Arctic strategies of sub-national regions

*Why* and *how* sub-national regions in Northern Finland and Sweden mobilize as Arctic stakeholders

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1. Introduction

1.1. High stakes and Arctic governance

In 2007, a Russian miniature submarine placed a titanium flag on the North Pole seabed, far under the ice cap, which provoked heated reactions from its Arctic neighbors. Part of the scientific expedition Arktika 2007, the flag was planted to underpin Russian claims in the Arctic, which are contested by several nations. The other littoral Arctic states – Canada, United States, Norway and Greenland (Denmark) – claim overlapping territories in the region, believed to contain vast reserves of oil and gas.¹ The high stakes in the Arctic, in terms of economic opportunities, environmental challenges and political interests, combined with the fact that stakeholders include the most powerful nations in the world; suggests that the future political configuration of the Arctic region risks becoming a game of high-level politics. And the temperature is rising – in multiple senses – as the thawing tundra is releasing great amounts of climate gases, and the receding ice covers are exposing desirable natural resources. In 2013, a political leader who had spoken out against mineral extraction in the Arctic was outmaneuvered under suspicious circumstances by Russian officials, and the same year an Arctic Council conference in Kiruna was boycotted by Greenland after the Swedish government’s refusal to grant the Danish dependency equal weighting with the Arctic states – demonstrating the political pressures that involved parties are exposed to.²

The significant economic potential of the region, combined with issues of sovereignty over the territorial status of some parts of the region, indicates that the geopolitical stakes in the Arctic are high and rising. And even though the number of conflicts and disputes between stakeholders has remained relatively limited and have been addressed in a collaborative, rather than confrontational manner; maintaining the Arctic as a region of low tension will depend on the ability to develop and strengthen the system of Arctic governance. The Arctic Council, the only transnational organization working exclusively with wide-ranging Arctic issues, is gaining operative capacities and receiving increasing international attention – but is unlikely to become an overarching governing organization of the Arctic region. Instead, it is more “likely to serve as the central pillar of a multi-level, multi-instrument regime”.³ The Arctic Governance Project, a collaboration between distinguished researchers, indigenous

leaders and members of the policy community from the eight Arctic states, released a report in 2010 which framed critical issues and set forth recommendations for the future of Arctic governance. The report was presented to policymakers from both international and national bodies and argues for the need to incorporate lower levels of involved communities in the development of a governance system in the Arctic region.

The performance of Arctic governance tasks should be handled by those bodies with the greatest capacity to do so, including local, regional, national, and international bodies as well as traditional and non-governmental bodies. Preference should be given where appropriate to those bodies closest to the problem.4

Such notions are fundamental to the multi-level policy-making processes within the European Union, referred to as the subsidiarity principle, which has allowed sub-national regions to gain increased political authority across the EU during the last decades.5 However, the political tensions and immense economic possibilities in the Arctic risks putting the interests of the Arctic peoples and other important stakeholders at sub-national levels in the background, by neglecting their right to influence the development and exploitation of the region.6 For regional levels in the European Arctic, such a scenario will risk a substantial reduction of influence capacity over matters directly affecting them. This is a prospect especially challenging for the northernmost sub-national entities of the non-littoral Arctic states, which are marginalized in the context both internationally, by nations littoral to the Arctic Ocean, as well as nationally, by their more developed southern counterparts.

1.2. Problematization and research gap

In light of the major transformations occurring in the Arctic region, with substantial economic and political stakes, rapid climate change, a large number of stakeholders and a changing

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institutional setup of the region; lower levels of government risk being put in the background in favor or high-level and high-tension politics. Moreover, depending on the attitude by national governments towards Arctic issues and the role of the sub-national level – sub-national regions will face a different set of opportunities and challenges for independent action. While there is a fair amount of literature on the formation and institutionalization of governance in the Arctic region, including the role of sub-national actors, little has been written on the more profound aspects of why and how sub-national regions mobilize in the Arctic. Therefore, identifying how and why lower levels of government mobilize to protect their interests in the Arctic region, and within different national contexts, would represent an important contribution in the debate on the future of Arctic governance.

1.3. Research aim and research questions

This study will comparatively analyze why and how sub-national regions in two non-littoral Arctic states mobilize in Arctic matters in order to understand what role they play in the context. To achieve this, a set of questions have been formulated to guide the research:

- How do the regional levels consider themselves to be affected by Arctic matters?
- To what extent do they wish to influence Arctic matters?
- What measures and which strategies are used to accomplish the ambitions?
- How do the regions differ in these questions?

1.4. Design

To understand how sub-national regional levels function within the system of Arctic governance, inspiration will be drawn from literature on sub-national mobilization, paradiplomacy theory, and marginality theory; to construct a theoretical framework that can explain why and how regional mobilization occurs in certain policy areas. Through strategy documents and interviews with civil servants working with regional development in each region, empirical data will be gathered on the two cases represented in this study regarding

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their position in Arctic matters. These two cases are Northern Ostrobothnia\(^8\), in Finland, and Västerbotten, in Sweden – two of merely five Arctic regions in the European Union, which possess several analytically valuable similarities and differences in terms of their respective national context. The data will be presented according to a set of themes derived from the theoretical framework and analyzed by comparing the two cases – in order to draw conclusions on (if) how and why they mobilize politically as Arctic stakeholders.

2. Definitions

2.1. Concepts

‘The Arctic’ is most commonly defined as the area lying north of the Arctic Circle – the latitude above which the sun does not set during summer, and does not rise during winter. In the center of the Arctic region is the North Pole, surrounded by the seasonally varying polar ice cap, which stretches over the vast Arctic Ocean; from the Bering Strait to the Barents Sea, and from the shores of Siberia to the islands of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.

‘The Arctic states’ are eight in total: the five littoral Arctic nations surrounding the Arctic Ocean - Canada, United States, Russia, Norway and Greenland (Denmark); and the three non-littoral Arctic states – Finland, Sweden and Iceland, which possess Arctic territory but no shoreline onto the Arctic Ocean. Together, these make up the eight Arctic nations as defined by the Arctic Council, in which they all hold permanent memberships.\(^9\)

‘The Arctic sub-national regions’ extend beyond the Arctic Circle by several definitions, to also include areas participating in Arctic Council Working Groups and/or the entire Barents region – adding some territory and several sub-national regions of Sweden, Finland and Russia to the definition.\(^10\) The latter definition will be applied in this study.

‘Regions’ and ‘regional level’ in this study refer to the sub-national level of authority located between national and local government. In both Sweden and Finland, the regional level of authority/government/administration encompasses several different actors, which will be discussed further on. Moreover, the term ‘Arctic region’ is used occasionally while referring

\(^8\) NOTE: Northern Ostrobothnia, Pohjois-Pohjanmaa, is also synonymously known as Oulu Region.


\(^10\) See Appendix A “Map 1; Boundaries of the Arctic Council Working Groups”; and Appendix B “Map 2: Arctic administrative areas”.

to the macro region of the Arctic, which is why additional care has been exercised when using this term in order to avoid possible confusion about which ‘region’ is referred to.

‘Sub-national level’ includes all levels under national governments, but is in this researched used primarily in the context of sub-national regions, regions (see above) and regional levels. When only ‘sub-national (level)’ is written, it refers to sub-national authorities in general. When referring to sub-national localities, or sub-national regions, this will be unambiguously stated. Similar to the use of ‘regions’ – certain care will be taken in order to avoid confusion.

‘Sub-national (regional) mobilization’ is in this study referred to as the involvement in policy-making processes by sub-national regional authorities, which may also occur on the extra-national arena as ‘international mobilization’.

