

# JOURNAL *of* NORTHERN STUDIES

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Mats-Olov Olsson (editor-in-chief), Fredrick Backman, Alexey Golubev, Björn Nilsson & Lars Ohlsson (co-editors), Lars Elenius (assistant and graphics editor), *Encyclopedia of the Barents Region*, Oslo: Pax Forlag 2016, ISBN 978-82-530-387-5, Vol. 1 (A–M), 559 pp.; Vol 2 (N–Y), 593 pp.

The Barents Region is the name given to a large geographical area along the western Arctic coastal region comprising the north-eastern territories of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the European parts of the Russian Federation. Politically it is a region of collaboration that transcends national borders; this development follows from the so-called Kirkenes Declaration signed in 1993 by the Foreign Ministers of the above-named countries. It is a tangible product of the end of the Cold War Era.

A major figure who helped to lay the conceptual groundwork for the new turn of events that made possible the creation of the Barents Region as a region of collaborative activities in the domains of economic, scientific, social and cultural endeavours was the former President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who together with onetime Minister of Foreign Affairs in Norway, Thorvald Stoltenberg, has written and signed the foreword to this immense encyclopedia packed with facts, analyses, comprehensive overviews and extensive reference materials, as well as many illustrations and tables relating to the region's diverse past history and its more recent post-Cold War development.

The encyclopedia in itself is also a fine example of what has been accomplished in the collaborative spirit engendered in the just-cited inter-governmental agreement made twenty-four years ago. From its inception to final publication, the compilation of the valuable reference-work—divided into two volumes comprising some 1,150 pages—took ten years of work, involving 315 specialists, who, individually or jointly, produced 417 articles in all. Both volumes begin with a thematic overview list of entries that cluster articles under altogether thirteen broad topic categories. Specific topics appear in alphabetical order but are interconnected through a nice network of cross-references; after the text of each topic there is a short list of keywords pointing to related topics, and additionally a list of references to specialist literature under the rubric "Suggested Reading." Depending on the subject, the suggested reading will take the reader to relevant articles and books in English and/or Norwegian, Russian, Sami, Swedish.

The encyclopedia project began in December 2006, conceived as organizing the task of writing a scientifically based work in parallel to a then already ongoing production of a comprehensive history text enti-

tled *The Barents Region. A Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe* (Elenius et al. [eds.] 2015). This latter book yielded a research-based history of the Barents Region from 800–2010, a project started already in 2001 when collaboration with colleagues in Russia in a research network across four countries was something quite new. The *Transnational History* is thus an earlier companion volume that the interested reader may also want to consult. The leader of both projects has been Professor Lars Elenius who has a double academic affiliation, on the one hand the Department of Business Administration, Technology and Social Sciences, Luleå University of Technology, and on the other the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå University, Sweden.

In a preface to the encyclopedia, Elenius situates and provides an interesting explanation of the background and organization of the vast collaborative academic encyclopedia project and reminds us that there has until now been a lack of common written history across national borders in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, and that there has been a general deficit of knowledge regarding research and higher education that is actually being pursued in the humanities and social sciences in the northern region of each country. In the wake of the groundwork laid by the *Transnational History* volume and the research network set up and extended in connection with that project, the new encyclopedia's list of contributors reads like a "Who's Who?" in its particular branch of the humanities and social sciences within the compass of "Northern Studies."

To give a feel of the general scope and thrust of the contents of the two volumes of the encyclopedia, here is a small selection of the thematic categories. They range from a minimum of a handful to a dozen topic areas in the categories architecture, language, legal issues and religion, up to maximum of some 120 items in the case of the category "Places" (including cities, sub-regions, major islands, bays, seas and more). Entries taking up historical personages like northern and polar explorers and their major expeditions, scientists, politicians, indigenous leaders and activists, cultural personalities etc. amount to about 60. Other thematic categories are culture, art, media, demography and ethnography, economy, education and science, environment, history, politics. This then, is the framework that has guided the overall compilation within which individual entries run alphabetically. An index (38 pages) functions as a handy guide for finding information on a particular historical or political event, a given issue, topic, person, region or ethnic group; one can furthermore read up on indigenous activists, some feminists in the past,

NGOs (like the environmentalist organization Bellona, or the lesser known Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East—RAIPON) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the Arctic Council, or the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC); there is also plenty of demographic information about major regions, as well as a detailing of important concepts like cultural heritage, Common Heritage of Mankind (as a set of ethically based principles for the exploration and sharing of the world's natural resources), Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and UNCLOS (Law of the Sea), etc.

