

# **NRF Open Meeting as a Platform for Open Discussion and Inventory of the State of Northern Cooperation – an Introduction of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF Open Meeting**

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I am very delighted that we had our third gathering, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting of the Northern Research Forum (NRF) in Yellowknife and Rae Edzo, NWT, Canada. This is first of all due to the active role the Canadians have had in northern cooperation in general and especially in the NRF process. The first time I came to Yellowknife in December 2002 I was impressed to see how dynamic a place it is and how interested people are in Northern cooperation and how ready the representatives of our, at that time potential, hosts were to cooperate with us and host a NRF Meeting in Yellowknife and NWT of Canada. The time in between my first visit and the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF was intense and effective, and everything was settled for the work of the NRF meeting in September 2004.

## **1. Short Introduction**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting of the Northern Research Forum (NRF) attracted more than 140 participants from different parts of the North concentrating on acute and relevant northern issues. The Meeting included several discussions in four plenaries, three square hours and seven project sessions and the Northern Film Festival with several shows. Indeed during the four interesting and busy days of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting the atmosphere was excellent as were the facilities for the main activity of the Northern Research Forum. There was open discussion between decision-makers, planners, civil activists, business people and academics, both junior and senior, on interesting and relevant issues of the north.

The last one indicates an important relationship, i.e. that of young and seniors scholars, which proved both fruitful and dynamic during the sessions in Yellowknife and Rae Edzo.

This is an introduction of the Third NRF Proceedings which is based on my Introductory Remarks for the work and discussions of the sessions of the Yellowknife and Rae Edzo Open Meeting in 2004. Firstly, I share some of my thoughts on the main themes; secondly, I discuss northern cooperation in general and especially the role of the NRF in the cooperation; and finally, I have brief conclusion on the importance of NRF Open Meetings.

## **2. About the Main Themes**

There are several ways to describe the current state of the circumpolar North, for example as a cold, extreme and exotic region, a homeland of indigenous peoples, 'Klondyke', a sparsely populated frontier, a sink of pollution, and a laboratory for science (Heininen 2004a). Thus, simultaneously the North shares some common features on one hand while on the other it is different compared to the rest of the world. In the Yellowknife meeting it became clear that it would be relevant to interpret the North as an educated, secure, modern and innovative north of the democratic, stable welfare states, the Arctic Eight and therefore to view it as a part of the developed world with keen North-South connections and a good understanding of globalization. Although the circumpolar North,

or the Arctic, can be seen as a distinctive region, it is first and foremost a relevant part of the globe.

The viewpoint of the NRF Steering Committee, which is in charge of the operative activities of the NRF, is that it has been, and still is important to have continuity, new ideas and visions inspiring discussions in the processes. When we decided on the main themes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting, we were convinced that they would be relevant, acute and fruitful for the development of northern regions in the next two years, and even longer. The many discussions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting sessions were the real test of this; we received considerable feedback and were able to see that they were very well received. Through panelists, young researchers and other active participants a great many valuable and interesting contributions were made during discussions of themes, including fresh and relevant points of view.

### *2.1. Global Changes*

Global changes, as one of the main themes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF Open Meeting, is a multi-functional, multi-level and comprehensive challenge in our time and may, along with globalization, be the most complex and demanding challenge yet. There are numerous and serious impacts of global changes in the North, the major one being climate change as the Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) Report (2004) describes. Among the traditional impacts is the utilization of natural resources, first of all due to the increased need of energy, trade and its control - colonialism in general, and scientific research, tourism, militarization and aviation using the great circles, and long-range air and sea pollution.

In the context of the globalized world economy there is also increased oil and gas drilling and transportation as examples of the flows of raw material, and flows of capital and labor through trans-national companies. As counteracts there is for example, interregional and global cooperation of northern indigenous peoples and activities of global and local environmental movements and civil organizations demanding environmental and social responsibility. There is also flow of information and communication, militarization of space through the North and northern dimensions' policy of states and the EU.

Thus in sum, in the North there is already present a corporate globalization and that of

civil organizations, which is a good reason to ask about the social responsibility of trans-national corporations and governments. In spite of the side-effects of globalization and climate change there are also positive indicators in how the circumpolar North has become an interesting target area in world politics. For example, regionalization based on inter-regional and trans-boundary cooperation is seen as representing a new possibility and an interesting model, which challenges the power and hegemonic politics of the Cold War period. Based on this new interpretation of Northern geopolitics (e.g. Heininen 2004a) the North might have something relevant to say in world politics and find constructive ways to implement experiences and fresh ideas in the near future, unlike the World Summit in 2002 in Johannesburg.