3. Limitations

The two cases examined in this study are expected to produce important knowledge for the understanding of sub-national regions in Arctic governance; however, the results cannot be generalized to all sub-national regions of the Arctic. Neither can conclusions be drawn for all Arctic sub-national regions of Sweden and Finland (the Arctic regions of the EU), although this context represents the primary motive for the choice of cases. The two sub-national regions investigated in this study are Västerbotten, in Sweden, and Northern Ostrobothnia, in Finland – and conclusions will only be drawn for these specific cases.

4. Background

4.1. Arctic transformations

As a consequence of global warming and climate change, the Arctic environment has entered a phase of rapid transformation. The extent of the Arctic ice cover has shrunk dramatically, to the point that scientists are now debating the possibility of near ice-free summers in the Arctic Ocean before year 2040, and perhaps even earlier.\textsuperscript{11} As areas with permafrost are thawed, methane gas deposits are being released into the atmosphere, further increasing the speed of global warming. The extensive ice melt, combined with higher water and land temperatures, creates new circumstances for flora and fauna within the Arctic region, as well as for people

living in the area. But the climatic shift in the Arctic, combined with modern technological advances, has also brought with it new opportunities for economic development and exploitation. These include access to shorter international transport routes as well as the uncovering of desirable natural resources. The receding ice cover along the northern shores of Siberia, Canada and Alaska opens up possibilities for the so-called Northern Sea Route, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the ice-free Barents Sea; as well as the Northwest Passage through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. The continental shelf surrounding the Arctic has proven to contain large amounts of oil and natural gas resources, while the cold, nutritious waters support great numbers of fish. Moreover, although mining activities have been taking place in the Arctic region for quite some time, notably in Siberia and the Scandinavian countries, mineral prospecting is now also becoming increasingly common in more remote areas such as Greenland, driven by a high global demand for raw materials and large investments in the region by states and multi-national enterprises.\textsuperscript{12}

The fact that all eight Arctic states – and the European Union – have come out with new or updated Arctic strategies, further demonstrates the growing interest in the region. While some of these nations highlight the need for national security and sovereignty, almost all strategies include references to the importance of economic and regional development, infrastructure, environmental protection, and international cooperation. Certainly, in order to achieve these ambitions, development of the current management and governance system will be crucial – a fact that is also stressed by the majority of the Arctic nations and the European Union.\textsuperscript{13}

4.2. **Legal framework and Arctic decision-making**

The Arctic region was, together with Antarctica, one of the last outposts of the world to be explored and settled. These regions have, as such, been considered virgin land, and have therefore not been encompassed by any clear political or institutional framework. But compared to Antarctica, which is \textit{land surrounded by ocean}, the Arctic is an \textit{ocean surrounded by land}, which results in quite different circumstances. The territorial claims of Antarctica are in large parts overlapping and have not been resolved. The status of Antarctica is regulated by the Antarctic Treaty (1959), which prohibits military activity and economic exploitation; and grants all nations freedom of scientific investigation. No claims are allowed


\textsuperscript{13} Le Miére, C. & Mazo, J. (2013a), p. 120.
to be asserted or denied, thereby freezing Antarctica’s territorial disputes and preserving the status quo. By contrast, in the Arctic, issues of sovereignty and the tense relations during the Cold War have led to the area becoming highly militarized. The only similar agreement to the Antarctic Treaty concerns the Svalbard Archipelago, the Svalbard Treaty of 1920, which endows Norway sovereignty over the islands, but grants other nations the right to use the territory for economic activities and research. Apart from this, territorial disputes in the Arctic almost exclusively concern maritime boundaries and are therefore subjects of the international agreements on the matter.

The United Nations Conference on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) was established in 1982 and lays down a comprehensive regulatory framework over the world’s oceans and seas. UNCLOS regulation concerns all aspects of ocean space, such as economic and scientific activities, environmental control, the settlement of disputes, delimitation, etc.; granting states full sovereignty over an area measuring 12 nautical miles from its shorelines and the exclusive right to exploitation of natural resources within 200 nautical miles. As such, although UNCLOS is an international agreement, it is also the only overarching legal framework for conflict resolution of Arctic issues on a transnational level. Although achieving a stable and long-term governance structure of the Arctic region would be facilitated by the establishment of a comprehensive treaty regime – like the Antarctic Treaty – such a development is unlikely. Apart from the difficulties in negotiating such an agreement, the five littoral Arctic states have expressively pronounced their opposition against that notion in the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008.

The Arctic Council, a high-level intergovernmental forum in which all eight Arctic nations hold permanent memberships, is the only body that is solely devoted to and covers the entirety of the Arctic region. Its purpose is to promote cooperation concerning economic and environmental matters in the Arctic, but it has no decision-making capabilities and expressly excludes military-security issues. In 2013, the Arctic Council opened a permanent secretariat in the Norwegian city of Tromsø, with about ten employees, including one representative from each member state. In recent years, the Arctic Council has piloted

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negotiations on two important cooperation treaties on search and rescue operations and oil pollution preparedness, which are limited in their scope but provide examples of how the Arctic Council can function as a policy-making actor in the region. Additionally, providing a clear representation of the rising interests in the Arctic region and a strengthening of the role of the Arctic Council, the number of observers in the Arctic Council was recently doubled – from six, to twelve permanent observer states. The recent expansion includes such distant nations – from an Arctic point of view – as China, India, South Korea and Singapore. Although these states do not have any claims in the Arctic, they could all benefit from shorter trade routes and prospects of economic development in the region; where the mining and petroleum industries have received substantial investments, particularly from China.

Furthermore, the European Union, which has no member state with direct access to the Arctic Ocean (Greenland is not part of the EU), is actively pushing to receive a greater role in the Arctic region. Although failing to obtain an observer status in the Arctic Council, the EU is involved in several environmental protection programs and has fishing agreements in Arctic waters. Regular international exchange in the Arctic, apart from the Arctic Council, also takes place in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) – an intergovernmental forum run in collaboration between the Nordic countries, Russia and the European Commission. As an intergovernmental forum decisions are, however, non-binding and only concern the Barents region. BEAC has, nonetheless, achieved to build a long-term and constructive dialogue in a region that has previously been heavily militarized, and is still marked by intra-national tensions.

4.3. The approach by the national levels of Finland and Sweden

Sweden has quite recently (2011) come out with an Arctic strategy, while the Finnish government during the last five years has both published an Arctic strategy (2010), and come

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out with an updated version of it (2013). Finland is also taking a more proactive role as the EU’s spearhead in Arctic matters, by promoting its distinctive ‘snow-how’ in the Arctic environment and redefining the country as entirely Arctic by implementing an alternative geographic definition. Moreover, the positions taken by the national levels in regard to the role of sub-national regions in the Arctic context are quite different, as can be witnessed in their respective Arctic strategies. The Finnish government supports a policy of finding a natural role for the sub-national regions as Arctic actors, and advocates an interactive approach between the country’s different levels of administration in Arctic matters. Finland’s Arctic strategy also refers to the regional level in terms of economic prospects – its challenges and opportunities, and their potential of accessing financial aid from the EU, and the regions’ crucial role in the Barents cooperation. The Swedish Arctic Strategy contains very few references to the sub-national regional level, and then merely concerning their role as recipients of means from the EU cohesion policy and structural funds. And, illustratively, the Arctic regions of the country are only mentioned by name once, when listing the members of the Barents Regional Council.

5. Theoretical framework

5.1. Sub-national mobilization: contextualizing the theory

Authors debate the changing role of the nation-state in the global political system, as the reduced importance of territorial association is challenging the classical configurations of politically, economically and culturally contingent entities. Provoked by increasing economic globalization and global interconnectedness, new communications technologies and the emergence of what resembles a worldwide culture, the connection between territory and political authority is dissolving. Some point at the emergence of a pluralistic and multi-layered power structure with new policy actors and centers of authority, such as lower levels of government, multi-national companies and non-governmental organizations; exercising influence above, below and alongside nation-states. International organizations play an

28 The Government of Finland (2013), pp. 8, 10-11, 12.
increasingly important role in international politics as independent actors, and, where such organizations were previously perceived only as extensions of nation-state capabilities, they now deal with issues that stretch beyond interstate relations, covering global topics and shaping international politics.\textsuperscript{31} In the face of an emerging global society and a global market, regional trading blocs and new political unions have taken shape. As a result of the changing political landscape and increasing economic competition, national governments have increasingly come to focus on national competitiveness, which has resulted in a diminished attention towards policies of regional balance – leaving a void to be filled by sub-national levels of government. In many places sub-national actors, such as regions or municipalities, have gained the authority to independently enter into economic and political arrangements both with other sub-national entities as well as with supra-national organizations.