In the index, the paging of topical entries is highlighted in bold letters to distinguish these from the maze of other information. So if you, for example, want to know something about Russian Arctic explorers, you can readily find an entry on this, and likewise for Russian-Norwegian economic relations 1905–1940, or Russian submarines, or the Pomor Museum. While “the Red Army” does not have an entry in its own right, the index will take you to many sections in which this topic is mentioned in one way or another, for example its role in the “Russian Civil War of 1918–1922.”

One can also easily learn about research and educational activities with a northern or polar slant (pertinent to the Barents region) connected with one or another of the more than fifty universities or specialist centers/institutes covered. Anyone interested in various aspects of energy-use, including coal-driven, hydro-electric, nuclear and alternative energy, as well as natural resources more generally, will quickly gain a good picture of the past and present by tracing a chain of index words under these rubrics. In the same way, if you follow pages cited in multiple sub-references under, for example, the words environmentalism, fishing, forestry, hunting, infrastructures, language(s), migration, military history, mineral resources, mining, railway(s), tourism, trade, transportation, tundra, World War I and World War II, this will open a mine of facts, figures and brief overviews. In some cases a key word like “Saami” leads to a trail of successively linked topics, from the “Saami and religion” over “Saami education,” “Saami film,” “Saami languages,” “Saami media,” “Saami migration,” “Saami musical cultures and political history,” “Saami research,” “Saami rights,” to shamanism, tourism and traditional ways of life.

The foregoing are only a few examples of how one can use the encyclopedia in order to quickly find well-researched information on a given topic or a set of mutually related topics. A brief but substantial entry on the “Barents Euro Arctic Region” with an organogram and a map, furthermore provides some insight into the context wherein the encyclopedia project itself was hatched. Interesting perspectives that may be

entirely new to the inquisitive reader also emerge. After a general perspective on “Colonialism,” we find an entry by a Russian scholar on the little known history of colonization of the Russian North-West. Some readers might fasten on to articles like the one on traditional “cuisine” or “food and drink” specific to the Barents region, others might go directly to the one on oil and gas extraction in the Barents region, or the fascinating one on “Place names.” Furthermore, the entry entitled “Maps of the Barents Region” provides a valuable overview of the history of different cartographic traditions.

An entry on “Mineral Resources and Mining” discusses the geology of the Barents Region and has a long list of mines currently operating in the four countries involved. A text on “Monasteries in the Russian North” takes us over to religious geographies, providing a map, discussion and images of significant Christian Orthodox monasteries and their roles over historical time. Under “Minorities and Minority-Related Issues,” we are introduced to the demographics of aboriginal minority peoples (e.g., Komi, Nenets, Sami), as well as linguistic minorities like Finns in Sweden, Kvens in Norway or Swedes in Finland. A series of three comprehensive entries related to musical traditions, their social contexts, and various types of musical festivals in the Barents Region conclude the first volume of the encyclopedia. The second volume concludes with two long retrospective articles on World War I and World War II in the Barents Region. The very last entry is brief, dealing with the post-war achievements of an eminent Russian geologist long associated with the Komi Science Centre.

Traditionally, the study of geographical regions has entailed comparisons between areas in different national domains. The Barents Region defined as a co-operative framework entails a mix of three different development approaches (decentralisation, regionalism and so-called new regionalism) involving both top-down strategies and action plans from a center on the one hand, and bottom up initiatives among local stakeholders on the other. The complex dynamics of these processes have prompted geographers and other analysts to introduce new concepts, as for example explained in an entry under the rubric “Regionalization, Regionalism, and New Regionalism,” where such concepts are applied and found to fit the Barents Region. In the *Encyclopedia* as a whole, it is natural that the primary focus is descriptive, but since the general take on the Barents Region is intended to be multi- and interdisciplinary as well as integrative, I would have liked to have seen more entries like the one just cited that go well beyond description to an incisive discussion of several conceptual challenges implicated in the encyclopedia project as a whole.