Further, the circumpolar North would be relevant in world politics at least through two points of view (Heininen 2005a). First, the so-called geopolitical point of view emphasizing on one hand, the known geopolitical fact that the Arctic Ocean is a highly strategic bastion area for the SSBNs and other sea-based nuclear weapons and Alaska and Thule in Greenland for the US National Missile Defence (NMD) system, and a potential platform for the militarization of space. On the other hand, the circumpolar North is a reserve area of strategic minerals such as oil and uranium and their exploitation, as well as strategically important, geopolitically more available and politically safe for new sea/air routes.

Second, the scientific point of view saying that the circumpolar North is a 'laboratory' to study and gain more knowledge on the impacts of for example, global changes, the melting of sea ice, and storage of nuclear waste and other radioactive material. And, further to be a 'laboratory' for inter-relations of two different kinds of knowledge, the western science and traditional ecological knowledge. This is something which the University of the Arctic, as a cross-border network university and a new kind of model for higher education, and the NRF, as a new kind of platform for open discussion across sectoral borders, are doing already. Now, the first relevant questions are, how do these new structures promote an open discussion between different stake-holders and how is this kind of discussion utilized in decision-making processes? And further, how is new scientific knowledge, either alone or combined with traditional knowledge and

common understanding, used in decision-making processes.

In order to promote these two points of view, and especially due to the fact that the circumpolar North already plays a role in world politics, it would be intellectually interesting and politically fruitful to see the North-South relationship as a flexible context and search for a new approach for that. Behind this is the suggestion of the Symposium on Northern Dimensions - Expanding Circumpolar cooperation (Report 2004a, 7) that "The North-South relationship is not a question of strict definitions... but should be treated as a flexible concept". This discourse has started to some extent, but needs further contributions, viewpoints and research. As a way to continue the work of both the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) and that of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment it is important to include and even emphasize this point of view in research projects in the North, either to deal with climate change, economics, human development or politics, or all of them.

The NRF's contribution to this is to continue both research and discussion on circumpolar geopolitics moving from the technology models of geopolitics and the resource models of geopolitics into environmental conflicts, social responsibilities and policy-responses. As a part of this, and the Strategy of the NRF as a Process, the NRF will organize a workshop on "Economies in the North" in 2005 with the aim "to share what we have learned about the local economies e.g. in the AHDR, and focus on what needs to be learned" and to feed the discussion of the sessions of the 4th NRF Open Meeting.

## *2.2. Resilience and Human Responses*

In our slogan "Resilient North" we asked: how do we implement and promote adaptive capacity and accelerate human change in the North while trying to promote sustainability in the North? Behind this is the current understanding and the scientific assessment of the Arctic Human Development Report that northern societies and communities are viable and resilient (e.g. AHDR 2004, 139-154, 230 and 237).

This has much to do with the experiences that Northern peoples have collected concerning the utilisation of natural resources, when trying not only to survive but to create culture. Further, Northern indigenous communities and cultures are dynamic and indicate socio-

cultural diversity, which is already known among, and partly attracted by, other indigenous peoples through international activities. The way in which new knowledge and common understanding is used in decision-making processes is also critical, and this can only be realized through an open discussion. Indeed, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the circumpolar North has demonstrated resilience based on sustainability.

While the UN report on sustainable development joined together the environment and economics, and emphasized human beings as a resource, a definition and promotion of human development as an implicit element of sustainable development is needed. International cooperation and communication across national and sectoral borders promotes development simply due to the fact, according to David Mitrany's (1966) theory on functionalism, that the more cooperation, the more openness - the more openness, the more confidence and trust - and further, the more trust, the more stability. Democracy needs trust and without trust there is no legitimacy of politics, and democracy dies (e.g. Judt 2004). Finally, this will concentrate on economic foundation, equal access to higher education and to strengthen a civil society. These are preconditions for an equal and sustainable development, welfare and democracy, i.e. human development, and further this is an appropriate way to solve regional conflicts and to stop international terrorism. There is, however, one more precondition, and that is global leadership, as in real leadership to face the challenges of global changes and globalization. Thus, resilience is only one precondition among many, for sustainability.

