

# Justice in Participation & Governance in the Arctic

## Envisioning just governance in the Arctic



Economic development in the Arctic often comes with a significant justice gap. To close it, a more inclusive and equitable participation in governance and policy-making is needed. Across five case studies centering on large industrial infrastructure development projects and nature-based livelihoods in Finland and Sweden, JUSTNORTH's work on "Justice in Participation and Governance" has analyzed existing land-use interests and value conflicts. The aim has been to identify mechanisms for reconciliation and to further a better understanding of how a more just participation in decision-making and co-existence of livelihoods can be achieved.

Large -scale projects exploiting natural resources in the Arctic can benefit municipalities. At the same time, they evoke strong emotions among the local population. The region has a long history of colonial extractivism that has resulted in uneven distribution of national benefits. Scars of historical wrongs remain open.

Across the different case studies —ranging from mining, wind farm development and the Arctic Railway to salmon fishing, reindeer husbandry and nature-based tourism—traditional livelihoods are typically at loggerheads over the right to resources with other key stakeholders, such as government and business.

## CASE STUDIES 13-16 & 18

CS13

Railway: Transition Link and Power Disparities: The Arctic Railway plans in Finland

Researchers: Solili Nyste'n-Haarala, University of Lapland  
Pigga Keskitalo, University of Lapland  
Juha Kähkönen, University of Lapland

CS14

Mining: Mining in the Finnish Arctic

Researchers: Jukka Similä, University of Lapland  
Henri Wallen, University of Lapland

CS15

Livelihoods: The Power and Perish of Multiple Land-use for Indigenous and Traditional Livelihoods in Northern Finland

Researchers: Mia Landauer, University of Lapland  
Juha Joona, University of Lapland

CS16

WindFIN: Balancing Sustainable Opportunities in the Arctic: Wind Power & Reindeer herding in Northern Finland

Researchers: Solili Nyste'n-Haarala, University of Lapland  
Tanja Joona, University of Lapland

CS18

IndEntr: Empowering Equitable and Robust Indigenous Economy through Indigenous Entrepreneurship in Sweden

Researchers: Elena Bogdanova, Northern Arctic Federal University  
Ildiko Asztalos-Morrell, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

A crucial part of the research has been to map the different perceptions and values, and the plurality of land use interests that key stakeholders bring to the table. There is a range of diverse and sometimes conflicting interests across local, regional, and national scales. These create a complex reality of different ideas about social justice and sustainable land use that lie at the base of existing conflicts. At the core is a clash between utilitarian economic interests and age-old cultures. For instance, from the point of view of municipalities, mining and wind power development are often eagerly wanted. But in practice, they typically benefit the financial hubs in metropolitan areas of the country while imposing undue risks and impacts on the local community and environment.

The arguably most salient value conflict identified in our work is procedural. We found that crucial decision-making processes often lack transparency and equality of participation. The effect is mistrust and a perceived deficit in legitimacy by stakeholders that have been sidelined. There is a sense shared by these actors that decision-making in Arctic economic development is too far removed from the local level. When new wind farms are planned or catch quotas of fish are estimated, they feel that they are not properly heard. They maintain that their traditional ways of life are many times carelessly disregarded.

These value differences are a significant barrier to a just, sustainable development. Does this research, then, point to what could be done to remedy the controversies surrounding Arctic economic development? Two things stand out: there is an urgent need for greater equality of participation as well as for more information transparency. The insufficient incorporation of local knowledge and interests in decision-making needs to be addressed. Unless this is done, our means for evaluating the benefits and risks in case of new economic activities will be flawed. As a result, entrenched forms of injustice are likely to remain, posing a stumbling block to sustainability that “leaves no one behind”.

---

