



# Justice in Participation and Governance

## Q & A Factsheet

**Q** Your research is about justice in participation and governance in the Arctic. Could you walk us through what you have researched and why this work is important?

**A** Economic development in the Arctic is marked by a significant justice gap. The region is calling out for more inclusive and equitable forms of participation in economic development. We set out to study some of the most prominent large industrial infrastructure projects and land-use conflicts in Finland and Sweden, guided by a set of basic questions that bear on crucial aspects of justice: How should the land and waters should be used? By whom? Who owns the right to use the natural resources and for what purposes?

One of our key aims was to shed light on the meaning of “justice” associated with the economic activities in question – and this matters because sufficient attention is generally not paid to it. We also looked at how the key stakeholders perceive the positive and negative impacts, risks, and benefits related to the economic activities. All of this with the purpose to get a clearer picture of the barriers and pathways to sustainable development in the region.

We did in-depth case studies about mining, wind farm development, nature-based tourism as well as about the proposal to build the Arctic Railway in the Finnish Arctic. We also did two case studies about nature-based tourism in Finland and the effects of carnivore governance on reindeer husbandry in Sweden. In total we conducted some eighty interviews with government authorities (local, regional, and national), NGOs, businesses and industries as well as local politicians and community members, some of whom identify as Indigenous representing nature-based livelihoods.

**Q** In what ways is justice a vital concern in the particular economic activities that you have studied?

**A** Large-scale projects exploiting natural resources often evoke strong emotions among the locals. This has to do with the historical wrongs that previous generations have encountered for similar projects or decisions made in unequal ways. The Arctic region has a long history of colonial extractivism, which has resulted in an uneven distribution of national benefits. Our case studies on mining and wind power development, for instance, showed that the impact of heavy investment in these sectors weakened possibilities for traditional livelihoods by transforming local economies into “mono-economies”. This harms the economic diversity and resilience of local communities. Not only that, we also found that mining and wind power development typically benefits the financial hubs in metropolitan areas of the country, contributing to strengthening the view of the peripheral region as a natural resource colony.

**Q** A key element in this research has been to map the different perceptions that key stakeholders bring to the table when it comes to the impacts, risks, and benefits of these economic activities. What main points of contention and agreement did you find?

**A** For each case study we used a values-based approach focusing on the perspectives of large-scale industry, local businesses, indigenous organizations, and NGOs. We found heterogeneous perceptions among the stakeholders when it comes to mining, wind farms, and the Arctic Railway. Large industries and local businesses generally have a positive view of the human impacts of these economic activities. Broadly, the same goes for governments. Indigenous organizations, however, hold the opposite view. When it comes to the environmental impact, there is considerable awareness of the ecological risks posed by economic development among all of the stakeholders. In the case of mining, all four stakeholder groups recognize the negative impacts on the natural environment, but for wind farms and the Arctic Railway the results are more mixed. While wind farms are often perceived to have negative landscape effects locally, the stakeholders clearly see their value as a source of clean energy and a contribution to climate mitigation targets as well. In the case of carnivore governance and reindeer husbandry in Sweden, we found that participation in decision-making was very unequal: the rights of carnivores over reindeer and the interest of hunters and wildlife protection groups take precedence over reindeer herders — reproducing colonial conservation patterns.

Across the different case studies, indigenous actors and the other stakeholders tend to be at loggerheads over the right to resources, materializing a conflict between utilitarian economic interests and their land-use impacts, on the one hand, and nature-based livelihoods, on the other hand. At the core is an undervaluation of the cultural value and viability of nature-based livelihoods.

**Q One important part of this research is to identify the ethics of key stakeholders as they relate to the economic activities in question. How do you see the practical importance of this effort and what principal ethical conditions did you identify?**

**A** Identifying ethical conditions is a way for us to systematize and analyze crucial assumptions and motives that underpin the economic activities in question (whether explicitly or implicitly). These make up, what we can call, the conceptual and normative “grid” in which debates around the economic activities are lodged. The ultimate practical aim of this strand of our research was to identify mechanisms that might help reconcile the conflicts that play out on the ground, so we could gain a better understanding of how more inclusive and equitable forms of participation in economic development can be encouraged.