It is important that both traditional (ecological) knowledge and scientific knowledge or better still, a combination of the two, are used in decision-making processes. The prerequisite would be that traditional knowledge be supported by decision-makers and academics as has been done in many research projects concerning the impacts of climate change.

In the North there are innovations in governance and co-management as a result of new ideas, flexibility and knowledge based on (higher) education. This Northern experience in governance and economics may provide much needed models of a new kind of governance to other regions of the world, and the North can be a distinct component of the diversity of life on Earth, which also attracts

people to travel to the North. The AHDR report, which was launched in November 2004, is the first scientific assessment of human development in the whole circumpolar North, emphasizing main themes and trends of the development. It is, however, the first step, especially because the strict deadline allowed neither new research nor comprehensive policy-orientated conclusions. Therefore, it is important to have follow-ups, prepare for them, and encourage northern actors to be active, as was broadly discussed in many sessions of the Yellowknife – Rae Edzo Meeting.

In the conclusions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF Open Meeting it is said that “it would be beneficial to organize local or regional public hearings” on the Arctic Human Development Report and Arctic Climate Impact Assessment report and further, that “the NRF aspires to organizing, in collaboration with others, public hearings on the AHDR and ACIA reports”. It would also be good to encourage research institutions and universities to launch and promote international research projects on human development and global changes, and researchers to do research on these topics. One goal would be to continue the process in order to have a comprehensive and holistic scientific report, i.e. AHDR II in the near future, based on both new research and public hearings on the AHDR and ACIA, and another goal would be to have books covering the whole circumpolar North for bigger audience like for example, for the International Polar Year (IPY) in 2007-8.

Integrated to this, it would be valuable and timely to start an ambitious discussion on “the value of a future Arctic instrument, a convention or a regime, to address the sensitive issues of the future” (Report 2004a, 7), especially because now governments are expected to move from promises to implementation (e.g. Smith 2003). This would be a logical continuity to the work of the Arctic Council and its Sustainable Development Working group (SDWG).

### 2.3. Governance

There have been interesting and relevant institutional changes in the North, for example, region-building is one of the main tendencies in northern international relations and geopolitics since the end of the Cold war period, to some extent already in the 1980s. As a result of these changes self-determination and governance have become more of a focus,

and there are also new innovations, agreements and new kinds of dynamics in the northern governance (e.g. Young and Einarsson 2004, 237; see also Report 2004b). These are big issues, since now there are many agreements, negotiations and innovations in governance in the North such as the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs). This agreement, which was pushed by indigenous peoples and epistemic communities (e.g. Meakin and Fenge 2004), can be seen as one of the success stories of the new (geo) political reality of the North.

This dynamic of northern governance, which includes new innovations, agreements and solutions, is actually one of the main reasons for having the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF here in the NWT. For example, the latest Land Claims and Self-Government Agreements among the Tlicho Government and the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada (2003) are impressive, and one of those success stories of the North. For example, included is an aspect on the education of children as a reminder of where they live and belong. Giving real ownership of land and water to indigenous peoples, the agreement might play a significant role in the future for when other northern indigenous peoples will negotiate on their rights.

Based on the first NRF theme-workshop “Governance in the North” key issues, when trying to implement good governance, are plurality, actors and forums, meaning institutions that are not too complex, and democracy, how to legitimate representative democracy among people - and only people own the power in democracy - when politics so often lack *politics*, i.e. the contents (Report 2004b). Therefore, it was, and it still is, important to continue an open political discussion both in general and between science and politics on good governance in the North (see e.g. Arctic Governance 2004).

Relevant and maybe even critical questions are for example, how to interpret democracy in such a way that one of the ultimate goals, sustainable development would be possible to implement; and how to start a democratic process for a convention of the Arctic? One factor in this discussion is tourism, which will widen the discourse on, for example, how indigenous cultures are utilized in tourism and how local planning is influenced by tourism. Thus it is only natural to ask if tourism is a real alternative for development in the North, and if it is, how does it matter, and what kind of

tourism? Behind lies the idea that tourism is, or can be interpreted as a multi-functional factor.

