

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

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The Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR)

Introduction

The Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) project is built upon an idea that has emerged from the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, inspired by the UNDP's Reports on Sustainable Development. The AHDR is intended to 'assess the state of sustainable development and community viability in the circumpolar region including all Arctic residents' (as Einarsson presented it at the event). The project has been developing for several years in relation to the Arctic Council, amongst other in a small ten-member task force, and will most probably be formally accepted by the Arctic Council at its meeting in Finland in October. The secretariat for the AHDR will then be set up in Iceland, at the Stefansson Arctic Institute in Akureyri. The AHDR is planned to be presented as a finalized report at the end of the Icelandic chairmanship of the Arctic Council in October 2004, and be published in scientific and popularized versions, just like the environment-centered State of the Arctic Environment reports which were developed under the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme AMAP working group (AMAP 1997, 1998). The AHDR is thus intended to be a sort of 'Social State of the Arctic' report, and will also take in the same scope as the earlier environment-centered AMAP report: the area down to the Arctic Circle in northern Europe, and that down to 60 degrees northern latitude in North America.

In their presentation, Young and Einarsson presented the rationale of the report, its scope and content, and procedures for implementation, as well as invited further contact from the audience, especially Russian participants, with suggestions on how to develop the AHDR project. This summary and comments paper, requested by the Northern Research Forum, includes a brief description of the AHDR project, comments to the presenters at the event, and comments by the rapporteur, as requested.

Scope and content

As for rationale, scope and content, the AHDR project is based in the assumption that there are some common social denominators and shared concerns for the Arctic area. The report aims to describe the baseline of social situations in the Arctic and in that provide both a macro level description and micro level examples such as success stories, to evaluate similarities and differences across the areas and identify gaps in knowledge, networks and cooperation. It is in that intended to serve as a tool to identify issues in the

Arctic and related to sustainable development in the Arctic, to educate the public, provide a handbook for policymakers, and link to existing educational initiatives such as the University of the Arctic (which has also developed in an Arctic Council context).

The AHDR is intended to be based on existing research and information, and the development of the report would thus center on collecting available sources. The research and information would be presented by social scientists and people from the region. The report would also include both qualitative and quantitative data, and is presently intended to take up the following broad themes in relation to the Arctic:

- sustainable human development
- demography
- economy
- environment and resource governance
- globalisation
- political systems and legal issues
- cultures and rapid social change
- socio-cultural factors affecting human health
- human and social capital (including links to higher education resources)
- community viability and gender issues
- international cooperation.

Questions and comments to the presenters

In the following discussion session, questions and comments to the presenters centered on how participation and selection by social scientists and peoples in the region should take place. Several people questioned how to gain participation to write on all of the Arctic. One person noted that it was unlikely that someone, for example, specialized on the Scandinavian north would be able to write on all of the Arctic (as the description would also not be possible to generalize). The problem was, as he stated it, that selected writers either would need to go largely outside their own area and undertake extensive research into areas they were otherwise not specialists on, or would need to set up large research groups. A Russian participant in the session asked how teams for writing could be selected: in the Russian case she saw it as likely that the research team or institute appointed by the state would be one outside the region. Even more problematic, then, she saw the question of how to select the participation of peoples in the region. It was also suggested that the Northern Forum would be involved in some way or that at least some regional organization of the north would be targeted. A problem in selecting scope and participation was though, as presenters stated in response to a question, that it was as of yet undecided on which level (for example, state, regional, or county) data would be assembled.

Additional questions and comments took up how the Arctic can be described (mainly, whether in a descriptive fashion or by using indicators); that natural science could have a role to play in for example describing sewage treatment capabilities in Arctic communities; that the Russian national consensus data that would be gathered by

the end of the year could be possible to utilize in the project; and the suggestion that Russian northern and Arctic-related institutions would most probably support the project after it had been approved by the Russian government. The Association of Canadian Universities of Northern Studies (ACUNS) representative present (Robert Bailey) offered to take the AHDR proposal to ACUNS to find people interested in participating. It however became clear in discussions that it—different from in Canada—does not exist any Russian regionally based network of researchers on the north except in relation to the University of the Arctic.