The diffusion of power across borders and the deterioration of the nation-state model, has been theorized as leading towards a changed international system in which power is dispersed based on what is suitable for the specific policy or issue, a phenomenon labeled as \textit{perforated sovereignty}.\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, a great amount of literature on sub-national regions deal with another concept, the so-called \textit{multi-level governance} (MLG), as a framework for the inclusion of all different levels of authority and interest groups in decision-making processes.\textsuperscript{33} Multi-level governance theory has drawn much inspiration from the governance system of the European Union, especially pointing at a concept discussed fervently a few decades ago – “Europe of the regions” – where the sub-national regional level is highlighted as an increasingly important source of political authority.\textsuperscript{34} In sum, these factors are contributing to the emergence of a different governance configuration than the Westphalian nation-state system, in which sub-national levels of government have received a greater role to play.\textsuperscript{35}

5.2. Sub-national mobilization: why?

The theoretical framework applied in this study combines marginality theory with paradiplomacy theory and a separate framework for motivational factors behind regional mobilization in the EU; which provides a theoretical account for why peripheral regional levels of the European Union would desire to engage in an extra-national context (as an Arctic stakeholder). This framework is summarized in Table 1, as seen below. The reasons to why sub-national regions mobilize on the international arena are grouped under a number of settings which host a particular set of opportunities and challenges - giving rise to certain motivational factors: the general setting, i.e. the international arena in its entirety; the EU-specific setting, referring to the policy-making institutions, processes and activities of the European Union; and the context-specific setting, the features of the sub-national region’s own geographical location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>EU-specific</th>
<th>Context-specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>access to new markets; investment opportunities; technological transfer; promote tourism</td>
<td>gain support for cultural development; cultural promotion; language and identity recognition</td>
<td>formalizing, legitimizing and institutionalizing of regional objectives; recognition and devolution of political authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons to why sub-national regions mobilize are naturally quite numerous, and very much depending on the context in which the sub-national region is embedded. However, some generalizations are possible to deduce within the extensive literature on regional mobilization. Regional mobilization on the international arena has been described within the theoretical concept of paradiplomacy, applied extensively on the context of sub-national regions within the European Union, but also on regions and localities in other areas. The term was first

introduced in the 1980’s by authors Ivo Duchacek and Panayotis Soldatos, and although rivaled by concepts such as *multi-layered diplomacy* and *constituent diplomacy*, paradiplomacy became popularized as a stable and overarching terminology to describe the phenomenon of sub-national involvement in international relations. It has been defined as:

 [...] a form of political communication for reaching economic, cultural, political, or any other types of benefits, the core of which consists in self-sustained actions of regional governments with foreign governmental and non-governmental actors.

Authors of paradiplomatic theory have discerned three main motivational factors for regional levels to enter the international arena – economy, culture and politics. In terms of *economic motivations*, regions strive to find new markets for regionally produced goods, investment opportunities, access to modernizing technologies, and to promote tourism in the region. *Cultural motivations* are especially apparent in contexts where national governments remain indifferent to regional cultures and/or languages. Being active on the international arena can help the region to gain support and resources for cultural development and promotion, as well as more formal goals such as language and identity recognition. Sub-national regions’ *political motivations* can appeal to economic and cultural motivations, but include formalizing, legitimizing and institutionalizing of regional objectives, such as claims on territorial recognition, devolution of competences and recognition of political authority – both nationally and internationally. Entering the international arena can therefore assist the regions in mobilizing greater support for their cause.

Considering the economic opportunities and dramatically increased international attention in the Arctic region, these three motivational factors all possess substance in the Arctic context. Apart from the Arctic nations themselves investing heavily in resource exploitation and essential infrastructure in the region, multi-national firms and non-Arctic nations such as China and Japan have also devoted greater interest in the area during recent years. The

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heightened international attention increases opportunities for investments and tourism, and promotion of the cultures and trades of the peoples living in the area – from the Inuit and the Aleutians in North American Arctic, to the Sami and Nenets people in the Barents region. Moreover, as much of the Arctic region suffers from dramatic climate change and environmental concerns, efforts to tackle these issues on a global scale will require the specific know-how and experience of the sub-national regions of the Arctic – giving them further possibility of being heard internationally. Thus, increased international knowledge of the specific conditions in this part of the world – economic, cultural, and environmental particularities – could represent an opportunity for highlighting the specific political interests and concerns of the sub-national regions in the area, providing motivation for international mobilization.

Other authors who focus specifically on the political system of the European Union, discuss motivations on the basis of two fundamental concepts – financial mobilization and regulatory mobilization. These theoretical concepts also provide an account for the strategies and means used by sub-national entities in international politics, which will be discussed further in the following section. Financial mobilization appeals to the ambition to access financial transfer mechanisms within the EU, which include investment funds and various social programs within the EU cohesion policy, directed at the regional levels of authority. Regulatory mobilization concerns the desire to influence the European Union policy-making processes and regulatory outcomes. It is generally regarded as taking place within policy areas and legislation that have an administrative or financial effect on the sub-national region itself; and mobilization occurs when the regional authority wishes to influence these processes in favor of its own interests.\(^{41}\) Regulatory and financial mobilization are not driven by motivations that are mutually exclusive, and regulatory mobilization may, for example, be motivated by the need to obtain greater access to economic benefits.\(^{42}\) This framework, constructed specifically for sub-national regions within the European Union, allows a theoretical explanation as to how mechanisms available within the EU can function as motivational factors for regional international mobilization. Considering that the European Union has become increasingly interested in the Arctic region, its own political tools for sub-national influence will likely be stimulated to position the union and its interests in the Arctic context. The political activity

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and mobilization on the EU-level is perhaps figuratively demonstrated by replacing the ‘Northern Periphery Programme’, with the ‘Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme’, but is also visible in several more concrete initiatives, as discussed in section 4.2. Through the EU’s cohesion policy and regional policy, sub-national regions of the European Arctic have significant opportunities in attracting attention from the EU, which might further motivate international mobilization by the northernmost regions of Finland and Sweden.

Engagement in the international political arena by a region that is situated peripherally to the center is further explained by the so-called *marginality theory*. Marginality theory has been theorized upon by authors in several different areas of political science, including Arctic studies, contending the modernist view of periphery or marginality.43 The modernist discourse holds that periphery or marginality implies a status of inferiority and powerlessness, by being distantly situated from the core, or the center. In terms of sub-national regional entities, the modernist discourse would refer to the distance from the center of political power, i.e. governments and the state capitals, implying that peripheries or margins are considered of relatively low interest in international politics.44 In political science and international relations, marginality theory has been applied on studies of peripheral or marginal sub-national levels of authority, to instead argue for the possible *advantage* of having a marginal location.45 Authors within marginality theory argue that remoteness to the center might not at all imply a lack of importance or influence capacity for the marginally located entity. Indeed, it indicates distance to the center, but might actually imply relative closeness to a separate center. Such a setting can thereby facilitate the marginal actor to function as a bridge, or mediator, between these two centers of gravity – granting it a substantial capacity to influence. Entering the international arena as an independent actor can therefore provide the peripheral region with a powerful advantage of hosting international flows of goods, technologies or capital. Moreover, in a globalizing world and expanding networks of political interaction, frontiers are becoming re-conceptualized as places of exchange and interaction, which further enforces this perception of marginality as a possible advantage.46

44 Note: Parker (2008) makes a linguistic and etymological distinction between the two concepts of periphery and margin, where periphery is generally understood as negative and subordinate to the center, and marginality possesses more positive connotations of independence and power. This distinction is, however, not applied in this research.
By being peripherally located in both the Arctic region, as well as in the European Union, the cases investigated in this study can be perceived as possessing a unique opportunity to function as a bridge between two spheres of authority. While the location between the powerful European Union and the Arctic region represents a clear prospect for international influence, sub-national regions of northern Finland and Sweden might also use their peripheral location for national benefits. International and national opportunities can give the examined sub-national entities further incentives to mobilize internationally, resulting in an additional dimension that may function to reinforce all other motivational factors.

