informs her research foci. Ip's own interest areas have been primed by his background as an architect and time spent in the Canadian Arctic among Inuit communities. Lvova, originally from Arkhangelsk, Russia, credits her professional academic interests squarely on the opportunities offered by the ad-

vancement of the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation over the last two decades. Zojer, doing his doctorate on environmental governance in the Arctic and its interplay with economic development, admits to falling in love with the North leading him to uproot from Germany to a remote town in Finland's Arctic. Each of these young researcher's commitment to creating new and cutting-edge knowledge and research located in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is laudable. As research on the Barents Region advances, they will be pivotal in shaping how that scholarship and knowledge capacity-building will be further shaped and expanded.

Recent international economic, social, and political vicissitudes have ironically both drawn and pulled focus away from the Barents Region. Events such as the refugee crossings in the Arctic border between Norway and Russia in the Autumn of 2015 and increased NATO training exercises in 2016 have garnered much attention in international presses. At the same time, deindustrialization and sanctions-induced economic recession between Russia and Europe have seemingly diminished our regard for this fledgling Northern region. Whatever the changes and stagnations that local and global political, economic, social, and cultural events bring to the Barents space, what will create an enduring record of the diverse stories of this region arguably will be its art, literature, research and scholarship that will be done by academics, young scholars, writers, and artists who are intent on giving voice to communities here. The *Barents Studies* journal is but one vehicle for such stories reflecting dynamism, robustness, perhaps apathy, and even dystopia of Barents Region communities.

As we grow as an academic journal, it is strongly evident that it will be a diversity of stories, multidisciplinary in their approaches, that will fill our pages. In so doing, we hope that the telling of such stories will have *comparative* relevance for others in the Barents Region, the Arctic, and around the world. In other words, we expect that the articles such as the ones published in this issue will have resonance in other parts of the world that ostensibly have little in common with the Barents Region. We hope they reflect commonalities in peoples' everyday lives as they negotiate globalisation, massive industrialisation, economic recession, human security issues, human rights, gender and class inequalities, environmental degradation, population decline and increase, and cross-border relations, just to name a few. The possibilities for academic research and publications on the Barents Region are dizzying indeed. Our goal is that such a diversity of topics will continue to be found here in the pages of the *Barents Studies* journal.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the seven anonymous referees who generously gave their academic service to review the three academic articles published in this issue. I would also like to thank the contributing authors for their patience and due diligence in editing their research articles into publishable quality. Diverse as they are, they were all a pleasure to read and I was enriched by each of them. Tom Malmanger, whose photograph graces our cover for this issue deserves our gratitude for his generosity in allowing us to use his brilliant *Aurora Polaris – Hammerfest* taken on a dark Barents Arctic night at the end of November 2015. Much like previous artistic images of the High North and Arctic, Malmanger's photograph inspires and conjures imaginings of a cold, remote, yet, in this image, thriving urban Barents Region distinguished by the spectacularity of Northern Lights.

As always, I would like to thank my co-editors Monica Tennberg at the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi and Larissa Riabova at the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the Kola Science Centre, Russian Academy of Sciences. I would especially like to thank Larissa for allowing me to use two of the Young Researcher profiles that she had already collected for her own upcoming issue.

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REFERENCE

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