

## 7.1 Ten years of knowledge and capacity building: Work done and lessons learned ...

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7557/5.3222>

### Introduction

The challenge of economic and social change facing rural and small town places appear very similar across the Circumpolar North. Through an integrated local and regional development approach, we have explored these challenges, as well as the opportunities to address these challenges. This book, from a wide range of contributors, is an exploration of not just the important problems but also different ways to address those problems.

In this concluding chapter, I do not seek to summarize or repeat the contents. Instead, I want to provide a higher level description of key lessons. The hope is that these lessons can inform individuals, local communities, political and development organizations, and researchers in their own work. This chapter is organized under four sections or themes that drive local and regional development: “capacity building”, “approach”, “together”, and “the development circle”.

### Back to Tana

At the opening of the book, I described how the successful first local and regional development workshop was held in the small municipality of Tana, in Eastern Finnmark, Norway. Since the beginning of the project for local and regional development workshops, the Gargia conference, and the UArctic Thematic Network on Local and Regional Development, the local authorities in Tana has been active participants and supporters. The close cooperation between Finnmark University College and the local authorities and business community in Tana has been to great help in transforming the municipality in a positive direction. The leadership in Tana, both in the public and private sector, has been active in different local and regional development

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partnerships, such as the East-Finnmark Regional Council, presided by the mayor of Tana. The strong political position he has in the region depends very much on his focus on education, knowledge, and capacity building among his fellow citizens, not only among the employees of the Municipality, but the local and regional population in general. Because of this the Center for Knowledge and Capacity Building (“Øst-Finnmark kompetansesenter”) in East-Finnmark was located to Tana 5 years ago. You also find it in the House of Knowledge (“Kunnskapens hus”) – which is another of the mayor’s latest achievements. Through the House of Knowledge in Tana they were offering more on-line course and study programs than Finnmark University College offered before it was merged with the University of Tromsø (2013), he claimed. His ability to get things done, partly through partnership and network organization, has also contributed to his reputation as a great leader and manager.

The leadership group in Tana has stayed connected with international sources of innovative ideas to help inform their local and regional initiatives. They have been working to connect local people and organizations via regional and international networks. This leadership group has been open to new ideas and has been working locally to mobilize ideas that fit with expectations and opportunities of the community and the economy. They also understand the intimate connection between economic development and community development, and considerable investments to support a robust community development foundation have been a key to their success. They stay knowledgeable about what is needed for business success and for a successful, resilient, and diverse community. Tana’s leadership remains an innovator in both social and economic development, and they are always at work to help the people of Tana, and neighbouring municipalities, to be ready for challenges and opportunities. In many fields and ways, Tana has been a role model for others, especially in issues concerning local and regional development. The present mayor of Tana, Frank Ingilæ, has played a central role in the research and development cooperation between Finnmark University College and the Municipality all the way from the development workshop and partnership in 2004, and he is also head of the Development Council for East-Finnmark. Drawing from Tana, other communities, and the collaborative work of the Gargia Conferences and the University of the Arctic’s Thematic Network, the following sections explore key lessons for local and regional development.



## **Knowledge and Capacity Building**

### ***Thinking Education***

Education towards understanding is a central aspect of being “ready” for change. There is a substantial value to investing in, and fostering, mutual learning as we think about education and training needs. Feedback can be shared across different stakeholders and sectors. A vision can be formed about what communities and people need both at the present time and even more importantly into the future. Within a rapidly changing context, stakeholders must pay attention to how they will develop relevant education, training, and capacity building programs that would meet challenges and needs. Ideally, course and study programs in this area of work, like the advanced emphasis course in Management of Local and Regional Development, mentioned earlier, should be evaluated and revised on a yearly basis. Our local and regional partners, in the public, private, and voluntary sector, should be directly involved, both in teaching and the evaluation of these course and study programs so that they cover their education and training needs.

Based on those learning opportunities, our partners and other stakeholders can learn from those who deliver and seek educational programming. Continuous attention and investment in knowledge and capacity building is vital in small places, as is flexibility in how this capacity building is delivered. The way the House of Knowledge and the Center for Competence and Capacity building in Tana are working is a good example to follow. Stakeholders must recognize, however, that skills and capacities will also change over time across local government, cultural, civil society, and business sectors.

### ***Delivering Education***

Local and regional development stakeholders must be open and respectful to different types of knowledge, different educational media and ways of delivering training, different ways of learning and knowing, and different ways to achieve educational outreach and engagement. They must also recognize that education happens in all facets of life, and that attention to education must be ongoing. Due to the challenges of cost and time, stakeholders will want to make wise choices in the use of technology versus in-person delivery of training workshops.



The educational institutions involved in local and regional development projects and programs, by delivering special training, course and study programs, in research and/or other types of development activities, should be sensitive to the needs, economic means, and capacity of organization and work of the users and partners on both local and regional levels.

### **Approach**

#### ***Scaling-Up***

Local places are embedded within their surrounding region. This helps to strengthen synergistic community and economic relationships locally, between municipalities, and between municipalities and regional authorities, as well as with regional and national development agencies. Inclusion into regional development or innovation systems and networks can also bring further legitimacy to development processes. Places and regions also function, however, within senior government frameworks. There is a need to ensure that an appropriate range of stakeholders are included and involved in these frameworks to support local and regional development initiatives. Again, such working relationships should be grounded in respect, understanding, and trust.