5.3. Sub-national mobilization: how?

In table 2, as seen below, the theories on paradiplomacy, marginality, and sub-national mobilization in the EU are condensed to a range of specific activities that can be utilized by sub-national regions for mobilizing on the international arena (as Arctic stakeholders). These measures and strategies are grouped under the same settings as the motivational factors – representing separate arenas on which various forms of international activity occur: the general setting, the EU-specific setting, and the context-specific setting. They are further sorted according to the mode of interaction between sub-national and national levels in terms of international activities, which is theorized as a major factor in deciding the sub-national regions’ space for individual action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>EU-specific</th>
<th>Context-specific</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Inter-regional networking</td>
<td>International missions</td>
<td>Regulatory mobilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characteistics</td>
<td>Regional participation in int’l events; establishment of regional representation in commercial and political centers and organizations</td>
<td>National delegations</td>
<td>persuading EU political institutions to consider regional interests in EU regulation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>missions by regional leaders or professionals, financed by regional governments</td>
<td>Promotional events</td>
<td>tracking and collecting information on EU funding; bidding and making the case for regional interests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>exhibiting and events promoting trade, investment and tourism</td>
<td>National delegations</td>
<td>cooperation/bypassing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>participating in int’l events under national delegations</td>
<td>Regulatory mobilization</td>
<td>cooperation/bypassing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persuading EU political institutions to consider regional interests in EU regulation</td>
<td>Financial mobilization</td>
<td>cooperation/bypassing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tracking and collecting information on EU funding; bidding and making the case for regional interests</td>
<td>Marginality</td>
<td>cooperation/bypassing</td>
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<td>Interaction mode</td>
<td>bypassing</td>
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Notwithstanding the extensive capabilities that have been bestowed upon the sub-national regional levels of authority, they exist within the legal framework of the nation-state they are embedded in – which also makes up the primary stage for how sub-national regions engage in international matters. The nature of the interaction between sub-national entities and national governments involves an element of tension, if the sub-national authority attempts to independently enter into the arena of international politics. Foreign affairs are generally considered the exclusive domain of the nation-state, and sub-national authorities’ attempts to enter this sphere of competence would thereby represent a challenge to the supremacy of the state and a source of conflict between the different levels of authority. Authors highlight the crucial difference between regional mobilization when it occurs within the framework of the national government as a complement to state activities, and when it ensues without interaction with the national government. From these assumptions, three separate modes of interaction between sub-national and national authorities can be identified: cooperation, collectively working across the levels of authority towards the fulfillment of shared goals; bypassing, lacking interaction between these (not necessarily including interest discrepancies); and conflict, working individually towards the achievement of objectives that are not compatible. Thus, bypassing and conflict both imply acting outside of the national framework for international activities, but differing in the sense that the bypassing strategy contains no interest deviation from the national level and therefore lacks the dimension of conflict. Worth noting is that conflict, as a strategy for international insertion, is considered an unlikely and unusual form of interaction between national and sub-national levels. As a consequence, bypassing and conflict will be treated equally in this study.

This dynamism points at a key disparity, and initial separation, among strategies and actions of sub-national regional authorities’ engagement in the international arena. Bypassing is not perceived as the preferential option by sub-national actors, but is resorted to in case the channels of interaction with the national level are weak or blocked. This implies that the measures and strategies utilized by the sub-national level in its international activities is dependent on the space for individual action given to them in the relevant policy areas:

suggesting that disregard by the national level might result in an extended use of bypassing strategies, or simply cause a lower international activity by the sub-national actor in general.

Within the EU system, bypassing the national government by approaching extra-state channels of interaction occurs frequently in institutionalized forms and under quite non-dramatic circumstances. Activities may include various networks and associations of regional authorities, the Committee of the Regions, lobbying offices in Brussels, direct connections with the European Commission and Members of the European Parliament, undertakings with regional businesses and the use of private advocacy firms. Such measures may be used with the purpose of achieving regulatory outcomes, through regulatory mobilization – lobbying within the EU’s political institutions to persuade them to consider regional interests in some specific area of EU regulations. Financial mobilization, on the other hand, requires tracking and collecting information of the mechanisms and structure of EU funding towards regions, localities or other geographical entities. As the funding possibilities and distributive policies are built upon a zero-sum logic, in which receivers are competing for the same resources, financial mobilization will require bidding and argumentation for their cases, as well as the adaptation to certain conditions that are set up by regulators. Regulatory and financial mobilizations are not mutually exclusive, and can function collectively as a cohesive sub-national mobilization within EU policy processes. By proactively lobbying for regional interests within the EU framework of cohesion policy, sub-national authorities are engaging in regulatory mobilization while possibly also managing to attain new opportunities for EU funding – leading to both financial and regulatory policy outcomes. While regulatory mobilization can be used to lobby for consideration of regional interests in some specific area of EU regulations, it could also be used to promote regional interests in mechanisms of financial transfer. Highlighting regional challenges and specificities to influence EU cohesion policy and social funds would require a combination of regulatory and financial mobilization, which can result in the augmentation of financial support for challenges specific to the Arctic context.

The literature on paradiplomacy lines out a more defined conceptualization of the theoretical approaches, as authors put forward a set of specific strategies employed by sub-national

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entities, which possess many similarities with the methods and instruments identified above, both generally and for the EU-specific context. While these are explicit to the point that they resemble high-level diplomatic activities by nation-states, I will argue for their bearing in the context of sub-national international mobilization in the Arctic. In early texts by Duchacek, nine or ten strategies of ‘global micro-diplomacy’ are identified\(^ {53}\), which, in later works, are condensed to six major methods of sub-national activity on the international arena: (1) establishing permanent offices representing the regional government in capitals of foreign countries, or commercial/industrial centers; (2) international missions and journeys by regional leaders which are covered by local and international media; (3) short-term, professional fact-finding missions financed by sub-national governments; (4) exhibitions and events which promote trade, investment, tourism and technological opportunities in the region; (5) establishing commercial (free-trade) zones for foreign investment; (6) and regional representatives participating in international conferences in regional or national delegations.\(^ {54}\)

These strategies are intended for the international arena as a whole – not for specific contexts such as the Arctic region – and some of these strategies may not be practically viable for sparsely populated sub-national regions in small nations such as Sweden and Finland. Nonetheless, they provide a guideline for more precise options available for the regional level on the international arena. Some clarifications and reformulations are however necessary. The first strategy or method has been extensively discussed within the context of the European Union, by Keating referred to as *inter-regional networking*, a phenomena which is both common and encouraged by the establishment of the single market and instruments such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).\(^ {55}\) This strategy would include participation in inter-regional organizations and collaborations, as well as the establishment of regional representation in Brussels, in other important cities, and/or at the secretariats of Arctic/Barents organizations – with the aim of promoting the region’s interests in the Arctic. The second and the third strategies are somewhat overlapping and could be considered analogous, and combining them in one concept would facilitate the analysis. Such strategies are nevertheless expected to be difficult to identify among the cases examined in this study, as international missions by regional representatives are often likely to be part of larger

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delegations and rarely conducted unilaterally. Such initiatives do, however, allow for a region to demonstrate specific skills or experiences found in the region, which can be applied in the context of the Arctic and highlighted for regional benefits, e.g. the establishment of a research facility. The fourth strategy should be considered plausible in its current form, and can be utilized with the same aims as the previous strategy. The fifth strategy is highly unlikely to encounter in this context, and even more so as the regional governments of Finland and Sweden do not have the political competences to establish such areas – which is why it will be excluded from the analysis. Finally, the sixth strategy concerns actions by regional representatives that both include cooperative behavior and bypassing behavior, which is why it will be split into two concepts in order to make it coherent with all parts of the theoretical framework set up for this study. Participation in international events in a regional delegation will thereafter be placed under inter-regional networking, while participation under national delegations will remain a separate strategy.

