

The 4th NRF Open Meeting: Cross-Cutting Themes, Multi-Disciplinary and Policy-Oriented Discourse and Analytical Dialogue

Lassi Heininen
Chairman of the Steering Committee
Northern Research Forum

The 4th Open Meeting of the Northern Research Forum took place in the Bothnian Arc, i.e. Oulu and Tornio in Finland, and Haparanda and Luleå in Sweden in the 4th-8th of October 2006. It was organized by the Northern Research Forum together with the Host Planning Committee consisting representatives of eleven regional and local institutions of the Bothnian Arc region from Finland and Sweden.

The program was a rich one and included the Opening Session, three Plenaries, a Special Session, six Project Sessions under the title of Day of Projects, four Square Hours and a Summary Session. There were also film shows with four documentary films from Finland, Iceland and Russia under the title of "Northern Traveling Film Festival", Cultural Evening including an opening of a photo exhibition "What's up North" and a dance performance "Deadly after dark", and two NRF dinners. Altogether 150 participants took part in the activities of the meeting including NRF Young Researchers, panelists of the plenaries and speakers of the project sessions.

The Main Theme of "Tech-Knowledge"

The preparatory discourse for the main theme of the 4th NRF Open Meeting, "Tech-knowledge in Economies and Cultures" was started with a tentative theme of "Economics, Technology and Regional Development". The idea was to search for a new approach to inter-relations between these three relevant phenomena, and further, to find a common understanding of how science, technology and economic development would be used for the benefit of northern regions. In a purposeful, if a slightly artificial final formulation of the main theme, "tech-knowledge" means the combination of

(western) science and technology, and traditional and local knowledge on one hand, whereas on the other hand, an interpretation that technological development dominates too much, and that the faith in technology is a two-edged sword for peoples and societies, lies behind.

We were asked for a clear definition, but we were actually more eager to hear participants' interpretations and definitions of the term, and due to this fresh and unorthodox main theme, expectations were high. As a result, technology, (western) science and traditional knowledge as the principal components of the main theme were broadly discussed in the sessions, particularly in the position papers. Though there was some hesitation due to the complex, multifunctional and less than easily accepted concept of "Tech-knowledge in Economies and Cultures" the main theme was largely well received, but in general both scholars and policy-makers discussed specific aspects or elements of the theme rather than adopting a holistic point of view. However, when trying to define a new phenomena, even a somewhat vague but explorative discourse on the theme produces results.

Technology is "a purposeful, practical activity which involves an interaction of tools or machines (as hardware) and human beings" which also includes "the application of knowledge by organizations of human beings" and "the interaction between human beings and hardware" (Allen and Thomas 2000, 403). This is not, however, enough, because all human activity, either technical or not, has also both a strong social content and an economic content and thus deals with development. Therefore, "knowledge by organizations of human beings" includes traditional knowledge and local knowledge in general for example, the Saami hey-shoe as hi-tech of its time, and especially traditional knowledge

regarding the environment, i.e. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). It also includes indigenous participation in resource management such as is discussed in the position papers by Gail Fondahl, Tero Mustonen and Francois Trudel (see these articles in this volume).

One fundamental general question is, how is it possible to have a common language between experts on technology and its users in a society? Followed from this there are challenges of “tech-knowledge” for example, how to include human capital-building and regional capacity-building in technology. And further, how can we promote an interface between the issues of climate change and human development, as reflected by the gaps in knowledge raised and discussed by the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) which is based on a close international and multilateral scientific cooperation (Young and Einarsson 2004, 238-240). The issue is a recent example of a need for a new kind of multi-disciplinary discourse on knowledge, technology, and policies and procedures on one hand, and on the other the interplay between science, politics and business in general.

Interdisciplinary research is already under way to create new knowledge for example, the Arctic Human Development Report, AHDR (2004) and the report of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, ACIA (2004), international agreements to reduce impacts, and response policies, either to apply or control, to these impacts. In the eight Arctic countries there are excellent universities and higher education systems and the University of the Arctic is an international network for higher education. All of these deal significantly with climate change and human development. The NRF has also discussed these issues extensively in the Open Meetings as well in Town Hall Meetings, such as the Special Session at the 4th NRF (see Report from Town Hall Meeting, February 8, 2006; Final Report from the Calotte Academy 2005), a series of meetings that deal with the findings of the two above-mentioned reports. Another step forward would be to educate decision-makers at all levels in the nature of climate change, what kinds of inter-relations there are, and what human responses we need.