JUSTNORTH’s work revolves around four overarching sets of value indicators that bear on critical ethical dimensions of the economic activities: environmental indicators, procedural indicators, SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) indicators, and substantive indicators (e.g., human security, belonging, flourishing, respect). In all of the case studies, two ethical conflicts feature prominently. First, there is a recurrent conflict between environmental protection and economic development. Take, for example, the case study on nature-based tourism. Tourism entrepreneurs believe that their livelihood is threatened by wind farms since these can cause biodiversity loss and sudden landscape and habitat changes.

At the same time, there is considerable awareness among the stakeholders of the importance of environmental protection and ecosystem services (such as x, y) impacted by this economic activity. In the case studies about mining, wind power and the Arctic railway, public awareness of climate change has played an important role in boosting an understanding of the positive broader environmental impact of the industrial activities. However, their negative environmental impact locally is generally less acknowledged. At the same time, recognition of the role of ecosystem services is caught up with a complex and layered reality. For instance, in the case of carnivore governance and reindeer husbandry in Sweden, carnivores are seen as key to biological diversity even as they pose a threat to reindeer. At the same time, the ecosystem services (such as x, y) provided by reindeer husbandry are often undervalued.

Second, perhaps the most important finding in our research concerns procedural values. We found that decision-making for the economic activities studied often lacks transparency and equality of participation among stakeholders. This leads to a mistrust in decision-making — to outcomes that are perceived as less legitimate than they could be.

The biggest concern is the ignorance and lack of knowledge of the traditional ways of life of the northern people. Local stakeholders often voice a concern that they are not properly heard in planning wind farms or estimating catch quotas of fish and damages to reindeer management. They maintain that there is a need for a better understanding of their history and culture to promote greater equality, rights and transparency in planning and decision-making.

**Q What main barriers to and opportunities for sustainable development does your research indicate?**

**A** The opportunities for industrial infrastructure development are found in employment and economic diversification opportunities as well as in curbing greenhouse gas emissions. However, as we have seen, there is a range of diverse and many times conflicting interests across local, regional, and national scales. These create competing ideas about justice and sustainable land use – and are at the base of existing conflicts between different land users. From the point of view of local communities, the unequal distribution of benefits and risks on human systems and on the environment is at the centre of a perceived injustice. These value differences are a significant barrier to a just, sustainable development. The most salient value conflict between different stakeholders – and thus, a barrier to sustainability – is procedural justice: the power of industrial development over local people’s voices in land-use governance is real and needs to be addressed.

**Q Does your research point to what can be done to remedy the patterns of injustice?**

**A** Equality of participation and information transparency emerge as the two most important requirements for a more just and inclusive development. It’s concerning people living in the North that decision-making in Arctic economic development is often remote from the local level. As a consequence, there is now a lack of a common language” and trust between the parties in the development and planning process. It’s imperative that participatory governance is strengthened along with a more holistic approach to what constitutes legitimate perspectives and ethical norms – bridging the gap between, on the one hand, a utilitarian approach that encourages the greatest good for the greatest number and, on the other hand, local practitioners’ and indigenous knowledge and the more egalitarian worldview with which it is often associated. The reconciliation of conflicting land-use interests requires an understanding of the diverse ethical grounds, the cultural and spatial concerns of the different livelihoods. Above all, there is a clear need to incorporate local knowledge in decision-making and planning. It’s only by factoring in these different perspectives that we are able to properly evaluate what just economic development and demand looks like and what kinds of long-term benefits and opportunities they may provide. On the positive side, multiple legal frameworks that could play an important role are already in place. One example is the Finnish-Swedish Border River Agreement, which provides a legal basis for promoting cooperation in water and fisheries matters in the Tornio River. In general, however, the legal protection of traditional livelihoods on a national level, such as reindeer husbandry and salmon fishing, is insufficient and needs to be strengthened.