#### ***Scaling-Down***

Local places are where the global economy and public policy hit “home”. Within this context, local places must be at the centre of local and regional development work. This involves paying attention to scaling “down” all activities to the local level. It is not just about engaging outside experts. It is not just about top-down decisions. It is important to involve local people and organizations in meaningful ways from the beginning and throughout the development process by building upon local ideas, aspirations, and needs. This can be fostered by supporting reflexive relationships between bottom-up community and economic development, and the need for supportive top-down public policy.



## Together

### ***Building Development Partnerships***

Partnerships are instrumental to support local and regional development initiatives as they can connect stakeholders with a wider range of ideas, information, support, and resources. Building effective partnerships is about being open and working across a wide range of sectors. It is about understanding each other's capacity and bringing each other's capacity to the various tasks that need to be undertaken. Partnerships are also more likely to be successful when they are grounded in efforts to create a more effective understanding of those working relationships. Through partnerships, value is added to local and regional development initiatives by bringing people and organizations together.

### ***Structuring Networks and Partnerships***

To be effective, networks and partnerships need to be grounded in mutual respect, understanding, and trust. People need to be engaged in meaningful and equal ways to strengthen these long-term working relationships. This will not happen if people do not feel valued and respected. At times, effective working relationships can be challenged by hierarchical structures. Understanding the structure and strength of networks can inform lessons as to why some initiatives are more successful than others. Vertical networks, for example, can be easier to nurture and develop as they are often grounded in place. They can suffer when "equality of participation" is not valued. By comparison, horizontal networks can be more difficult to develop and maintain as they are more difficult to access and as such hierarchical power structures are distributed across other, and perhaps distant, places.

There is a need to establish diagonal networks by bridging the benefits of horizontal and vertical networks in order to create more synergies between top-down and bottom-up supports and strengthen comprehensive approaches to local and regional development. As such, networks and partnerships need to be open and inclusive. This involves engaging stakeholders in developing tasks and determining who will assume responsibility for various activities. It takes time to develop effective working relationships as people and organizations learn how to work well together, to address ongoing challenges, and to maintain momentum.



It thus requires an appropriate investment of time and resources to nurture networks and working relationships, as well as a willingness to develop collaborative leadership structures. Attention to these important elements will go a long way to building successful social cohesion and social capital within the community and across the region.

### ***Being in Partnership Networks***

Building effective partnerships is about harnessing the knowledge and capacities of those invested in creating networks and partnerships. For communities that are experiencing rapid change, once a critical crisis is under control, it is vital to stay in the network in order to monitor and evaluate the relative success of the responses. It is also vital to stay in the network so as to be better positioned to pursue community and economic development opportunities for the future. Through a long-term investment in networks and partnerships, stakeholders can continue to have access to timely information and supports.

### ***Bounding***

Economic and social change touches all facets of life. There is a need, however, to focus efforts in order to wisely use the limited availability of resources. This requires a strategic discussion of key problems and priorities that can be situated in a bounded list of work to focus upon. This includes a clear indication of what needs to be done immediately and what can wait. In small communities, the need to focus energies and activities on agreed upon priorities is important and can minimize wasted efforts.

### ***Conflict Resolution***

Long-term working networks and partnerships need to be equipped with adequate conflict resolution mechanisms. This requires attention to two important aspects. First, there will always be different views, as stakeholders will not always agree on everything. It is actually important to invite “difference” into the process. The critical issue is to recognize that these processes of engagement can help to facilitate a common knowledge base and a understanding on common problems and priorities, as well as support of a common approach to problem solving. Exclusion only results in distrust and a withdrawal of support for any proposed



development solution by those who feel outside of the process. Second, processes to manage debate and conflict will require attention and an investment of time and resources to support dialogue and consensus building. Attention to these two important aspects will go a long way to embed respect, understanding, and trust as foundations for engaging in networks and partnerships.

### **The development circles**

Local and regional development, in today's fast paced global economy, is not about one time solutions that will "save" communities. In northern places, shortages in capacity, staff, knowledge, or resources means that attention to building partnerships is a vital part of the ongoing development and re-development process. As a result of these matters of context, local and regional development cannot be thought of as a linear process; rather it is a recursive circle, where the actions of the past inform the opportunities of the present and where the choices we make today will set the context for future actions. Successful local and regional development in the Circumpolar North means working diligently and deliberately towards achieving success one step at a time, staying engaged through implementation so as to build and maintain momentum, and continuing to monitor, evaluate, respond, act, and plan to help keep a flexible and resilient community viable now and into the future.

### ***Achieving Success One Step at a Time***

In local and regional development, success can only be achieved one step at a time. Capacity is developed through the importance of being successful at small things, and then building on those successes to pursue more complex initiatives. It is also about creating synergies that are capable of supporting broad involvement, overcoming skepticism, and circumventing obstruction and sabotage. Recognizing that not all communities and regions are "ready" for local and regional development planning, stakeholders sometimes need to "start" with earlier or smaller steps.



***Maintaining Momentum***

A common challenge is that sometimes when energy is spent through a development process, the results may not always be seen immediately. Investing strategically in ways to mobilize action is an important way to overcome skepticism and continue to nurture broad support for long-term endeavors. Stakeholders also need to evaluate local and regional development approaches and remain open and flexible to changing the course that is being pursued as local and non-local circumstances change.

**No Time to Rest**

The global economy is fast-paced and constantly changing. If communities are to be successful with development initiatives, they cannot be complacent. The challenge is to always be ready and positioned to respond to emerging issues and opportunities by nurturing community capacity, social cohesion, and social capital.

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