

Introduction

Contested borders and identities

This publication is one result of the thematic session ‘Contested borders and identities’ organised at the conference entitled *Contested identities, contested cultures and contested rights – Change and challenges in the Northern European periphery* held on 23–25 September 2009 at the University of Tromsø, Norway. The conference was organised and financed by the university’s Citizenship, encounters and place enactment in the north (CEPIN) group, a multi-disciplinary research school that examines globalisation and modernisation processes in the north. The conference gathered researchers from 19 countries representing different fields of social sciences and addressed various issues relating to political, economic, social and cultural processes in the north.

The thematic session explored northern peripheries, in particular contested borders associated with identity, non-renewable resource development, welfare, security and social change. The contributions created the opportunity to discuss some of the important challenges that represent themselves in a region where various boundaries are contested, such as majority and minority/indigenous identities, culture, politics, social welfare and rights to territorial land. The sense of place, northernness and belonging was captured in examinations of the processes of change caused by global transition. These discussions highlighted the process of building new identities as well as maintaining old ones; and of how both northern and indigenous cultures that have revived and adapted their cultures to the requirements of modern society. The presentations articulated the importance given to the differences in cultural perspectives. The concepts of rights, culture and identity in relation to contested borders illustrated the contrasts and tensions that are identified

with the geographical relationships that define what the north is, should be, and to whom it belongs.

The contested claims to northern peripheries are significant local challenges that are connected to global debates on migration, ethnicity, citizenship, environmental security and natural resource development. The notion of peripheral borders plays a major role in the development of social and cultural identity and the rules and values shared by society in influencing and negotiating boundaries. The presentations illustrated various issues related to contested borders, in particular how the notion of identity plays a major role in the process of creating contested boundaries in a political, cultural, environment or social setting. The presentations also showed the Arctic to be complex in terms of its inhabitation and how locals situate themselves in the region: indigenous people with status as first nations, majority Europeans and ethnically-mixed settlers arriving more recently but having deep roots and, finally, new migrants having chosen to settle in the north with globalisation.

Though the north often is characterised by remoteness, wilderness and natural resources, the papers presented in this volume capture the dynamism of the European and pan-Arctic region. The very contested nature of the norms associated with traditional images of the north itself highlights how this region on the periphery also has a crucial place in greater debates on globalisation and modernisation processes.

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