

Introduction

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There are many big issues facing small communities. Rural and remote regions in most developed economies are dealing with long-term economic and social change. These changes are increasing with the accelerating pace of the global economy. Across the Circumpolar North, this involves many different types of communities, including Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities; places with different levels and types of resource dependence; different histories, economies, political structures, and demographics; different spatial relationships with other places in the region; and different capacities to cope with, and respond to, change. The key question concerns how to best address these changes.

There are several key stakeholders that can play an important role in addressing these changes. For communities, the experiences with economic and social changes can be similar, even if the local details vary. There is a good opportunity to support mutual learning across communities. This mutual learning can be grounded in key lessons learned throughout different stages of the local and regional development process. For government, staff and policy makers are often on the front line to provide assistance and address crises. While they are often challenged by the pace of change, they must respond. For government stakeholders, there are opportunities to learn, to collaborate, and to build collaborative partnerships that can help mobilize supports and resources for small communities. While there is a lot of academic knowledge from different contexts, there are opportunities as well for the research community to learn from governments and communities, to learn from different regional and national settings, and to mobilize and test new knowledge.

An Opportunity

Through this book, the contributions made by many participating stakeholders are brought together to present and illustrate elements of a more holistic and integrated approach to local and regional development. At its core, the book confronts critical issues and ways to facilitate

Gargia conferences | 2004 - 2014



positive change for communities that are experiencing economic and social transformation. The issues and lessons outlined in this book are grounded in the experiences acquired with the project for local and regional development workshops and partnerships, the Gargia Conference, and the Thematic Network for Local and Regional Development initiated in 2003 by Finnmark University College, Norway, in cooperation with the University of the Arctic. These conferences were structured to tackle specific problems and were supported through plenaries, dialogues, and workshops. The first conference on regional development in the Circumpolar North was held in the spring of 2004 at “Gargia Fjellstue”, a guest house and tourist establishment in a small Sami community outside of Alta, where Finnmark University College was situated.

The first Gargia conference was mainly dedicated to planning for the next local development workshop – in the Municipality of Tana, in Eastern Finnmark. In addition to its function as a meeting place and forum for discussion of issues of common interest for the participants and stakeholders in the local and regional development workshops, the conference was used to build knowledge and capacity in the thematic field of local and regional development, among faculty members in the Resource Group behind the new research and development project, as well as the ‘practitioners’ who took part. People with special knowledge and competences in relation to the different issues raised, from far and near, were invited as keynote speakers at the conference. Each conference strategically selected roughly 40 to 50 community representatives, local and regional government speakers, representatives of development agencies, and researchers in order to facilitate a good discussion about the critical issues facing small places. They were also held in rural settings in order to keep the discussions grounded and focused, 9 out of 10 Conferences were held at “Gargia Fjellstue”. The last Conference held in Norway was held in Tana to celebrate where the local and regional development workshops and partnerships started. A decennium later, in spring 2014, the Gargia Conference for Regional Development in the Circumpolar North, together with the UArctic Thematic Network on Local and Regional Development were moved from Alta to Yakutsk, more precisely to the Institute of Finance and Economics at the North-eastern Federal University (NEFU), under the new leadership of Oksana Romanova, Vice-Director of the Institute. In June 2014, she was responsible for the organization of the first international Gargia-Oktemtsy conference, in Oktemtsy, a rural municipality not far from Yakutsk. It was here that the UArctic Network in 2009 organized the first local development workshop and business school in Yakutia.



Detailed later by Tor Gjertsen, the Gargia Conferences were initiated to respond to the social and economic crises being experienced in small places across the Circumpolar North. In the beginning, stakeholders called for assistance, but they asked for assistance that was practical and real. Following the work taking place in these communities, a bigger platform to discuss challenges and opportunities in the new rural economy was needed. The Gargia Conferences provided an opportunity to select and work through specific issues. The conferences and dialogue, however, was not enough. The learnings and capacity that was developed through the conferences needed to be supported by action and application. There was also a strong desire to 'export' the lessons that were being learned to other regions and countries in the Circumpolar North. This led to the creation in 2006 of the Thematic Network on Local and Regional Development through the University of the Arctic.

A second opportunity was to expand and formalize previous local development and training projects into more comprehensive local and regional development workshops that fostered collaborative dialogue locally, as well as with neighbouring communities and distant partners and agencies. These began with rural communities in Finnmark, Norway, but soon expanded internationally. In these communities, it functioned first as a source of experience and knowledge, but they evolved as stakeholders assumed ownership over their own local and regional development workshops. Overall, workshops have been held in 42 communities in Northern Finland (2), Norway (12), and Russia (28) between 2004 and 2014, half of them including business schools for 'start ups', people who wanted to start their own business, but also for experienced social and economic entrepreneurs.

