

# EDITORIAL



# At the economic, social, and political margins

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The new issue of *Barents Studies*, an international peer-reviewed journal, continues to popularize research in the Barents Region in collaboration with its partners the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland, The Barents Institute at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø, and the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the Kola Science Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

*Barents Studies* articles (Espiritu 2015) seek to reflect commonalities in people's everyday negotiations of globalization, massive industrialization, economic recession, human security issues, human rights, gender and class inequalities, environmental degradation, population decline and increase, and cross-border relations. Our main goal is to maintain the diversity of topics and to make sure that the journal also covers topics around marginal phenomena. This has prompted us to devote the 2018/1 issue to the theme "At the economic, social, and political margins". Writers have been invited to submit manuscripts about any topic related to marginal – less common, well-known, or studied – phenomena beyond the mainstream of economic, policy, or social research in the Barents Region. This is one way of expanding our understanding of the Barents Region in a global, social, political, and economic context. And perhaps there is a need for a second call for this very theme, so that we might reach academic work in fields such as social work and social policy, which also need addressing. *Barents Studies* offers a unique opportunity to promote research cooperation in the Barents Region in these fields, too.

This issue features three peer-reviewed scientific articles and two research communications, a book review, and introductions of young scholars of the region. The new issue features five very different articles that foreground five studies located in the Barents Euro-Arctic region.

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Our first research article, by Hanna Lempinen, examines the societal dimensions of energy. Exploring media representations of the regional energyscape through the “theory–methods package” of situational analysis, this article highlights the diversity of regional energy beyond oil and gas production; the simplistic manners in which the societal dimensions of energy are understood; the absence of everyday life, ordinary people, and the female gender from the depictions of the regional energyscape; and the lack of attention to climate impacts of northern energy production.

In the second refereed article, Frode Bjørgo investigates how different policy areas are coordinated in two Nordic municipalities affected by mining megaprojects. Drawing on institutional theories in public administration and governance, the article demonstrates how the emergence of new corporate interests sparks the formation of interactive governance networks focusing on business development and economic growth, leaving welfare departments out of strategic policy development. Bjørgo concludes that

first, there has been a growing tendency for the state to regulate local government service production in order to ensure universality. Yet standard solutions risk being poorly suited to local needs and problems, for example during a dramatic change in the local economy. Second, if local welfare provision ends up being a mere appendage to local democracy, a mandated role carried out in a managerial way but not coordinated and incorporated into a larger governing context, this may in fact undermine the governance capacity of local government.

In our third refereed article in this issue, Heidi Rapp Nilsen and Trond Nilsen tackle the discharge of drilling waste from petroleum operations in the Barents Sea. Their qualitative research presents suggestions for environmental improvements to the Norwegian regime for discharging drilling waste, which is an important and current issue. The authors conclude that the applied systemic methodology yields new knowledge and salient policy recommendations for a part of the Barents Sea petroleum regime that has been less studied to date.

Our first research communication, by Pekka Iivari, attempts to determine how Russian media representations of migration are contextualized and what kind of spatial practices are formed in the case of the arctic border with the European Union. Iivari focuses on the migration discourse at the Finnish-Russian border in the winter of 2015–2016. The author finds that

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different media sources reported on asylum and immigration in broadly similar ways. This may reflect a homogenous press system in Russia. Newspapers and agencies tend to use the same language, report on the same themes and feature the same explanations and responses. Furthermore, whilst there was some variation, this can be attributed to different editorial guidelines and target audiences. The migration crisis was consistently represented in terms of its political contexts; the themes that emerged were broadly compatible with the various aspects of east–west relations as they are politically contextualized and understood.

Our second research communication, by Marit Sundet, informs us about the challenges of being a participant observer in a non-established culture, in No Man’s Land as she defines it. The traditional method assumes that the anthropologist will learn to understand the other from the social and cultural assumptions the other is born into. This text addresses the challenges the methodology poses in such a research situation.

The journal also features four young scholars of the Barents Region: Anna Nikupeteri (University of Lapland), Anastasia Emelyanova (UArctic Research Liaison and Thematic Networks Office), Anna Näppä (Luleå University of Technology), and Bodil Hansen Blix (UiT The Arctic University of Norway).

The issue contains a book review by Monica Tennberg of the Encyclopedia of the Barents region, which covers 1200 years of history in the region from different perspectives: state formation and borders, social history, economic systems and industrialization, regionalism, and globalization. As the reviewer argues, the encyclopedia is well-suited for anyone looking for key information about the region.

I would like to thank the eight anonymous reviewers who expertly and constructively reviewed the articles in this issue. I also thank the young scholars for their collaboration and wish them all the best in their work in the academic community in the Barents Region. Thanks are also due to Monica Tennberg for much collaboration and support.

Winter is almost here!

*Tarja Orjasniemi*

## REFERENCES

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