It would also be relevant to ask, how can there be a return of the traditional knowledge of the Saami back to the people and the Saami communities? And further as a more general issue, how to continue an evaluation of information and communication technology (ICT) and promote it in Northern peripheries like for example, crossing borders by using ADSL (see Kajava, Mamaja, Anttila and Ilkko in this volume). Another question is, if there is potential for technology that deals with the impacts of climate change and a “risk technology for the

North” (e.g. Brainstorming meeting 2005), is that then only another example of a faith in technology which is rooted in the faith in economic growth as one of the driving forces of modernization? If we take seriously the criticism that spiritual and moral development of a human being has been much slower than the triumph of technology, we should be concerned with defining the problem through interdisciplinary and trans-sectorial processes and procedures through the collaboration of experts of different fields, and further, to guarantee that new technological innovations are really needed in a society, and thus will be utilized.

The Geopolitical Context, the Bothnian Arc

The geographical and geopolitical context of the 4th NRF Open Meeting, the Bothnian Arc *per se* is a good example of “The Borderless North” making possible a geographical and political focus of both national borders and a borderless space. “Borderless” can be interpreted in many ways for example, “attractive, offering the prospect of free and unencumbered transfers of information, people and goods” although (coastal) states “tend to be vigilant concerning the threat...of erosions to their sovereign rights” as Ron Macnab writes in his position paper (see Macnab in this volume).

Reflecting current interdisciplinary discourses on national borders one thing is that in spite of lower borders within an integrated area for example, the European Union (EU), a boundary as an explicit border between territories, states, peoples and cultures has kept its main purpose of separating in the name of national security instead of promoting cooperation across national borders at the time of globalization. Though this is still the mainstream approach of international politics, in Europe there have been discourses since the 1950s to interpret a national border as low as possible, an element of connection and cross-border activities like euro-regions. As a result there is a borderland which works like a bridge, or even a centre, between two or more states and regions with the main purpose of connecting peoples, societies and cultures of the both sides of a border. Its main aim is to decrease tension and increase stability based on the theory of functionalism by David Mitrany and even to build security communities based on the theory of Karl Deutch.

A concrete example of a borderland in North Europe is the Euregio “Karelia” on the external border of the EU between Finland and the Karelian Republic in Russia, where both sides of this borderland share much of the same history and culture (e.g. Cronberg 2001; Yarovoy 2006). This interpretation of a (national) border indicates

interdependence and is according to new approaches of geopolitics, where on one hand actors and identities, not only a space, play an important role (e.g. Paasi 1996; Heininen 2005a) and on the other, it indicates a de-bordering process which would make it possible to define a region in a new way and create a new kind of a virtual region.

There are also other kinds of borders to cross like for example, those between sectors of a society in general and especially between science and politics. Indeed, how to cross sectorial borders in a society, and the globalized world as a whole, is one of the contemporary challenges of our modern societies, and correspondingly, the interplay between science and politics is needed. Even the wealthy and democratic Northern countries, which have recently been used as examples for other parts of the globe, such as with the Nordic peace, face the same challenges. For these challenges we need lively, fresh and open-minded approaches, discussions and dialogues, and new kinds of broader stages, deeds and procedures. In the 4th NRF Open Meeting an example of this was the Triple Helix interactive cooperation and action research between Luleå University of Technology, the Swedish University of Agricultural Science, and industry and municipal leaders from four Norrbotten municipalities described by Håkan Ylinenpää and Margareta Strömbäck (2005) in their position paper.

The 4th NRF Open Meeting took place in one economic and political union, two states, three countries and four sites (cities or towns), and it had eleven hosts. For the first time an NRF Open Meeting was organized in an international cooperative region, "The Bothnian Arc". It is a unique and exiting region in North Europe and within the European Union, with innovation systems and knowledge programs as Seppo Saari writes in his position paper (see Saari in this volume) and a modern heavy industry in stainless steel as is described by the position paper of Outokumpu Tornio Works. Further, within the region the Torniojoki river-valley on the Finnish-Swedish border is a sub-region based on a rich tradition of communication and cooperation. The river-valley includes the Twin town Haparanda-Tornio, or "Haapatornio" by the Finnish academic Matti Kuusi (1988) (see also Ronkainen and Bucht in this volume). It is an interesting case study for border research like for example, Dennis Zalamans (2001) has shown (also Zalamans in this volume). This is especially due to the fact that the inter-municipal cooperation did not start as a result of Finland's and Sweden's membership of the EU, but is based on local and regional 'bottom-up' cooperation across the border. Indeed, the Torniojoki river-valley is a unique workshop to study how a borderland influences the identity/ies and culture(s) of a region and

peaceful human and social understanding of people(s) as it was discussed in the 2nd Plenary in Tornio.

