

Encyclopedia of the Barents region. Volumes I and II

MONICA TENNBERG

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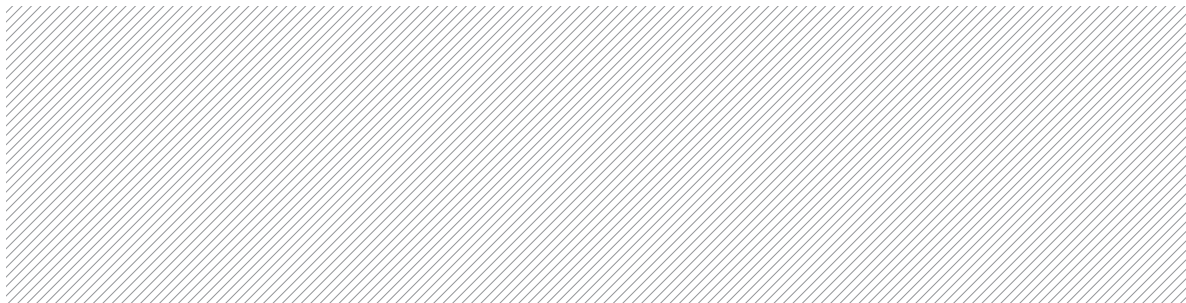
The Barents encyclopedia is an impressive collection of information that covers history, environment, economy, architecture, culture, art and media, education and science, languages, legal issues, people, politics and places of the Barents region. This encyclopedia takes a form of two book volumes containing 415 contributions in alphabetical order. The motivation to do such a book about the Barents region is to compile and disseminate existing information about the situation in the region and in its respective member countries. The objective of the book is to “contribute to the compilation and dissemination of knowledge about the conditions of life in northerly transnational societies”; and “it is expected to facilitate and stimulate interaction between citizens in the region in their capacities as businessmen, administrators, professionals and tourists” (p. 20). Some 300 authors, experts with different disciplinary and national backgrounds, have contributed to the encyclopedia. The contributions vary in length and style reflecting the diversity of topics covered in the volumes. The book is nicely illustrated with photographs, maps, and graphs.

It is rather difficult to give an overview of the wealth of topics covered in the encyclopedia. However, in the following, some points about politics, economy and environment as they are close to my own interests. For anyone looking for some basic information about the region, the encyclopedia serves very well. The encyclopedia provides information about administrative regions and their main development and features, geopolitics and historical development of borders, international cooperation in different regional contexts – North Calotte, Barents, Nordic and Arctic - and diplomatic and interregional relations in the region. Political history, organization and contemporary concerns of the Sami are included. Also, one can find information about some historical events in the region, such as the Alta controversy, Kautokeino rebellion, Svalbard

Treaty, World wars and Perestroika, and descriptions of a number of personalities in the political history of the region. Some topical issues such as colonialism and militarization are presented in the contributions but only for the Russian side of the Barents region. Globalization, a major force of change in the region, has not received its own contribution but the topic is referred as part of other contributions, such as environmental threats and security.

The book contains contributions on trade, economic development and activities. Basic information about energy industry, fisheries, reindeer husbandry, forestry, mining, telecommunications and tourism is included. A topical issue of transport and connections inside and outside in the region is also covered. National resource legislation in the respective countries and as well as nature protection in the region are described. The information concerning the environment includes contributions on terrestrial and marine environments of the region and about environmental threats, legislation and activism. Among the environmental concerns, climate change, its impacts, adaptation to them or mitigation has not received its own contribution but is considered as part of regional environmental issues.

Personally, I enjoy having a book or two like this in my hands, and the volumes have a place on my bookshelf for sure. The long history of the production of the volumes starting from early 2000s explains in my understanding the chosen book format and the selection of topics covered in the two-volume encyclopedia. At those times, internet had not yet become such an important and accepted source of information. Nowadays, there are several electronic sources of Barents related information available. For example, Barentsinfo (www.barentsinfo.org) containing extensive information about region, Barents patchwork (www.patchworkbarents.org/) visualizing regional features



and topics, Barents cooperation (www.barentscooperation.org) with documents about regional cooperation and also websites covering specific themes such as the Barents Sea Environmental status (www.barentsportal.com/) and climate change in the Barents region (www.climatesmart.fi).

One may, however, wonder what if the encyclopedia had been produced electronically what could it have meant for the project and its significance. In my understanding, choosing an electronic format could have meant at least four things: firstly, the information included to the two volumes of the encyclopedia could have been possible extended, and could be more easily maintained and updated in the future compared to the chosen book format. The book format set constraints on the number of pages to be printed, topics to be covered and possible extended for the future. Secondly, the electronic form make possible to have more photographs, maps and graphs to visualize the wealth of information in the encyclopedia. As such, the two volumes have nice illustrations, but some maps, for example, are produced very small which makes reading them difficult (for example in volume, page 483, the map on major mineral deposits). An electronic, internet based format, thirdly, could also include a possibility for readers to interact with other relevant sources of information through links, including possibility to refer to information in other formats, such as documentary films and videos. Finally, an electronic format would make the information more available and accessible to larger groups of users. Of course, these developments are not without their problems: costs of electronic publishing, fragmented nature of knowledge, questions of reliability of sources and access to correct information are challenges of the internet to mention a few. These reflections, however, do not diminish the value of the Barents encyclopedia: as such, it is an impressive expression of regional cooperation and commitment to production of knowledge and understanding of the region itself.