As with the theoretical concepts used to explain why sub-national regions mobilize, marginality theory can be used to provide a reinforcing dimension to the measures and strategies identified here. While marginality can be used to motivate insertion in the international arena, this same advantage – of being ‘favorably located’ between two centers of power – can function to make the regions more relevant in the context and thereby provide the implemented measures and strategies with additional leverage and stronger arguments.

6. Method

6.1. Qualitative research and the question of subjectivity

This study will collect empirical data through interpreting strategy documents and performing interviews with civil servants in order to construct an image of why and how the regions act in the relevant context. Both methods of collecting information require sorting in line with the researcher’s interpretation of the theoretical framework, and analyzing this material will imply drawing conclusions on the basis of the researcher’s own sense of logical inference. This approach to the research process is in close relation to the idealist ontological standpoint dominant in qualitative research philosophy – perceiving reality as a construction of the human mind; and to the epistemological tradition of interpretivism. These philosophical stances add up to an understanding of reality as constructed by the humans inhabiting it, and
to grasp its complexities one must understand the different perceptions of it. As such, the results will include a significant dimension of subjective interpretation. Consequently, there are several aspects and issues that the researcher has to consider in the research process. The difference between objective and subjective information is often put forward as a one of the major differences between quantitative and qualitative research. While quantitative studies generally rely on what is considered objective and independent of the researcher’s personal reflections – qualitative studies utilize the judgment of the researcher him/herself to produce scientific material. This leads to a general lack of precision in qualitative research, as it is depending on estimations and interpretations in the collection of data. This problem it is by qualitative researchers deemed inevitable, as all research (including quantitative) contain some degree of subjectivism. Instead, qualitative researchers emphasize the fundamental need for conscious reflection over one’s neutrality, a systematic research methodology, careful attention to representativeness of the material, and – importantly – a set of criteria for how the empirical data should be interpreted.

Since this study does not aim to produce empirical data that is quantitative, perfectly objective, or statistically generalizable, it is important adding that the results of this study cannot be generalized to all sub-national regions of the Arctic. Neither can the results be transferred to the other sub-national regions of Finland and Sweden, although that physical setting provided the central motive for the choice of cases. The two sub-national regions included in this study will be examined according to a comparative research approach, which implies contrasting them against each other in order to identify and analyze important differences and similarities. Thus, the conclusions will only be valid within the setting of these specific cases. Also worth noting is that the two interviews performed as part of this study provide a relatively fragile foundation for generalizations. The statements of the interviewees are therefore complemented by strategy documents that can be considered more representative for each region. Additionally, the interviewees were not chosen due to their

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57 Positivism: see Snape, D. & Spencer, L. (2003), pp. 11-17


representativeness, but for their broad knowledge in the relevant subject and the role of their respective region.

### 6.2. Validity and reliability

When it comes to assuring the scientificity and quality of the research, the concepts of *validity* and *reliability* are helpful and widely used in both qualitative and quantitative research. While these are originally positivist terms, they can assist the qualitative researcher as tools for reflecting over the scientific approach of the study. Validity is usually divided in two parts: internal and external validity. The internal validity refers to the precision with which the results of a study are produced. In more detail, it tells us if the independent variables succeed in explaining the variation of the dependent variables, or if they might be influenced by external factors that are not investigated. The external validity concerns the degree of transferability to cases outside of the specific study. Reliability, in turn, is the reliability of the methodological instruments used in the study – the ability they have to produce the same results if the study were to be repeated.60 By performing interviews, the researcher and the empirical data are exposed to several issues concerning validity and reliability. However, by departing from a clearly defined theoretical framework and operationalizing the theory to concepts that are utilized to structure the interviews – both aspects of validity and reliability are addressed. By being open and elaborate in describing how the interviews are performed and interpreted, it allows for the study to be reproduced with the same instruments, and for the analysis to be performed with similar results. Additionally, by clearly defining the theoretical concepts laying the foundation for the interpretative elements – scrutinizing the analysis and conclusions are facilitated. In regard to the strategy documents, validity and reliability are more difficult to control since the data is secondary and has not been gathered by the researcher him-/herself. This issue highlights the imperative need to provide a detailed description of how the selection of material has been performed and how the data has been collected by the source, in order to assure a high degree of transparency in the study.61

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6.3. Choice of cases

The choice of the two Arctic regions of Northern Finland and Sweden that are included in this study was based on four main motives:

1) They share many opportunities and challenges by being located within two non-littoral Arctic states of the European Union. The northern sub-national regions of Finland and Sweden possess many of the features that are representative to the Arctic region: low population density and depopulation, vast distances, indigenous minorities with specialized cultures and trades, a sub-arctic climate, and mineral extraction and forestry in remote areas. Despite not being as inherently ‘Arctic’ as other areas surrounding the Arctic Ocean, the transformations occurring in this part of the world – with rising temperatures and climate change, increased accessibility and intensified international attention – are issues that to a great extent are also affecting the northern regions of Finland and Sweden.62

2) These sub-national regions are of great strategic importance by being the northernmost outposts of their respective countries and of the entire European Union, thereby also uniquely positioned in connecting their nations and the EU to the Arctic region.

3) The Arctic policies of Finland and Sweden are different in many ways, which produces significant and analytically valuable disparities between the cases included in this study.

4) Västerbotten and Northern Ostrobothnia are similar in the way that they possess demographic structures with vast and sparsely populated interiors, and more developed coasts dominated by a relatively large urban center. Moreover, in terms of national political representation and decision-making influence, these regions are in the shadow of their more developed southern counterparts, where their capitals are located and the majority of the population lives. And ultimately, in the Arctic context, Västerbotten and Northern Ostrobothnia are shadowed by their ‘more Arctic’ northern neighbors.

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6.4. Material

The material consists of two interviews, one civil servant from each region working with regional development and international affairs, and strategy documents from the same regions. The interviews have been performed by phone and face-to-face, and have been recorded, transcribed and archived for the sake of future access, which enables verification of all the information used in this study. Both interviews have been transcribed in close connection to the actual interview, as to keep the details of the conversation fresh while listening to the recordings. For the same reason, the analysis has also been performed soon after transcription, to be able to interpret the information while still remembering information that might be imperceptible in the written transcripts. With the purpose of allowing the interviewees to give statements as close to the truth as possible, without having to give up important details, their identities have been kept anonymous. The interviews have followed a similar structure, although the questions have varied slightly due to the different conditions of each region, and the different forms of the interviews.

Interview I was conducted by phone, in English, with a civil servant in Northern Ostrobothnia, working with regional development related to international affairs and EU affairs. The interviewee has a long experience of collaboration within the Arctic and Barents area, and comprehensive knowledge of the different activities going on in the region related to regional development and the Arctic. Interview II was performed face-to-face, in Swedish, with a civil servant in Västerbotten, who is also working with regional development concerning international issues, and has a very good insight into activities related to the Arctic and Barents area, including the different regional actors working with these matters. Both interviewees were chosen on the basis of their extensive knowledge in the relevant policy area, as well broad perspectives on their respective regions’ involvement in the Arctic context – including the various organizations on national, regional and local levels.