#### 2.4. Security

Security, meaning comprehensive security, was the last but not least main theme discussed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting. Discussion on security, meaning comprehensive security, has been neglected in political discussion as well as academic discourse, on northern issues at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Heininen, "Security in the North" in this Proceedings). The topic has, however, relevant relations to local and regional development; if this challenge is not solved the current regional conflicts, international terrorism, and further fight against terrorism, will continue.

I have here an aspect saying that development, by which I mean equal development which should be an ultimate goal to reach - although a part of the global reality is that the richest billion earns 80% and half of the rest 5 billion lives on less than \$2 per day - is the most urgent challenge in the globalized world. If we are not able to solve this challenge, we can expect current regional conflicts, international terrorism as well as the fight against terrorism to continue. This is relevant, because in the international system there might be a transfer from the prevailing state of continuous regional wars and conflicts into a continuity of global warfare (Litmanen&Peltokoski 2003). This might become a sort of an endless fight against a new kind of evil enemy, which is against our god, culture, habits and values - everything we value as fundamental, important and holy. If this is going to be the case, then the theory of Samuel Huntington (1996) concerning the clash between civilizations as a new way to make or implement a world order will be realized, or in other words, it will become a prediction which will implement itself.

There are challenges such as loss of sovereignty, less area available for reindeer herding due to military testing, relevance of food security due to climate change and finally in how to take risk and threat as principle issues. There is also the challenge of re-militarization of the North, a danger which is easily underestimated, but a potential one due to the possibility of an escalation of warfare into the North, i.e. the North as a potential target area. Further, this is possible if the trend of the continuity of global warfare, including a fight against international terrorism, will be strengthened. Thus, how can peace be

maintained, and even improved, under increased pressure of regional conflicts, competition over strategic natural resources, new kinds of disputes and conflicts (for example, the competition for drinking water, uncontrolled traffic and possible violent acts against the sovereignty of the coastal states of the Arctic Ocean, like Canada) and hits by, or acts against, the worst kind of enemy, international terrorism?

In this kind of situation, the northern states and nations should not only be capable of defending themselves, but of being active and using non-violent methods in order to give peace a chance. Here the circumpolar North can be a forerunner of peace, especially if we define it as a distinct region rather than an entity or actor, and emphasize the increased international and regional cooperation, as has been done in the AHDR (AHDR 2004, 17-21). This is due to high stability and increased respect toward cooperation in the region such as the Nordic Model of stable peace (see The Nordic Peace 2003). Correspondingly, this is not only due to theories and academic discourses but very much due to relevant and partly dramatic changes in the northern geopolitics after the end of the Cold War period.

All in all, an open discussion on security in the North was (re)started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF Open Meeting by both an academic discourse on different concepts of security and security-policy and a practical discussion on implementations of every day security.

### 3. State of Northern International Cooperation

After the so-called Murmansk Speech by the former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in October 1987 in Murmansk, Russia at least 45 external political and academic structures (organizations, forums and networks) on northern international and inter-regional cooperation have been established. This is a sort of *political puzzle*, and yes, the NRF is among the youngest ones. This is the reason why an experienced and successful Finnish businessman, who has recently become interested in northern cooperation, asked me why there are so many organizations and forums but no order in northern cooperation. According to him it would be much more effective to decrease their number, which he would do immediately!

On one hand, here you could apply one of the slogans of the 1960s “Let all flowers be in blossom!”, especially if there is a real social order for all those structures, and if they have their own mission. On the other hand, and more importantly, is the background; why are there so many new external structures either in or dealing with the North, i.e. the two main themes or trends of the circumpolar international cooperation are the increasing circumpolar, or “North meets North”, cooperation by indigenous peoples organizations and sub-national governments, and region-building with nations where governments are the main actors (Heininen 2004a, 207). This can also be interpreted to be a new kind of post-modern stage-building, which has happened both through and by interplay between science, meaning here mostly social sciences, and politics (Heininen 2005b).