In the Bothnian Arc there are many actors and even more interests, several cultures, identities and environments including different cultures of action and procedures. It has been needed to cross several national, regional, municipal and cultural borders, borders between sectors, institutions and stakeholders as well disciplines. Although, there is a well-known proverb "Too many cooks spoil the broth", through the 4th NRF Open Meeting we all, i.e. the local organizers and the participants of the 4th NRF showed, even proved, that there are exceptions to that proverb and it is not always correct. Further, we do believe that in spite of challenges and some hindrances, as well as certain imperfections, the 4th NRF Open Meeting was worth the effort: On one hand, we were successful and created new experiences and good practices both on an individual level and between Northern societies, regions and countries; otherwise, how would we be ready to face real and big challenges like for example, climate change and its impacts. On the other hand, the meeting promoted region-building, devolution and even regionalization both in the Bothnian Arc and in North Europe both in general and especially in the context of the "new" Northern Dimension as it was both described by many and discussed lively in the 3rd Plenary in Luleå (see Henriksson, Heininen and Riepula in this volume).

Further, it was interesting that the North in the global context became a hot topic in the discussions of the meeting. Though not an altogether new theme in scientific discourse (e.g. Heininen 2005b; Southcott 2005), the issue was raised in the 1st Plenary by President Grimsson and President Halonen (2006; also Halonen and Grimsson in this volume) and received a lot of support from the participants and media interest. One might say that the mutual political conclusion concerning the growing role of the North and that Northern actors are playing an increasingly important role in global, world politics is one of the main findings of the 4th NRF Open Meeting (e.g. Kaleva 2006).

The NRF as an International Forum for Open Discussion and Dialogue

The Northern Research Forum (NRF) is an international forum for open discussion across sectorial borders and discourse between disciplines. Although not "Davos" of the North, the three Open Meetings have revealed a new kind of lively forum for an issue and policy oriented intensive dialogue addressing the critical issues,

challenges and opportunities facing Northern peoples and regions in the context of social and environmental changes and economic globalization (e.g. NRF Mission & Activities; Proceedings of the NRF Open Meetings in 2000, 2002 and 2004 on the NRF web-site). Further, according to the NRF Rules of Procedure, which the NRF Steering Committee accepted on October 9th of 2006: "The mission of the NRF is to be a platform for a productive dialogue among members of the research community and a wide range of other Northern stakeholders in order to (a) facilitate the efforts of researchers to carry out work that is relevant to issues on the contemporary Northern agenda and (b) engage members of the policy community and other stakeholders to discuss, assess and report about research products relevant to contemporary Northern issues."

The NRF is also an international research project with an aim to take into consideration all disciplines of science and has an interdisciplinary approach, which should be a part of teaching and supervision and to mean science with innovations. Further, the NRF Open Meetings brings together senior professionals and young researchers with their expertise and scientific knowledge with an aim that this inter-relationship creates fresh ideas and unconventional approaches. This reflects the idea that "NRF is a gathering of minds" like one of the students of the NR Master Degree Program put it at the 4th Open Meeting. As an achievement of outreach the 4th NRF managed to attract a bunch of good young researchers (mostly from Russia and North America) with substantial and qualified presentations which covered well the main theme of the sub-themes. Indeed, the NRF Young Researchers is a significant human capital in the NRF context.

In the NRF context an open discussion and dialogue is among members of the research community and a wide range of other northern stakeholders, and also for policy-relevant discussion on the role of research. In the background there is one of the criteria of science, the social relevance of science saying that a scientific community is not isolated in society and scholars and scientists do not work in an ivory tower, but are a part of the society where scholars and scientists live. If so, then the idea is that research findings have, or are expected to have, an influence in a society in general and especially when decisions are made, and further, in order to implement the social relevance of science the interplay between science and politics is needed (e.g. Heininen 2006).

On the one hand, we are interested in research findings being described, summarized and discussed in the public by the scientific community. On the other hand,

we are concerned with, and emphasize that research findings are taken into consideration, and used in decision-making by the rest of society for the development of societies and the international system. And further, that a scientific community is active in a dialogue between science and politics, and actively organizes this kind of dialogue. The latter needs forums and platforms in general, and especially new kinds of stages like the stage-building in the North as a part of region-building such as, the Arctic Council, the Northern Dimension of the EU and the NRF which were promoted, partly even initiated, by social sciences (Heininen 2005c).