The strategy documents consist of a Regional Development Strategy and a Regional Strategic Plan, which have been found on the web sites of each region. These have been chosen as they are important tools for the regional levels to influence the overall policy-process concerning the region itself, including international political issues and collaborations. In the Finnish system, these strategy documents are authored by the regional councils, as they hold the exclusive competence of regional planning and development. The document that will be

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examined in this study is the overarching strategy for regional planning and development activities, called ‘The Regional Development Plan’, maakuntasuunnitelma. It is processed and written by regional actors in a broad collaboration, as it functions as the guide and blueprint for all the other regional programs and plans. It was commissioned in 2012 and published in 2014 – and is to be found on the region’s official web site. The current Regional Strategic Plan of Northern Ostrobothnia stretches from 2014 to 2040.64 In Sweden, such strategy documents are authored by the actor with the responsibility for regional development, which varies depending on the region. In Västerbotten, the responsible authority is the collaborative body of Region Västerbotten – a regional development organization run jointly by the region’s primary and secondary municipalities. Similar to the Finnish case, these documents are authored through an elaborate process in collaboration with a wide range of regional actors. In Västerbotten, the overarching strategic plan is the ‘Regional Development Strategy’, regional utvecklingsstrategi, stretching from 2014 to 2020. It was published in 2013 can be found on the official web site of Region Västerbotten.65

6.5. Interviews

The interviews of this study have been conducted according to a semi-structured model of interviewing. This entails that the questions are prepared in advance, and distributed as to ensure full coverage of the subject and maintain focus on the topic throughout the interview. The questions are the same for all the respondents, which are granted enough and equal time to answer. The question form used in the interviews can be seen in Appendix C. The questions are formulated in an open manner, giving the interviewee space to answer freely and naturally. When deemed necessary by the researcher, he/she may add supplementary inquiries to maintain the structure and focus of the interview, or when the respondent seems to have further information to disclose. These considerations need to be contemplated in advance, meaning that rigorous preparations need to be done before the interviews to ensure their quality. The advantages of a semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is given enough flexibility to assess the situation and steer the interview in order to gather as qualitative information as possible, while the interviewee is allowed a more natural setting for expressing his/her thoughts. Additionally, by asking the same questions and following a well-

rehearsed and prepared structure, the results will allow an analysis in terms of commonalities between the cases.66

When conducting the interview, it is important to begin by establishing a relaxed and trusting environment, generally achieved through acting polite and respectful – according to common sense – in order to avoid a situation in which the interviewee feels uncomfortable. Also, giving the interviewee some practical information on how the interview will be conducted, as well as an explanation to the purpose of the interview and of the research as a whole. If the interview will be recorded, this needs to be addressed early on and tested to avoid it becoming a source of distraction. When ending the interview, the interviewee should be given liberty to express thoughts and questions that may have not been addressed – regarding the interview or the entire study. Finally, offering the respondent an option to see a transcript of the interview, a summary and/or the full report is important to provide closure – both socially as well as practically.67

Conducting interviews face-to-face allows for the researcher to fully grasp the meaning of what the interviewee is expressing – words, facial expressions, body language etc.; giving a more complete picture of the interviewee’s account of the subject investigated. By interviewing on a distance, the researcher will risk missing important information, while the lack of closeness might also make the interviewee insecure – resulting in loss of details and sensitive elements of the story, especially when dealing with personal topics. In some cases, distance interviewing is, however, necessary. The reasons for this may be many, but the most common arguments are, unsurprisingly, accessibility and cost.68 For this study, the interview performed on a distance did not contain any option for a face-to-face encounter, indeed as a consequence of accessibility and cost. Nonetheless, provided the subject of this study is not personal; body language, facial expressions or other emotionally related means of communication were not expected to be of great importance – although never entirely insignificant. As the distance interview was performed by telephone, it lacked several methods available in face-to-face interviewing that the researcher can use to establish a reassuring atmosphere of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. This might have resulted in important details being been left out of the research. Crucial for mitigating this issue has been the strict emphasis on anonymity for the interviewee. Additionally, the

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67 Ibid, pp. 78-79.
68 Ibid, p. 5.
ambition to establish a comfortable setting can at least partially satisfy by carefully deciding the time for the interview, preparing the interviewee with information on how and how long the interview would take, and sending some material by e-mail prior to the conversation so the interviewee has something visual to relate to while answering the questions.\textsuperscript{69}

6.6. Analyzing texts

Qualitative analysis in general is often conducted through analyzing textual material. Even though the data collection might have been performed by visual observation, interviews or other participatory approaches – the material is most often recorded in words.\textsuperscript{70} However, in some studies the data is not only recorded as text after collecting it – it is collected straight from a textual source. In such cases, when the source of the empirical data is secondary, i.e. not the researcher him- or herself, controlling the source’s credibility, its methods and its purpose, is essential in assuring its quality. For analyses of secondary data, it is of crucial importance that the background of the material is reflected upon, so the researcher is aware of by whom, how, and to whom the material has been produced.\textsuperscript{71} To guarantee transparency in the research, this information needs to be described thoroughly. In this study, a concern about the strategy document from Northern Ostrobothnia is the language in which the text is written. Lacking a translation to English, this study has been forced to use the original document in Finnish. As a consequence of the author’s limited knowledge in that language, a person not involved in the research has been asked to provide a translation of the material. With the already existing risk of reducing credibility by using a secondary source, strict control over the translation had to be exercised. Through using a person not involved in the research, with no knowledge about the theoretical framework or the purpose of the study, concerns for potential bias has been somewhat mitigated. Additionally, online translation tools have been utilized to double-check the data to assess the information provided by the translator.

\textsuperscript{69} Gillham, B. (2005), p. 104.


6.7. Thematic analysis and operationalization of theory

While this research will perform a relatively simple content and comparative analysis, there is still a need to structure the analysis in order to retain the meaning of the information while reducing the data for analytical purposes. This will ensure transparency and address issues of reliability and validity, thereby leading to a greater level of scientificity in the research.72 A thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and describing themes or patterns within data. Such an analysis might be conducted through an inductive approach, in which the researcher refrains from being steered by a theoretical framework and a preexisting set of assumptions in studying the material. However, this study departs from a theoretical base in both data collection and analysis, as it suits the research question – which is quite specific in what is supposed to be examined. To accomplish this, and to enable a structured and systematic data collection and analysis, the theoretical framework needs to be operationalized to a set of well-defined themes.

*A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.*73

These can be used to guide the formulation of interview questions, information seeking in documents, and subsequently structuring the analysis of the material as a whole in a patterned way. In doing a more theoretical thematic analysis, it is essential that the theoretical framework and the research method correspond with what the researcher attempts to investigate. As each theoretical framework carries with it a set of assumptions about the material, these need to be outlined clearly as to make the research transparent and the analysis easy to interpret in relation to the method. When the researcher subsequently investigates the empirical data, he/she will attempt to identify the themes that are related to the concepts defined in the theoretical framework.74 In this study, the theoretical framework has been allowed to represent a central part in the data collection and analysis. Firstly, the theories have been separated into two themes of sub-national regional mobilization on the international arena: how and why. These have subsequently been divided into a number of under-themes or categories which provide a set of more tangible explanations to the investigated phenomenon. With the help of these main themes and under-categories; questions have been formulated to

guide the interviews, the review of the strategy documents – and finally the presentation and analysis of the entirety of the empirical data. These themes can be found in tables 1 and 2, featured in the theory chapter.