You might, however, argue that the situation is a bit too complex. Maybe an emphasis should be given to quality rather than quantity, i.e. to value an individual’s interest and participation highly. In other words, now might be a good time to concentrate on quality and try to have synergy and coordination between the existing northern external structures, and finally instead of, or parallel to, separate and competing projects run by different research institutions to have more continuity in the northern transnational and inter-regional cooperation. (Heininen 2004b). Quantity per se is not, however, the point here, but a lack of, or poor, coordination, no real efforts for deeper cooperation, and finally due to limited intellectual and financial resources there is no need for overlapping. Therefore, one of the main conclusions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting is that *“current northern international cooperation should place more emphasize on quality as opposed to quantity, i.e. with improved synergy and coordination between the existing northern external structures”*. A relevant question here is “how research findings are used and utilized in decision-making?” (Heininen 2005b). And, here the NRF can play an important role.

This is, however, a sensitive issue, where you should both respect different bodies and their activities and at the same time have the courage for an open discussion. This can be done only through a cumulative process with knowledge, wisdom, patience and tolerance. While in the North there are many changes and conflicts based on the current multi-level and complicated state, due to many different actors

with multi-functional interests, there is a need for both a bigger stage and an open discussion in order to have the many voices heard. An open discussion and dialogue is really needed in general in politics when legitimacy of politics is not clear to people.

### 3.1. State of the NRF

As a response to my question “What kind of a forum should the NRF be?” the answer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> NRF Open Meeting in September 2002 was definite “that the 2nd Open Meeting already revealed itself as a new kind of forum for open dialogue” (Northern Veche 2004, 22-23).

On one hand this is based on a situation where a real open discussion and dialogue is lacking in many international political forums, or in other words, the implementation is poor. Thus, the NRF as a platform has its own, special design, i.e. an emphasis of open discussion. On the other hand, there is the interpretation that a discourse per se is an act: to define good policies and design good governance is not possible without visions and ideas, and an open discussion and dialogue is valuable and needed in order to create a collective will for a new aim.

Therefore a cross-sectoral and inter-cultural communication has been viewed as the main aim of the NRF which means scheduling and providing enough time, on one hand, because most conferences and meetings do not, and on the other hand, to promote a policy-relevant discussion on the role of research. If we agree that science is needed, whether for trying to solve problems and challenges of today’s world, or for developing new inventions, then it becomes important to interpret and transform new research findings into a form that is useful for decision-making.

The next question would be: what kind of outcomes do we expect from Open Meetings? especially if we would like to promote quality instead of quantity on one hand, and on the other hand, if we would like to promote the utilization of science and research findings in decision-making. One challenge we might face is a dilemma in the design of the NRF Open Meetings, i.e. if the outcomes are not concrete enough, or they deal mostly with long-range influences, they often seem to be too abstract for them to be perceived as outcomes. This might be a more general dilemma in Northern region-building and stage-building, but it deals closely with the credibility of the NRF in the context of northern political and academic

structures, i.e. is the NRF still in its infancy and on the margin because it is too abstract and independent?

Perhaps, however, although we have not actively launched but kindly offered, the design of the NRF Open Meetings has already been looked upon as a model, or elements of it have been used, in other contexts such as 1) the 1<sup>st</sup> international conference on Negotiating Futures – States, Societies and the World in November 2004 in Riga, Latvia (Proceedings 2005); 2) the international conference on Challenges for a Northern Dimensions Foreign Policy” in March 2005 in Atlanta, Georgia (Report 2005); 3) the White Paper on Nordic Research and Innovation (ANP 2003) to propose the establishment of a Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA) and a common Nordic-Arctic Research Forum with representatives of ministries, research councils, researchers, universities and trade and industry (Björkstrand 2004).

### *3.2. Cooperation with Other Organizations and Forums*

The NRF is running its Open Meetings based on a belief that there is a social need for an open discussion, and there is a growing interest toward this kind of activity. Further, the NRF is already active in (northern) international cooperation with other players, for example:

- 1) We have been associated with the University of the Arctic from the very beginning and will continue to do so. Here it is relevant, even critical, to have more and deeper co-operation e.g. in the context of AHDR, possible book projects, and to keep the clear division of work: the University of the Arctic deals with higher education, and should concentrate on that, and correspondingly the NRF deals with the social relevance of science, utilization of science and research findings in decision-making, and science in the public interest;
- 2) We have close relations with the Arctic Parliamentarians and have combined some ideas for example, dealing with human development in general and especially the AHDR, information and communication technology and contents of information society with an aspect of governance;
- 3) The NRF has cooperated with the Arctic Council for the last two years, and as is stated in the main conclusions “the NRF will continue to strengthen its relationship with the

