



Northern Research Forum

Report on the 4th NRF Open Meeting

**Sustainable Development Working Group, Arctic Council
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The 4th Open Meeting of the Northern Research Forum entitled *The Borderless North* took place on October 5-8, 2006 in Oulu and Tornio (Finland) and Haparanda and Luleå (Sweden). This was the first NRF Open Meeting to take place in Finland and Sweden and to deal with an international cooperative region, the Bothnian Arc. The main theme of this meeting was *Tech-knowledge in Economies and Cultures*, with several integrated sub-themes. Briefly stated, the NRF Open Meeting was a success due to, first, the lively and dynamic discussions in the sessions between policy-makers, community leaders, business leaders, and young researchers and senior scientists on relevant Northern issues; second, the number of relevant points of view on the Bothnian Arc region as a “borderless” space that were raised; third, disparate concrete attempts to define and illuminate the main slogan of the meeting; fourth, that two heads of state (President Tarja Halonen and President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson) together with many policy makers from several countries gave substantive presentations and participated in discussions on Northern issues; fifth, discussions of the importance of the North in world politics and of Northern issues in the global context; and finally, that new ideas and proposals emerged while some existing ideas, projects and procedures were confirmed.

The 4th Open Meeting attracted 150 participants, including members of the research community such as twenty one NRF Young Researchers (PhD students and recent PhDs with travel funding from the NRF) and several university rectors, policy-makers, two heads of state, several ambassadors, four governors and several other community leaders, business leaders, artists, and many other. In advance of the NRF Open Meeting sixteen substantial and some even brilliant Position Papers had been distributed to prospective participants, but these background papers focus on the various 4th NRF themes and were written by experts from different disciplines and stakeholders coming from many countries and regions. Although they should have been distributed a bit earlier better utilized by panelists and speakers, these papers created a very good foundation both for the discussions during the Open Meeting and for the 4th NRF Proceedings to be published this forthcoming June.

The program of the 4th NRF Open Meeting included an opening session, three main panel sessions, six parallel projects sessions, four square hours (including presentations by young researchers) and a summary session. Also as part of the program were the Northern Traveling Film Festival with documentary films from Finland, Iceland and Russia, an Oulu Cultural Evening including the opening of a photo exhibition “What’s up North” and the dance performance “Deadly after dark,” and two official NRF dinners hosted by the City of Oulu and the City of Luleå and Provincial Government and Norrbotten. The 4th NRF was organized by the Northern Research Forum, together with the 4th NRF Host Planning Committee representing the City Administration of Luleå, City Administration of Oulu, Council of Oulu Region, Luleå University of Technology, Provincia Bothiensis, Provincial Government of Lapland, Provincial Government of Norrbotten, Provincial Government of Oulu, Regional Council of Lapland, University of Lapland and University of Oulu.

Achievements

The 4th NRF Open Meeting was in many ways a successful gathering and many of its important achievements and outcomes are listed below under the separate headings of Presentations and Open Discussions, Themes and Substance, and Arrangements and Finance:

Participation and Open Discussion

1) There was good participation from the eight Arctic states and the UK, i.e. considerable number of academic representatives from these countries, of policy-makers from the Arctic states, and of business leaders both Finland and Iceland. Participants included President Tarja Halonen (Finland), President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson (Iceland), Governor Eino Siuruainen (Oulu), Governor Per Erikson (Norrbotten), Governor Hannele Pokka (Lapland), County Leader Esko Lotvonen (Lapland), Mayor Karl Petersen (Luleå), and the chairmen of the Municipal Councils of Tornio, Finland and Haparanda, Sweden. Thus the 4th NRF Open Meeting was received with much interest by Finnish and Swedish policy-makers and community leaders at the national level as well as regional levels.

2) Among the participants were the ambassadors of both Canada and Iceland to Finland, the Finnish ambassador to Iceland, the Swedish ambassador in the BEAC, and the Russian Chairman of the Arctic Council, but the meeting of Senior Officials of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council took place in Oulu during the time of the Open Meeting. There was, however, room for more participation by policy-makers, business leaders and NGO people; after all, internationally but especially in the context of North Europe, the 4th NRF provided the opportune meeting place for policy-makers and others to discuss acute issues and to observe and evaluate what is going on with Northern research. In the future it will be needed to work harder and with more sophisticated means to attract the interest and participation of a broader audience.

3) The 4th NRF Open Meeting witnessed the gathering of many rectors, professors, scholars and students from - and was thus seriously taken by - universities in North Finland and North Sweden. The University of the Arctic organized a meeting of its Executive Committee and Senior Management Group (Ofelas) back-to-back with the 4th NRF in Luleå, bringing additional UArctic-affiliated people to the 4th NRF sessions. An especial valuable achievement was the fact that the NRF brought to the meeting a group of particularly active young researchers (twenty one co-called NRF Young Researchers), most of them from Russia, Canada and the USA. Their presentations were substantial and of high quality and covered both the main theme and sub-themes. These young researchers also served as rapporteurs for the various NRF sessions. In conclusion, the NRF Young Researchers constitute NRF's biggest human capital.

4) What came as a surprise to NRF Steering Committee members was the lack of time for open discussion in some of the 4th NRF sessions according to comments by a number of participants in their evaluation of the meeting. This lack of time was attributed to facts that there were too many formal speakers, as in the case of some project sessions, that a chairpersons allowed speakers to exceed their time frame, as in the case of one plenary session, and that there were too many individuals eager to speak. Positively viewing this message, it is clear that participants accept and endorse the main mission of the NRF that has not changed since the first NRF Open Meeting in 2000, namely, to provide for and promote open discussion and dialogue.

