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# The Making of the European Arctic

## Introduction

This is the first of two thematic issues of the *Journal of Northern Studies*, with publications from the research Mistra Arctic Sustainable Development Program. The articles were produced within a work package entitled “The making of the European Arctic—northern resource governance in comparative contexts,” which brought together humanities and social science scholars from north European universities, in research on the historical development of industries in the northernmost parts of Fennoscandia. The overarching objective of their research was to explore the relationship between changing ideological trends, changing institutional frameworks, and the development of natural resource utilization in this region, from a historical perspective of the last 150 years. The results, published in this and a following thematic issue of *Journal of Northern Studies*, bring forward new knowledge on how actors within forestry, mining, fisheries, energy, tourism and reindeer husbandry defined, controlled, and utilized natural resources in the region and why.

The theoretical thinking underpinning our work is an understanding of natural resources as social constructs. In line with the geographer Gavin Bridge, we argue that natural resources do not exist in and of themselves; they are constructed as such by actors who inscribe them with different values—in most cases economic values but in cases also political values. They do so by linking mineralizations, forests and animals to large actor networks or socio-technical systems, which often—if not always—transcend the boundaries of the north and of nations

(Bridge 2009). This constructivist approach allows us to see not only how different actor constellations construct resources, but also how different actors not only define resources differently, but also often disagree on what the consequences of extracting them are. The articles in this volume all deal with consequences of resource extraction, from different perspectives, and experts on the situation in Sápmi from Vaartoe—Centre of Sami Research at Umeå University make additional contributions to the results of the project.

The Arctic is frequently described as an ocean of great global interest. The main reason for this is warming temperatures and climate change that affects the whole world. This is also related to geopolitical security issues, new trade routes, and revision of financial and governance systems. The Mistra research program concludes in the final report that systems of governance have been shaped in these relatively sparsely populated areas (*New Governance* 2019). A certain focus of the program is on natural resource use, but also on the people that live in the region. To a great extent the situation in the European part of the Arctic is divergent from the Arctic regions in Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland. But there are also striking similarities, and good reasons to maintain and encourage Arctic research collaboration over borders of nations and disciplines (*Integrating Arctic Research* 2016).

The research program promoted the human dimension of the Arctic. The region is considered a valuable treasure not only for the people who live there but also for the people who come there. It is necessary that the results of research are used in efforts to make this region one of the best places in the world to live in, meaning that we want to take careful treatment of the resources that we have, with the unique landscape and the treasures that are kept here while also trying to support economic development where innovation processes are vital, where demographic challenges are faced and where the health situation is of major concern. This relates, of course, also to the 10 to 15 per cent of the people living in the Arctic that are Indigenous and of multiple ethnicities, living in all different areas of the Arctic. We still have to repeat that Indigenous peoples face challenges and problems—yesterday and today—from their perspective, with a situation where culture, languages and religion is under-supported; where they find themselves in a marginalized position; where their legal rights are questioned; and where extractive industries are in a constant battle over the land and the resources that we have here. On top of that come infrastructure developments that can also be a problem. On the Scandinavian side it relates to the Sami and the reindeer herders.

The articles contained in this volume deal with the changing circumstances of the people living in the Swedish Arctic Region, from a Sami per-

spective Sápmi, the traditional land of the Indigenous people, in historical times and today. In an Australian setting Dean Carson, Jeanie Govan and Doris Carson propose a model of how Indigenous communities may engage with the mining sector to better manage local development impacts and influence governance processes. By making use of a resource lifecycle model the authors show how the *benefits* and *burdens* associated with mining, as well as the *bridges* between Indigenous and outsider approaches to development and governance, can change very quickly. They conclude that there is a need for more flexible agreements and more dynamic relationships between different actors, and that adaptation to changing circumstances is key for a successful outcome. The final discussion reflects on how the model may be applied in the context mining governance and Indigenous stakeholder engagement in the Fennoscandian north.

The complexity of cultures and peoples is also illustrated by Isabelle Brännlund's article. While looking at the situation 100–150 years ago she states that the traditional economy of the Sami was much more diverse than previously has been claimed. Diverse natural resources were exploited, trade patterns were extensive, and in Sami livelihoods reindeer husbandry was one of various Sami trades and means of subsistence, rather than the only Sami livelihood.

Many river beds were drained and large areas of pasturage flooded as a result of extensive water regulation between the 1940s and 1960s. Valuable riverside pasturage, natural pasturage boundaries and migration routes disappeared. The pasturage areas have been replaced with paddocks and the natural migration routes by road transport. Reindeer husbandry has received a measure of financial compensation for these impaired circumstances, but the far-reaching consequences are not easy to size up. Through clear-felling, soil scarification and the construction of new roads, forestry has broken up winter pasturage areas and reduced the supply of winter grazing for reindeer. In year-round areas, the legal act of Silviculture enjoins consultation of the Sami villages prior to clear felling. Peat-cutting and extraction activities also have an adverse impact on pasture lands. Åsa Össbo in her article scrutinizes the development of hydropower system in northern Sweden and she outlines the path that leads from the energy laws 75 years ago to the present situation of energy extraction. Excluding elements and limited recognition have on the other side been more persistent.

Studies with a focus on Indigenous peoples in the Arctic have an indisputable value for Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world, and the other way around. Sustainable development requires an understanding that is well informed and aware of the similarities globally, as well as the differences. Kristina Sehlin MacNeil presents an international comparison

between Indigenous groups in Sweden and Australia, and their experiences of conflicts and power relations with extractive industries and industrial proponents. Although expressions of cultural, structural and extractive violence experienced by the two Indigenous communities varied, the impacts were strikingly similar.

Thus, this volume of *Journal of Northern Studies* brings forward on an important dimension of resource making in the north—the extractive industries are dependent on and embedded in large socio-technological systems, with consequences extending far beyond hydro-power stations, mines or clear cuts. For some they mean economic growth and employment opportunities, while for others they can represent a destruction of other resources and associated perceptions of what is a good and desirable environment and life.

## REFERENCES

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