Comments by the rapporteur

The Young Researchers have been asked to provide their comments on the projects in these reports, and I have some comments in addition to those voiced at the meeting. These primarily relate to the conclusions I have drawn in my recently finalized PhD work at the University of Lapland, which work focuses on the construction of an Arctic region and especially considers the Arctic Council development.

In my view, the AHDR is a necessary and important project, in that it extends the previously dominant social focus on the indigenous (who are only 13% of the population in whole in the area defined as Arctic by AMAP, cf. AMAP 1998). There are however some issues that need be especially considered in developing such a project and report.

Firstly, while the environment has been a focus in Arctic cooperation since the age of exploration, is well researched and was thereby possible to rather quickly in AMAP compile a rather well-researched work on, the social has not been a focus in the Arctic for a very long time. The social characteristics of the regions of eight states that are in focus for this work have in an Arctic connection mainly been described mainly through their indigenous elements. This problem is characteristic of the Arctic Council: the Council holds state and indigenous NGO representation, but no representation of the actual regions of the eight states. While the AHDR recognizes and embodies a very important attempt to ameliorate this oversight, it may therefore nevertheless be difficult to attain both expertise and broader representation of people in the regions to be able to provide a representative description of these, in this short proposed time of two years to a finalized report. This problem involves several subproblems when it comes to selection of researchers and participants. Firstly, and the easiest to ameliorate, is that administrative/statistical delineations in the states upon which research may exist do not always relate directly to AMAP delineations of the Arctic, even if data can probably be amended to the AMAP delineation¹. There is however an important problem in scaling of data. Secondly, and more serious, is that in the short time available under the present suggestion, to assemble existing research, selection would almost inevitably target the existing traditionally and historically developed network on Arctic studies. In my point of view, this network is however not equally descriptive of all of the eight state contexts but mainly relate to the issues and areas historically and climatically seen as Arctic, which

¹ It may however be important to gather data on this now established delineation, as it would provide a social image of the environmental image of the Arctic that has already been described in Arctic Council work, and to which cooperatives refer as 'Arctic'.

are smaller areas than those now targeted for Arctic cooperation. That would mean that researchers dealing with Arctic issues may not always be aware of expertise that relates to the targeted areas as such, beyond those active in and dealing explicitly with the Arctic and thereby with established Arctic issues and most often the indigenous. On this note, the pre-assumption stated by presenters, that the Arctic would have some common denominators and shared concerns socially, should therefore perhaps be a possible and qualified result of research rather than an assumption at the outset—as it might structure the way assemblage of data is undertaken towards established problem complexes. While often assumed foci of traditional livelihoods, subsistence and rapid social change are often seen as common Arctic concerns, it has yet not been estimated to how high degree the northern areas of the eight states are actually on broader social level similar beyond general periphery and thereby related economic development problems. Thirdly, to then select ‘peoples of the region’ to provide a representative picture of the region is an even larger problem, as there exists very few links from the existing Arctic-studies related community to peoples in the regions beyond the indigenous or established Arctic issues. Interaction between policy, research, and lay areas is a common problem, but is in the Arctic exacerbated by the few established institutional ties that exist to sub-regional or local representation beyond the relation to indigenous or established concerns.

An AHDR developed in the scope of two years may therefore rather be seen as a politically related work in progress, and as indicating, as Einarsson suggested, some very broad baseline and needs for further work, including gaps in knowledge, networks and cooperation. While the publication of a full version and popularized version are crucial, neither of these may be attainable within the two-year scope. Data may not be accessible to support a legitimate, accountable description for a full version, and there are some risks with writing up a popular policy-related or population-aimed version of quickly gathered data (especially if these tentative data are stated with some certainty in the language of science and policy). Quickly gathered data may be taken both in Arctic-related and broader international work as an accurate description of the region - which may place Arctic issues into a limited and not fully accurate description it is then difficult to proceed from. Instead, a comprehensive report, in anything similar to the AMAP State of the Arctic Environment report, but on the ‘state of sustainable development and community viability in the circumpolar region including all Arctic residents’ would thus in this opinion need to be related to major ground-level research projects in each of the states/areas; which perhaps AHDR work can provide or support the initiation of. The two-year work would thereby be seen as a start and setting a policy and research priority (proceeded upon in following work e.g. in working groups and to motivate research in state frameworks), rather than as an end result.