

Commentary

The Role of Regions & Cities in Arctic Cooperation

Esko Lotvonen

Interest in Arctic issues, development activities and climate change has been growing in the past few years. This has been easy to notice also at the regional and local level in different agendas. The work of the Arctic Council has been active between Arctic countries, having also a strong emphasis on indigenous people's affairs.

You might ask the question why the role of regions and cities has been so weak, even though operational implementation of programs and strategies always is made on these levels in practice. Regions and cities have a lot to offer for Arctic cooperation. I have my own experiences from working in the State Office of Lapland, Regional Council of Lapland and City of Rovaniemi in Finland.

The city of Rovaniemi is crossed by the Arctic Circle, so that most of its surface area is above it. Today it is a dynamic, growing city by population and business. The number of inhabitants is about 62,000. Rovaniemi is the fifth largest Arctic city. The science and applied science universities of Lapland are major educational institutes with almost 10,000 students. The city is also home to units of the main national research institutes of natural resources. These form a strong base for research and development activities in many issues related to know-how of Arctic conditions. So it is not only the location on the Arctic Circle that gives it the status of Finland's Arctic Capital City.

Rovaniemi is most probably best known globally from the trademark of the Official Hometown of Santa Claus. Nowadays Rovaniemi is often highly ranked as one of the top winter tourism destinations worldwide. We have been steadily growing to become an attractive international tourism destination with large scale of services throughout the year. Most of the tourist overnights come from abroad (57%).

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During the last quarter of the century, the agenda of the city has been strongly focused on Arctic development and the ongoing work to enhance it. The city of Rovaniemi feels an obligation to be an active partner in Arctic development. Today's existing Arctic cooperation under the Arctic Council started in Rovaniemi in 1991 with the signing of the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy.

The commencement of the cooperation - the Rovaniemi Process - led to the establishment of Arctic Council in 1996 in Ottawa. To continue the tradition, we arrange every second year an Arctic conference in the *Spirit of Rovaniemi Process*. The next one will take place in November 2017, when Finland will be chairing the Arctic Council and celebrating 100 years of independence.

The Arctic Center research institute was opened in Rovaniemi in 1992. It plays a major role in Arctic through a global network of researchers. There have been projects to develop the Arctic Center as one of the leading hubs of the European Union's (EU) Arctic information centers. Different faculties of the University of Lapland are also working strongly in the field of Arctic know-how. The University also hosts the Secretariat of the University of the Arctic (UArctic) which covers a wide network of educational and research units worldwide.

Through its location, Rovaniemi is a good natural laboratory for the development of cold climate know-how and products. Mainly for tourism purposes, winter ice and snow hotel/bar constructions are attractive and practical service solutions for visitors.

In Rovaniemi, we also have four sites serving different types of commercial products testing. The majority of clients are car manufacturers or tire, snow scooter and all-terrain vehicle producers.

With the cleanest and freshest air quality, the area offers good and aromatic wild natural products such as berries, herbs, mushrooms, fish and reindeer meat. Arctic business is a growing and, with the goal of supporting this development, the Lapland Chamber of Commerce arranges the annual Arctic Business Forum in Rovaniemi.

The other official trademark of Rovaniemi is Arctic Design Capital. Since 2009 the city of Rovaniemi and University of Lapland have organized an annual Arctic Design Week. The week has grown to an important international event with participants from 32 countries. Arctic Design is a natural step for Rovaniemi due to the presence of the faculty of Art and Design in the university. It is not just about industrial design but also service design and city planning. Arctic Design is a new and exciting concept that can play an important international role in the future among Arctic cities.

Rovaniemi is a member of the World Winter Cities Association of Mayors (WWCAM) and through this network shares experiences between winter cities in order to create better living conditions for residents. In WWCAM, Rovaniemi is leading the sub-committee of Arctic Design. Winter cities have made reports lately how they have been taking into account the goals to reduce emissions and energy consumption. Also there are processes going on to enhance the circular economy and resilience of the cities.

Finland will chair the Arctic Council in less than two years' time starting from spring 2017. During that period there will be many important meetings in Rovaniemi and other municipalities of Lapland. Following the example of Alaska we have established the Lapland Arctic Council Host Committee to promote and inform about different kinds of competencies and services available

in our region and city. Hopefully these activities around different meetings will also be a stimulus for practical cooperation between cities.

The Arctic Council has many important Observer states both from Europe and Asia. The City of Rovaniemi and Regional Council of Lapland have good operative cooperation with sister organizations in some of these countries. These structures could be used partly in issues important for the Arctic Council. The role of the EU is important for Arctic cooperation and it should be strengthened. In Northern Europe we have had good practices for cooperation between regions and cities during the past 20 years. Mostly this has been implemented within the structures of the EU's Interreg- and Tacis- programs. Numerous projects have corresponded nicely with priorities of the Arctic Council. Strong emphasis has been put on environmentally and socially sustainable projects. One good example is the international North Calotte Academy which has been running for 25 years as a tradition to gather together students, researches and decision makers to discuss common interests in the European North.

Arctic regions are vulnerable, vast and rich in natural resources. Climate change will have many impacts on nature, culture, business and logistics. It is in the utmost interest for regions and cities on how all of this will be realized in their territory. In Lapland, for decades we have planned multiple, sustainable uses of land between different interests of business. In our case, the challenge has been to fit together interests of nature preservation, Sami culture, tourism, forestry, reindeer husbandry, agriculture, mining and logistics. In this planning we have lots of competence to share with other regions.

The northernmost area of Lapland forms also the home area for Sami people and culture. This area is inhabited by about 4000 indigenous peoples. Indigenous issues are governed by the Finnish Sami Parliament and the municipalities in question. We do have of course Sami people also outside of this area. For example in Rovaniemi we have about 500 of them and the city provides services in Sami language.

I have described possibilities to enhance Arctic cooperation on regional and local levels from the point of view of the Lapland region and city of Rovaniemi. I know that other Arctic regions and cities have similar kinds of competencies that could be shared through Arctic cooperation.

Cities have developed great products, functional solutions and sustainable processes in relation to different business sectors, public and private services, energy production and consumption. All this know-how should be better shared among Arctic societies.

Why has this competence and know-how on Arctic issues of regions and cities not been used more seriously? There are no suitable structures in the Arctic Council where this need could be realized. Also national delegations or working groups have not included enough sub-national actors.

Somehow we should change this situation.

It might also be useful to consider the establishment of a working group of Arctic Cities to the structures of the Arctic Council. This would bind together national level common strategies with regional and local operative programs and actions.

Let's keep in touch!