In the background there is also the complex and multi-functional state of the international system, a globalized, but not necessarily democratic world order, the need for a global dialogue between the EU, Russia and the USA, and China and India, and cultures and nations in general, and the interpretation that "The North appears to be an active, fresh and innovative region, a characteristic manifest in pan-Arctic cross-border cooperation, region-building, and through new and innovative political arrangements". Thus, it has a positive attitude "as a functional, viable region challenges the power and hegemony of the Cold War", and further, it has the potential to be a (positive) example, if not a model, for the rest of the world (Heininen 2005b).

Behind the main idea, or philosophy, of the NRF is thinking that it is better to have flexibility and mobility, to be based on lively personal connections and to build a process rather than a heavy structure. It is similar to a knowledge-based network with "the ability to transform scientific knowledge" like Boris Segerstahl writes in his position paper (Segerstahl 2006; also Segerstahl in this volume). Indeed, the NRF is a process and includes for example, sub-forums of, and for, the NRF Open Meetings such as the Calotte Academy, theme workshops on relevant themes, town hall meetings on the findings, issues, problems, opportunities and initiatives on human development and impacts of climate change, and a network of experts with its core in the NRF young researchers (NRF Steering Committee 2005).

An Open Meeting is, however, the core of the NRF activities and both includes and is parallel to, relevant case studies and general processes, and inter-relationships between them. It is first of all a platform for open discussion and dialogue between the participants, who - either as a panellist, a speaker, a young researcher or another kind of participant - are the most important actors of the NRF Open Meetings. Followed from this, the participants of the 4th NRF Open Meeting were asked to attend all the plenaries, square hours, special session and one-to-two of project day sessions of the meeting.

The main procedure of the work of an Open Meeting can be described according to the following ways and principles: first, to have the first round of discussions through the so-called position papers, which cover the main theme(s) and most of the sub-themes, feed the discussions of a meeting. Here I would like to thank the authors of the position papers of the 4th NRF for their important contribution for our issue-orientated dialogue; second, in the Plenaries / Project Day sessions there are expert panellists / speakers that represent different disciplines, fields of expertise, countries and regions. Their contribution is both a short presentation and to actively engage in an open discussion. Thus, a high expertise on Northern issues is present in the sessions; third, a lively dialogue is not, however, possible without active participation by all experts who are present in sessions, and time for an open discussion. In NRF sessions there is always time enough for an discussion, dialogue and debate both between the panel and the audience, and in general between the participants of a session; fourth, although the main method is a dialogue *per se*, the main product is new knowledge with the aim to have analytical discourses, to make syntheses when it is possible, and to create new ideas and concrete proposals for the future; fifth and final, in order to implement these methods all discussions, ideas, proposals and conclusions will be reported and documented orally by the NRF Young Researchers on one hand, and on the other hand, these reports and articles by the panellists and speakers and re-written position papers will be published in a proceeding.

Conclusions

Briefly saying the 4th NRF Open Meeting was successful and created on one hand new things and ideas and on the other, confirmed several existing thoughts, things and procedures. There were dynamic discussions and dialogues between decision-makers, young researchers and senior scientists and a wide spectrum of relevant subject matters were covered in the sessions during these four days. From these the main themes "tech-knowledgy" and "borderless", not least due to the slogan "The Borderless North", were broadly discussed and also concretized through the case study of the Bothnian Arc region. Further, the fact that two heads of state, President Tarja Halonen and President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson had a speech and participated in the discussions shows that Northern issues are relevant, and even more that the importance of Northern regions is growing in world politics.

Although there is still room for more representatives of politics, business and the civil society there were enough academics from the Northern countries, deci-

sion-makers from Finland and Sweden, and business people from Finland and Iceland for lively and interesting discussions and dialogues. As a result, the 4th NRF was taken seriously by politicians and civil servants both at the national, regional and local level in Finland and Sweden. Internationally in the context of North Europe the meeting became a meeting place of sorts for both academia and policy-makers to discuss critical issues, to meet each other and to hear what is going on in Northern research. Thus, based on the evaluation of the 4th NRF and the analysis of the first three Open Meetings the NRF is both needed socially and has proven itself as a potential, even already successful, activity by the scientific community.

In order to both maintain this position in the future and to fulfil new expectations and opportunities, we must continue to develop the essential cross-sectoral dialogue needed to advance the NRF both as a forum and a more institutionalized and established process. Based on this the NRF can be developed in the near future as an international forum – for both regional and global discussions and dialogues – much as it is today with some additional activities. The NRF can also be developed - this is neither controversial to the above-mentioned paragraph nor an ultimate alternative to the first option - more toward an international epistemic network, or even platform, of experts on contemporary issues with an academic context and high professional skills.

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