

Report on Plenary Session I  
Northern Research Forum  
Veliky Novgorod, Russia  
September 19-22, 2002

Prepared by Nancy Elliot  
Session Organized by Peter Johnson

### Human Capital in the North

It was apparent by the Plenary I: Human Capital in the North, that people had a differing view of what is meant by 'Human Capital'. There are challenges in talking about an overall 'human capital', since people from different countries expressed concerns that reside at various spatial and temporal scales. This reflects differing cultural backgrounds, as well as varying standards of measurement between countries. The Northern Research Forum can play a central role in placing issues within a comparative and meaningful context.

Peter Johnson of Canada chaired the Plenary. The first speaker, Sergei Karcuhi of Russia, detailed ways in which legislation (national) and policy (national and regional) has been used in Russia to protect rights of Aboriginal peoples. He stressed that maintaining the relationship with the traditional land is important for identity. It is vital to emphasize this with other agencies and industrial companies operating in the north. He concluded by pointing out that each region has its own specificity, and thus the solutions for implementing national policy at the regional level will be different on a region by region basis.

Ingvild Brock discussed national and international issues relating to higher education, noting that in her country (Norway), a relatively high percentage of staff are from abroad, and that many Norwegians leave the country to attend educational institutions. She noted the success of having people educated in the north, for then there was a significant chance that they will stay to live and work in the North. She also noted that it is important to have professors and students taking part in the development of regions. The Northern Research Forum assists in meeting the goals of higher education.

Nancy Elliot (Young Researcher) from Canada discussed that way that differing worldviews between Western-based science and traditional environmental knowledge can create barriers to implementing resource management policies which will protect and promote the values of aboriginal peoples. In particular, she discussed how the way that maps are used and viewed reinforces the worldview of western-based science. Her PhD research will examine ways of using Virtual Reality to help bridge this gap by developing better ways of communicating the Aboriginal worldview to non-Aboriginal managers and decision-makers.

Esther Coombs of the Alaskan Housing Corporation presented details on the Alaska Healthy Community Project. She noted that community based wellness programs are based in local community values, and that it is not possible to have healthy communities without healthy leaders and people. With the Community Project, it was the first time a comprehensive approach, involving a partnership amongst the private sector, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, government, and local people, was used.

It was evident from discussion that a huge and central topic for this plenary was: how do you develop human capital in the north without healthy people?

Peter Johnson of Canada presented information on the demographics of the Canadian Arctic (a population 'snapshot'). He noted that it is important that communities control their own destinies, for example by building and controlling infrastructure, such as airlines. He also noted that sometimes achieving the goal of economic expansion can counter other goals. To illustrate this point he spoke of the oil and gas companies in Yellowknife who had hired high school age students, taking them out of school. He stressed the importance of education and trade development in the role of capacity building in the North. He also stressed the importance of integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge in school curriculums.