Council, especially in the fields of human development, science and higher education, and information and communication technology”. This is a good chance to have northern voices heard in southern capitals;

- 4) We also cooperate with the Northern Forum. In this context the NRF can play an important role to discuss relevant and somewhat sensitive issues like governance in general, and especially innovation of governance in the North, as an element of the center and periphery dilemma like we did when we jointly organized the workshop on Governance in the North;
- 5) Since the start of preparations for the 3rd NRF we have closely cooperated with the Canadian Federal Government and NWT Government. The state visit of Governor General of Canada, Mrs. Adrienne Clarkson, to Finland and Iceland in autumn 2003 strengthened this link. Another result is the Symposium on Northern Dimensions which the NRF organized with the Canadian Embassy in Finland and the Canadian Mission to the EU in June 2004 in Brussels. This cooperation was promoted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Meeting in a great way, and it will continue, as was seen in the Atlanta Conference half a year later;
- 6) The NRF is also one of the sponsors of ICARP II and the design of the NRF Open Meeting, indicating that the importance of interplay between science and politics was welcomed by the ICARP Steering Committee. Due to the fact that an implementation matters it would be important to make every effort so that experiences derived from the Open Meetings will be utilized both in the preparations and in ICARP II, because the outcomes of the Conference will greatly influence northern research for the next 10-15 years.

All in all, based on the few NRF principles and main aims it is only natural to continue this close dialogue and cooperation with other northern actors and stakeholders on different levels. Not merely to continue but be more open toward, and even actively search for, closer cooperation in order to have increased quality and to utilize more research findings in decision-making.

Therefore, we ourselves will make further efforts in organizing more joint sessions and gatherings on relevant themes in order to have both continuity and more intensity in northern

cooperation. Here NRF Open Meetings play an important role, and the 4<sup>th</sup> NRF Open Meeting will take place in October 2006 in the Bothnian Arc, North Europe, i.e. in Oulu and Tornio, Finland and Luleå and Haparanda, Sweden.

#### 4. Conclusions

There is neither a declaration nor a statement coming out of NRF Open Meetings which is due to the simple fact that there is no need for that. The underlying thought is that more important than declarations and statements are participants' interest and involvement meaning on one hand, the contributions by speakers and other active participants of the meetings, and on the other hand, the discussions which are followed these contributions with an ultimate aim to increase knowledge and understanding, which fortunately will be applied and used by each participant by her or his own way.

There are, however, a few main conclusions emerging from the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF Open Meeting dealing with both the main themes and the structure which I would like to emphasize two of them. First, the plan to organize local and regional public hearings, or town hall meetings, on the AHDR and ACIA reports as well to promote other institutions to do the same in cooperation with local, regional, national and international actors and stakeholders. Second, based on and encouraged by the experiences of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NRF Open Meeting to integrate young researchers more into the work of NRF Open Meetings, and to invite them as members of the NRF Network of Experts.

Finally, international cooperation is never implemented without going across or looking beyond national borders, and the ultimate idea of both regionalization and region-building as well globalization is the same. In academia there is a current fashion in emphasizing that it is good to cross different borders like for example, those between disciplines and to be international, multi-lingual, open-minded in dealing with different cultures and to have a multi- or interdisciplinary approach. All this is, however, more often rhetoric than real, and an interdisciplinary approach is not actually totally new in academia since in the ancient history of western science there was one discipline, philosophy with an aim to be holistic and include all relevant points of view. All this is much what the Northern Research Forum would like to define itself.

Followed from this, the NRF is first of all international, although mostly monolingual, using English as the common language, interdisciplinary and open toward different cultures, identities and spaces. Further, a special mission for the NRF is on one hand, to implement the interplay between politics and science with an effort to find a common language between them, and on the other hand, to promote a dialogue across sectoral borders of both one society, and on a global scale, several societies. Here questions like for example, "How is science utilized in political decision-making processes?" are relevant. Finally, to cross different latitudes is an important part of this instead of having strict definitions of the North or the South, when the most interesting, fruitful and fascinating relations can be often found on borderlands, in between. All this emphasizes how important it is to have and promote a holistic point of view, which is also badly needed in decision-making processes. This might also the only way to deal with new kinds, complex and multi-functional challenges and one of the best ways to find new opportunities.

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