7. Mobilizing as Arctic stakeholders – why and how?

7.1. Empirical background: Arctic sub-national regions of the EU

Throughout Europe, regional levels have gained more extensive competence, capacity and confidence in policy-making during the recent decades. This development to at least some extent explained by the memberships in the European Union – EU regional policy and its various funding mechanisms have been pointed out as major facilitators in the mobilization and increased salience of the regional levels of administration in member states. Moreover, regions are becoming increasingly diligent in shaping and influencing policy-making processes to their own advantages on an international level, by lobbying for their interests within the political institutions of the EU. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the number of regional offices that have been established in Brussels during the last decades.

In Finland and Sweden, the decentralization process realized during recent decades has followed a similar pattern as the development observed in other parts of the EU. It has provided the sub-national levels of government with substantial increases in political representation and administrative capabilities; where taxing, health care and regional development are some of the major policy areas that are entirely or partially placed under control of the regional governments. The regional levels of Sweden and Finland are in some aspects quite similar, generally handling tasks including health care, public transport, regional planning and development, and bear some resemblance in territory and population size. However, they also differ in many ways, perhaps most notably in that the Swedish system of regional division, counties, is based on units with directly elected parliaments, which have their own taxing powers. The Swedish counties, or secondary municipalities, are parallel to the local level of primary municipalities, and both levels possess a distinct set of competences and tasks. On the contrary, the Finnish regional level is based on collectivities of primary

75 Quinn, B. (2010), pp. 120-121, on the effect of EU structural funds and regional policy on the empowerment of the regional levels of government; Zimmerbauer, K. (2013), p. 91, regarding the increasing lobbying capabilities of the sub-national regions; Salageanu, R. (2014).
municipalities, which has no taxing powers. Moreover, with the exception of Kainuu, the regional councils of Finland are elected indirectly by representatives of the municipal councils.78

The regional levels are also internally disparate in both countries, and while health care and transport are specific tasks for the secondary municipalities in Sweden (regioner and landsting), they are handled by different configurations of primary municipality collaborations in Finland – not necessarily corresponding with the regional divisions. Conversely, regional planning and development are the two main and explicit responsibilities of the Finnish regional councils, whereas such tasks in Sweden are handled either by the elected regional bodies of the secondary municipalities, by regional collaboration organizations or by the nationally controlled County Administrative Boards. Sweden’s County Administrative Boards constitute a separate system on the regional level, as they are formally extensions of the national government in the regions. Their responsibilities are somewhat overlapping with the secondary municipalities, especially in terms of regional development competences. This system has also existed in Finland since Swedish colonial rule, but was recently abolished.79

Regional development has traditionally been managed by the central governments without involvement of local and regional actors, e.g. through the activities of the public sector, investments in infrastructure and the use of policies and subsidies directed towards different business sectors. Nonetheless, during recent decades, in the spirit of economic and political decentralization, the approach to regional development in Sweden and Finland has shifted to wide inclusion of the lower levels of political administration. While independent funding initiatives by regions represents one factor, the most important tool is perhaps the regional development plans and strategies, which are designed by local and regional actors to provide blueprints for decentralized interventions.80 These function as general guides to which priorities, goals and interests should be followed in regional development and planning initiatives, including some national and EU activities on the regional level – thereby representing important tools for influencing regional policies. Although the regional levels are responsible for drafting these documents, dialogue and collaboration with national and local

78 Local Finland (n.d.), Regional Councils, Web (retrieved 2015-05-20).
levels are required, meaning that regional governments are not entirely independent in the process.\(^{81}\)

On an EU-level, there are a number of forums within and around the EU system, through which sub-national regions can influence policy-making processes. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a consultative body to the EU institutions, made up of regional and local governments from the member states, and specifically monitoring the implementation of the subsidiarity principle.\(^{82}\) Moreover, sub-national regions have a big influence in deciding the direction of the EU’s cohesion policy, and are important players in designing the various programs under the social and structural funds.\(^{83}\) And concerning the Arctic, further demonstrating the EU’s increased interest in the area, it has – rather illustrative – renamed one of its European Regional Development Fund (ERUF) programs, the ‘Northern Periphery Programme’, the ‘Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme’\(^{84}\).

There are also a number of cooperation forums for sub-national regional organizations and representatives in the Arctic region, both within and outside of the European Union. The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) is a network of regions in Norway, Finland and Sweden, which are united by the many common challenges in terms of demographics, climate and transport faced by northern, peripheral areas. The NSPA is working on a report together with OECD to highlight the specific circumstances that exist within the regions of peripheral Northern Europe, in order to provide arguments for continued and increased attention from the EU in the area. One of the NSPA’s principal aims is maintaining the additional allocation of resources from the EU cohesion policy to the sparsely populated areas of Northern Finland and Sweden.\(^{85}\) In a more Arctic context, the Barents Regional Council (BRC) works to enhance collaboration in health, energy, education and culture between its members, which are 13 counties in the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. It was founded in 1993, together with the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), between regional representatives and indigenous peoples. The collaboration is concretized through a number of


working groups in certain priority areas, which report both to the BRC and BEAC.\textsuperscript{86} Notably, the collaboration includes several regions in Russia, a nation with which collaboration on a national level has been characterized by high tension and suspicion. Additionally, the Northern Dimension (ND), a joint policy between the European Union, Russia, Norway and Iceland, operates within similar policy areas as the BRC and puts special emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity.\textsuperscript{87}

7.2. Northern Ostrobothnia

7.2.1. Why

While the average person of Northern Ostrobothnia would perhaps not describe the region as ‘Arctic’ – but rather as simply ‘Northern’ – the interviewee thinks that the relevance of the Arctic context is generally more apparent to people working with regional development, as the area has been something of a “hot topic” during recent years. Being a part of the Arctic context is described as containing significant meaning, from several aspects. As a consequence of Northern Ostrobothnia’s relatively marginal location in Europe, the interviewee thinks the region, from an international perspective, is considered quite irrelevant and invisible – in contrast with the Arctic region, which is both well known and internationally interesting. Stressing that Northern Ostrobothnia is indeed part of the Arctic makes it more significant, or central, from an international point of view. This notion is supported by the Regional Development Plan of Northern Ostrobothnia, which highlights the important role of the region as a hub for development in all of Northern Finland and the Barents area, giving it the ability to function as a key player in international collaboration.\textsuperscript{88} As such, Northern Ostrobothnia sees itself as part of an international corridor for exchange of goods and services across the entire Barents region. It recognizes significant opportunities for the region to strengthen this position in the future, following the possibilities that the Northeast Passage will open up for large-scale maritime transport and become an important international trade route. Consequently, the region wishes to identify itself as a “national and international center for the Arctic region”.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{86} Barents Regional Council (n.d.), Barents Regional Council (BRC), Web (retrieved 2015-05-20).
\textsuperscript{89} NOTE: Translated from Finnish by the researcher; Council of Oulu Region (2014), p. 17.
Thus, mobilizing as an Arctic stakeholder by the region of Northern Ostrobothnia is considered vital for a number of reasons. In terms of political motivations, the interviewee argues that mobilizing as an Arctic stakeholder by the region of Northern Ostrobothnia is necessary to make sure that they stay in a “position of owners [off those policies]”, in order to fulfil the objective of influencing Arctic policy and strategy making. Keeping the region attractive for future generations and investments, as well as achieving growth, maintaining environmental values and sustainable development, will require involvement by the region itself “to make sure that the future of the area is in our own hands”. The interviewee goes on, stating that if the region is not active itself, “someone else will, and […] it will not be the best solution for us who are really dependent on this area, so yes, I think that we have no other choice than being an active stakeholder” – pointing at a desire to mobilize as an Arctic stakeholder to protect the interests and self-determination of the region.

Working with building an attractive region on an international level also represents a motivational factor in terms of cultural opportunities, where neighboring sub-national regions are considered important partners for collaboration – also in securing the rights of minority groups although Northern Ostrobothnia does not have a significant indigenous population, as is the case in several of those regions. Nonetheless, other forms of cultural development identified as strategic priorities in the Regional Strategic Plan are international collaborations and multi-cultural activities, which can help to make the region more attractive, and also assist regional businesses in finding new networks and markets. Additionally, the interviewee especially points at the cultural aspect of the tourism sector in the Arctic region, which also brings with it significant business opportunities.