The concepts of sustainability and sustainable development are touched upon in a number of entries but are not analytically elaborated as contested terms in any of them. This is a pity, as they seem to be central to the vision of the Barents Region as a prospering entity. In some of the literature, one can find critical voices that point out how the same contradiction between ideas of sustainability and neoliberal governance found in other contexts is also inherent here. In fact, some authors speak of a paradox.

Addressing the question of the strengths and weaknesses of sub-regional institutions on Arctic affairs, Tennberg *et al.* (2014: 68), for example, discuss what happens when ideas of sustainability and neoliberal governance meet in community development:

The situation in the Barents Region from the perspective of local communities is paradoxical in many ways. While the popular image of the region is one of rich resources, with many opportunities for wealth and development, the local perspective is dominated by views emphasising a lack of resources and services and people and livelihoods that are struggling to benefit from regional development (see Duhaime and Caron 2008; Glomsrød *et al.* 2008). From the local perspective, the Barents Region seems poorer rather than richer: there are not enough resources to cover expenses related to housing, environmental protection, social services and innovation and culture, among many other things. There is constant competition between peoples, livelihoods and resources, manifested in local conflicts between cultures, groups and various related needs. One explanation for the “poverty” of the Barents Region lies in neoliberal policies, with their national variations, which make natural resources accessible to international actors, add local responsibilities and extend competition to all social relations.

While the two governmentalities often conflict, they sometimes also complement one another, posing a paradox that raises concerns over the social aspect of sustainable development in particular.

Finally, the military dimension also deserves more attention, since it permeates life conditions and often also policy considerations. I note that immediately after the entries in each volume there is a specific “list of maps with sources” directly related to major topics included in that particular volume. One such map illustrates the topic “Militarization of the Russian Arctic.” The discerning reader will note that unfortunately there is no comparable map of current militarization of northern countries under the auspices of the NATO command. Surprisingly, NATO does not even appear as an entry in the encyclopedia’s index. Nevertheless, a discussion in a brief entry entitled “Geopolitics, Security, and

Globalization” does touch on the issue and notes how NATO-financed radar stations were—and still are—situated in northern Norway as far east as Vardø, and how the entire circumpolar North still continues to host important military structures, including nuclear weapons systems, air forces with (nuclear) bombers and Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence (C3I) systems with radar, and Norway still allows testing of new weapons, arms systems and military applications, and military training and exercises and intelligence work. Mention is also made of how both strategic and so-called attack nuclear submarines of the US Navy patrol the Barents Sea close to Russian naval bases. The encyclopedia would have benefited greatly by inclusion of further entries relating to what bearing the present day geopolitical scene (and NATO’s role in it) has on the Barents Region and its governance.

In this connection, two analysts (Bailes & Ólafsson 2017: 62) writing a chapter in another recent book remind us:

the Russian side is currently more sensitive than ever to European/Western “ganging up,” and it remains to be seen whether the Northern Dimension in particular can avoid lasting damage from some EU members’ insistence on extending sanctions to the financing of its collectively sponsored projects. The de-politicization and humble profile that allow sub-regional cooperation to make its most characteristic contributions may, it seems, be among the hardest characteristics for EU politicians to absorb and emulate. That could raise questions in some minds about how the EU would use any stronger status it may eventually gain in the Arctic Council. The answer matters, because a peaceful Arctic is ultimately in the interest of all Europeans.

In conclusion, the encyclopedia is strong on historical, social, cultural and educational dimensions of developments, as well as aspects related to ethnicity, demographics and humanities in the Barents Region. A number of scientific aspects of historical interest are taken up. Economic, military and political dimensions connected to the past are well covered, but as I have indicated, the focus on deep-running trends in the current dynamics behind these same dimensions tends to be weaker. This, however, does not detract from the fact that the two volumes under review here constitute a remarkable achievement and a great source for both students and scholars, and broader publics interested in an important region of a rapidly changing world in the High North. Academic and better-stocked public libraries are recommended to obtain copies of these two finely illustrated and readable volumes; they definitely help fill a sizable gap in our ability to orient ourselves in that world.

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