

## Rebuilding East and North

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The historical background of Finnish Arctic policy goes back to early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Finland got separated from the Kingdom of Sweden and became a part of Russian Empire. That was a starting point for the spontaneous Arctic policy by the Finnish government, or Senate at that time.

Finland had a three type of interests in Nordic regions: political, economic and academic interests. The economic interest concentrated on raw materials, while the academic interests included culture, history, languages and folklore of Karelia, Lapland, Kola Peninsula, and Siberia: there was lively cooperation already at that time between Finnish academics and the Science Academy of St. Petersburg.

In the 1980s–90s there was a renaissance of the Arctic issues, when especially the economic interests were focused on oil, gas, and transportation. These interests are currently strongly increasing due to climate change, global warming and melting of permafrost leading to new possibilities for exploitation of polar resources.

The on-going climate change is a great global threat to mankind, but up here in the North, climate change also involves other perspectives. These perspectives are excellently addressed in *The New North. Our World in 2050* (2011), a book by professor of geography Laurence C. Smith (University of California, Los Angeles, USA).

According to Smith, the Northern Rim Countries (*NORC* countries) – Canada, the USA, Russia and the five Nordic countries including Finland, will become in the future a geopolitically and financially attractive part of the globe. Their role will become even more important than the role of the *BRICS* countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which have enjoyed much of the limelight thus far.

Located mainly above the 45<sup>th</sup> latitude, the *NORC region* continues to hold vast amounts of unused and undiscovered natural resources, which are partly located underneath permafrost and the ice of the Arctic Ocean. This region is home to approximately 3% of the world's population, it covers 15% of the world's total area, and 20% of its oil reserves and 40% of its forest reserves are unused. Furthermore, the region also has significant fish, minerals and fresh water reserves. Compared to the *BRICS* countries, the advantages of the *NORC* countries include, for example, uniformity, a tolerable climate, a good infrastructure and, mostly a stable political system (Smith 2011).

In view of the challenges of the present century, the New North stands in a good position. However, the northern ecosystem is extremely delicate and vulnerable, and the organisms are threatened by waves of migration and extinction unlike anything

witnessed before. Moreover, increased human activity in the region also poses its threats to the ecosystem.

In order to mitigate and control climate change on a global scale while also taking into consideration the changing conditions up here in the North, we need extensive and multidisciplinary research and education. The changes affecting the North are related to climate change and to the use of natural resources and land. These affect both the region's environment and society, and this is why cross-disciplinary research approaches are needed.

Indeed, the Academy of Finland has established an *Arctic Research Programme*, which seeks to reinforce Finland's status as an internationally leading expert in Arctic issues. The research programme is planned to have four themes: quality of life in the North, economic activity and infrastructure in Arctic circumstances, the northern climate and environment, and Arctic policy.

Finland is also in the process of renewing its strategy for the Arctic region (*Finland's strategy for the Arctic region* 23. August 2013; [www.vnk.fi](http://www.vnk.fi)). The earlier strategy from 2010 was mainly focused on the conditions of the Arctic, the new strategy, however, takes a broader and more concrete approach both in terms of the objectives and measures. The strategy examines the possibilities for bolstering Finland's position regarding the Arctic region, the creation of new business opportunities, the Arctic environment and the region's security and stability, the position of the northern parts of Finland, international cooperation, and Arctic expertise in the widest sense of the term.

Moreover, a Ministry of Employment and Economy working group addressing

the development of eastern and northern Finland also "turned its gaze towards the north" when finding new perspectives for the region's development (*Katse pohjoiseen, An eye to the North* 2012; [www.tem.fi](http://www.tem.fi)). The report states that the overall volume of projects planned in the Arctic areas of Finland, Sweden and Norway and in the Kola Peninsula will exceed 100 billion euros in the upcoming decades, and 10% of this is estimated to be targeted at eastern and northern Finland (*Uutta asennetta Itä- ja Pohjois-Suomen kehittämiseen, New departure for the development of eastern and northern Finland* 2012; [www.tem.fi/itajapohjoissuomi](http://www.tem.fi/itajapohjoissuomi)). In addition, the regional councils of the eastern and northern Finland have been also active themselves. They have established a common EU office in Brussels which represents the interests of the sub-regions of the East and North Finland ([www.eastnorth.fi](http://www.eastnorth.fi)).

All in all, we need to make sure that Finnish universities, other education and research organisations and our trade and industry can have a role in the building of the New North. Naturally, we cannot make it alone but together with the partner universities, enterprises and stakeholders of the Arctic and Barents Euro-Arctic regions.