Experience has proven that it is also critical to build capacity and develop training in local and regional development. Apart from the special training programs of the development workshops and business schools, advanced emphasis courses in management of local and regional development have been developed and delivered by the Thematic Network since 2006. Capacity building has been done mainly through the integration of theory and praxis-based knowledge and competences. There are connections to international bachelor and masters programs, summer schools and institutes, as well as student and teacher exchange programs that are supported through national and international relationships within the University of the Arctic.



Through the business schools, organized mainly in Russia in connection with the local and regional development workshops, the international network has contributed to the establishment of many new businesses and workplaces, and other local economic development initiatives. This has involved the delivery of basic business and entrepreneurial training. It has also been accompanied by formal study programs that include applied training activities such as business planning. Building local experience and supporting ongoing education and training has been the most important aspect of the Thematic Network on Local and Regional Development. Overall, the workshops represent a multi-faceted and integrated approach that is applied in purpose and international in scope. They are also built on a foundation of respect for people and diverse cultures. Furthermore, the capacities that are developed through these workshops are mobilized through an emphasis on place-based capacities and assets. Each activity and event initiated and organized by the thematic network has been structured to foster openness, respect, understanding, and trust in order to guide mutual learning towards effective action.

This book is different from other books about local and regional development. It is not the usual academic text. There are contributions from politicians, bureaucrats, and civil administrative staff at different levels of government. There are also contributions by local, regional, and national development agencies. These contributions are assembled alongside voices from the academic, business, non-profit, cultural, political, and broader community sectors. Furthermore, the voices include many Indigenous organizations and governments from across the Circumpolar North. As a result, the form and format of the chapters in the book vary. Some are formal, some are dialogues, but all are committed to sharing experiences, addressing challenges, and mobilizing action for positive change. It is our hope that through its contributions, this book can provide a focal point to share information and build capacity that is grounded in the integration of theory- and practice-based knowledge.

Outline

The opening section of the book includes a foreword by Greg Halseth, this introduction, and an historical background to the Gargia Conferences (including details of the local and regional development workshops and partnerships) by Tor Gjertsen. To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Gargia conferences, and yet share the most up-to-date information, the main sections include as many as possible presentations from the last six conferences (2009-2014).



Section One is focused on the role of municipal and regional authorities in supporting and leading change and development in rural communities across the Circumpolar North. The four contributions are from the June 2014 Gargia-Oktemtsy conference held in the rural municipality of Oktemtsy just outside of Yakutsk in the Sakha Republic, Russia. Contributions are from Oksana Romanova and Klavdiya Barashkova, Vera Smorchkova and Alexey Titovskiy, Galina Knyzeva and Ekaterina Kniazeva, and Tor Gjertsen.

Section Two includes four contributions that discuss the important topic of building capacity for sustainable business and community development in the Circumpolar North. All but one of the contributions are from the Gargia-Tana Conference in 2013. Contributions are from Nils Aarsæther, Julia Loginova, Stig Hansen, and Gunnar Reinholdtsen.

Section Three builds upon the Gargia Conference 2012 on “Youth, Entrepreneurship and Rural Development”. The focus of the three chapters in this section is on how to retain and train youth in rural communities to support innovation and entrepreneurship. Contributions are from Tor Helge Reinsnes Moen and Trond Einar Persen, Valeria Gjertsen, and Øyvind Berg and Tor Gjertsen.

Section Four is a collection of four chapters that explore issues related to sport, tourism, and place development in the Circumpolar North. Contributions are from Julia Loginova and Valerij Rochev, Yngve Johansen, Galina Gabucheva, and Eeva-Maarit Aikio.

The Fifth Section presents four chapters that explore the topic of control over natural resources as a prerequisite for social and economic development in Indigenous communities and regions in the Circumpolar North. Contributions are from Svein Lund, Steinar Pedersen, Vyasheslav Shadrin, and Stefan Mikaelson.

Section Six consists of four chapters that are dedicated to exploring coping strategies as small communities respond to the restructuring challenges associated with the global economy. Contributions are from Greg Halseth (together with Don Mason, Laura Ryser, Sean Markey and Marleen Morris), Natalia Okhlopkova, Nils Aarsæther, and Jan Henry Keskitalo.



The final section of the book, includes a conclusion by Tor Gjertsen and an Afterword by the new leader of the UArctic's Thematic Network on Local and Regional Development Oksana Romanova.

Contributor biographies are listed at the end of the book.

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