5) Due to all of the above, the 4th NRF good atmosphere generated interesting and critical dialogue among policy makers and representatives of the scientific community and other publics and stakeholders – who had come together to discuss relevant Northern issues such as the meanings and importance of “borderless”, the importance and possibilities of both technology and “tech-knowledge,” the Northern Dimension of the European Union, and the North in a global context. The 4th NRF was also widely reported in regional and local media, especially on the Finnish side. All in all, the representation of different stakeholders was good instead of perfect, and there was much open discussion and dialogue even though we sometimes ran out of time.

Themes and Substance

6) During the four days of the 4th NRF we managed to cover a wide spectrum of subject matter. There were particularly intensive discussions on the theme of “borderless” (based on the slogan “The Borderless North”), focusing both broadly on its meanings and concretely on its relevance for the 4th NRF hosts, in the context of the Bothnian Arc region – and the welcoming addresses on the border and the visit at Tornio Works of Outokumpu provided particularly relevant and concrete experience for the participants. The 4th NRF manifested a new important feature which the NRF is able to provide, i.e. the promotion of “region-building” or “regionalization” by making a distinctive, international region a platform for discussing possible lessons to be learned and comparisons across regions of the North and throughout the rest of the world.

7) Correspondingly, North-South relations, or rather the North in a global context, was the focus of much discussion - but this topic came alive already during the 1st plenary session and received much interest from both participants and the media. Emerging from this discourse was the conclusion that the North, including Northern actors, is playing an important role in global context and world politics. This conclusion – which may even be the main finding on the 4th NRF Open Meeting - is not new in scientific research but it is rare in politics. Also discussed was the European Union’s Northern Dimension, in general but also specifically the content of the new ND Policy Framework Document between the EU, Russia, Iceland and Norway. This document is described and discussed in a couple of 4th NRF Position Papers and it was discussed at length during the Open Meeting, particularly during the 3rd plenary session.

8) Technology and knowledge systems – both (western) science and traditional knowledge – as the central components of the main theme “‘Tech-knowledge’ in Economies and Cultures,” were broadly discussed, both in the sessions and in Position Papers. Although the main theme was complex, vague and multifunctional, participants generally approached it with an open mind (though some with hesitation), resulting in a lot of discussions including definitions by some main speakers and position paper writers.

9) The NRF is an international forum that is keeping the dialogue and discussions on climate change and human development open, public and lively. The 4th NRF special session “Town hall meeting focusing on the findings and issues raised by the AHDR and ACIA reports” provided a concrete evidence and example of this. This particular session was among the most important outcomes of the 4th NRF, reminding us also of the challenge to become more active in organizing and promoting further town-hall meetings in other locations and contexts in the future.

Arrangements and Finance

10) Arrangements went well considering all locations, i.e. the two countries, three regions, four cities / towns and eight visited places, and the traveling between Oulu to Luleå as well as between different locations within Haparanda-Tornio. Things went smoothly and conveniently in spite of the many hosts and actors, borders and barriers, sectors and disciplines, habits and cultures of action, and new environments. Thus, as is one of its mission, the NRF was successful in generating new experiences and good practices, both as concerns individuals and the interactions between Northern societies, regions and countries.

11) The NRF managed raise sufficient funds for conduction an elaborate Open Meeting. Funding was received from several national, regional and local sponsors – including the Icelandic Kaupthing Bank (the main sponsor), Ramirent from Oulu, and the Academy of Finland.

The Northern Research Forum and its Open Meetings

12) The NRF has emerged as a platform to discuss more general, global issues, especially relations between the North and the rest of the globe. This purpose of the NRF has not been explicit from the beginning; rather, the NRF has experienced a process from focusing on “North to North” to embracing the global dimension as well. After all, the discourse on Northern issues is very relevant to the discussions on North-South relations and on world politics in general.

13) The NRF has become an attractive forum for post-graduate students and young researchers to present her / his research. Now the NRF's challenge is to be active and smart and utilizing this important human capital. Another important human capital is the contributions by the Position Paper writers, as publications of good research results, scientific assessments and other background material which has served as springboard for our discussions.

14) Finally, the design of a NRF Open Meeting has proved its self called for and useful. Indeed, this encourages us also to continue and broaden the spectrum of our activities and to deepen the discussions and dialogues of our meetings.

4th NRF Follow-ups

Listed below are follow-ups of the 4th NRF Open Meeting concerning preparations for the 5th NRF Open Meeting as well as the promotion and development of the NRF as a process:

- 1) To publish the 4th NRF Proceedings in summer of 2007.
- 2) Preparations for the 5th NRF Open Meeting by the NRF and a Host Planning Committee. The 5th NRF Open Meeting will be held in Anchorage, Alaska, USA in September 24-27, 2008.
- 3) To organize and to support the organizing of regional sub-forums under the auspices of the NRF (e.g. Calotte Academy).
- 4) To continue to organize and sponsor town hall meetings on climate change and human development as a way of continuing and broadening discussions of the findings of ACIA and AHDR during IPY.
- 5) To continue discussions with organizations who are important partners in international Northern cooperation like, e.g. University of the Arctic, Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, Arctic Council and its working groups (esp. SDWG), IASC, IASSA and Northern Forum.
- 6) To take charge of a broader discourse on science in the public interest, on social impact assessment of Arctic science and on other research in the North - especially as this can be seen as follow-ups of ICARP II.
- 7) To reorganize and expand the work of the NRF Secretariat in order to meet new and more demanding challenges and situations.
- 8) To promote a process for implementing the idea of a Northern Research Platform on the "new" Northern Dimension including a financing instrument (proposed by Rector Lauri Lajunen).