In itself, the northern location of Northern Ostrobothnia is highlighted by the Regional Strategic Plan as one of the main development opportunities for economic growth and job creation. Thus, together with the great amount of natural resources that are available in the Arctic and Barents – mobilizing as an Arctic stakeholder contains significant economic motivations. Not only concerning tourism and the immense economic potential of gas and oil resources in the Arctic Ocean and Barents Sea, but also in terms of the specific knowledge and experience of living and operating in cold climate that the northernmost regions of Finland, Sweden and Norway possess. These skills can be used for economic gains, also in parts that do not have direct access to the Arctic Ocean and its resources. The Regional

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91 Ibid, p. 16b.
Strategic Plan specifically points out its experience and skills in industries and activities specific to the Arctic conditions – natural resources, safety, planning and construction, and sustainable management. These are argued as being an extraordinary asset to the region – assets that can be exported internationally and used to position Northern Ostrobothnia as an Arctic specialist and an Arctic center of knowledge and development.92

On an EU-level, financial motivations are an important aspect of Northern Ostrobothnia’s mobilization as an Arctic stakeholder, as the additional allocation of economic resources towards sparsely populated areas in cold climates are an important source of financing for regional development activities. Additionally, as a consequence of the EU’s increased attention in the Arctic region, they are carrying out a consultation with relevant stakeholders on how they can best use the available financial resources more effectively. For Northern Ostrobothnia, this consultation, and other policy initiatives by the EU in such matters, represent important motivations for reinforcing their position in the Arctic context. In terms of regulatory motivations, EU’s growing interest in the Arctic area can give Northern Ostrobothnia a prospect of influencing policy-making in the European Union in areas such as infrastructure, which is stressed by the interviewee as “one of the key issues that we are influencing”. The Regional Strategic Plan of Northern Ostrobothnia supports this notion, and argues for the importance of a greater attention in the EU-wide infrastructure policy by emphasizing the indispensable need of a functioning transport and telecommunications network for Europe’s peripheral regions.93

7.2.2. How

In terms of measures and strategies employed by the region of Northern Ostrobothnia in mobilizing in the Arctic, keeping themselves updated and well-informed on processes going on in the Arctic region is described as a key component. A part of this is knowing “who is doing what and preparing for what, and when it is going to happen”, which includes being part of different consultations, policy organizations and international collaborations. For the implementation of the Arctic Strategy of Finland, representatives from sub-national levels were included in the so-called national committee, which was responsible for overseeing the progress. This implies that, in regard to the region’s interaction with the national level,

93 Ibid, p. 16a.
Northern Ostrobothnia has achieved a strong position to influence, and be a part of national policy-making, as described by the interviewee: “I guess you can say that we have gained some political power on national [level] in terms of Arctic policies”.

Related to the strategy inter-regional networking, Northern Ostrobothnia is an active member of the NSPA collaboration, together with a number of sub-national regions in the neighboring countries that possess similar challenges and opportunities in the context of the Arctic and Barents area. Supporting inter-regional exchange is also achieved by focusing on a number of inter-regional development areas, which include the Bothnian Arc, and the so-called OuKa regional development zone – connecting Oulu, neighboring Kaajani, and Archangelsk in Russia.94 A recently established secretariat in Tromsø, Norway, by Business Oulu, is principally aimed at promoting economic development, but also interacts with the Arctic Council secretariat in the same city. Additionally, Northern Ostrobothnia works actively with the East & North Finland EU office in Brussels, in order to both stay informed about key policy areas.

Being active in Brussels, i.e. through the EU office and the NSPA collaboration, also provides the region with the means to exert influence on policy-making processes within the European Union – described by the theoretical framework as financial and regulatory mobilization. While access to financial resources is a big part of the potential benefits available to Arctic sub-national regions from the EU, the cold climate and long distances can also be used to receive a higher priority on the European Union policy agenda in terms of infrastructure and communications. The Regional Strategic Plan argues for the crucial role that Northern Ostrobothnia will play in the future development of the Arctic region – as a consequence of an increased exploitation of natural resources. Thus, prioritizing the Bothnian Corridor in the trans-European transport network can assure a stable communication between Norway and Russia, and with the internal market of the EU – thereby increasing the global competitiveness of the European Union as a whole.95 And in these efforts, the dimension of marginality is naturally playing an important part to reinforce the arguments, by emphasizing the centrality of Northern Ostrobothnia in the interaction between Europe and the Arctic region.

Northern Ostrobothnia also arranges journeys and missions by regional representatives, both politically and “more practically oriented activities” – in order to position themselves as

95 Ibid, p. 18.
Arctic stakeholders. Such activities also include participating in national delegations dedicated to the same issue. In terms of Arctic research, the University of Oulu is very much active in scientific excursions and collaborations, both individually and as a part of the network University of the Arctic (UArctic). Such activities are related to the ambition of establishing Northern Ostrobothnia as an Arctic specialist and an Arctic center of knowledge and development, as stated in the Regional Development Plan.\(^{96}\) This work is supported by events and activities arranged ‘at home’ in the Northern Ostrobothnia region, among others the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Barents Regional Council meetings being hosted in the city of Oulu in October 2015 – which are important for the region since “that is part of our, let’s say, branding strategy” and “that type of event also keeps us labeled as an Arctic stakeholder”. As the ambition to position the region as an Arctic stakeholder is prominent among people working with regional development and international affairs, events do not necessarily need to be labeled as ‘an Arctic event’, but that dimension is many times present in any way. An example of this is a global forum being held in the region, focused on economic development, which will also include an Arctic track as a part of it.

7.3. Västerbotten

7.3.1. Why

In Västerbotten, international collaborations are highlighted as an important factor in regional development work. This is stressed by the interviewee, as well as in the Regional Development Strategy of Västerbotten. The strategic area labeled “an outgoing and available region”\(^{97}\), refers to increasing the capacity of regional infrastructure, strengthening collaboration in transport, strategic planning and development, as well as continued development of international partnerships.\(^{98}\) But according to the interviewee, international collaborations and regional development activities “are rather directed towards the south [...] against the EU instead of the Arctic” – and also puts this approach in contrast with the more Arctic-oriented sub-national regions of Norway and Finland. The interviewee thinks that this is because the Arctic context is not perceived as especially relevant for the average person in Västerbotten, and also further explained by the lacking interest and somewhat unclear Arctic policy of the national government of Sweden. Consequently, Arctic issues are not a top


\(^{97}\) NOTE: all quotes in chapter ‘7.3’ are own translations from Swedish.

priority for people working with regional development and international affairs on the regional level. This somewhat southward geographical focus can also be observed in the Regional Development Plan of Västerbotten, where the Baltic Sea Region is emphasized as an essential area for deepened international collaboration on several occasions, while the Barents and Arctic area is devoted significantly less attention.

Nonetheless, working with sub-national regions in the Barents region – especially in Russia – has a long and important tradition as part of international regional development activities. Collaborating with Russian sub-national actors is also strongly supported by the national government, as it provides an important opportunity to collaborate with a country with which the relationship on an intergovernmental level is sometimes unstable: “even though there are conflicts [...] and tensions on the national level, it is business as usual on the regional level, and it enables maintaining the contact and assuring a flow of information”. The Barents collaboration is also defined as a principal political motivation for taking a more active role in the Arctic region, where the interviewee thinks Västerbotten could play a bigger role internationally.

The sub-national regional collaboration is described as a “potential door-opened”, which according to the interviewee, however, has not been used by Sweden in terms of the wider Arctic context. Generally, the political motivation of working internationally in the Arctic on a sub-national level are recognized; but in practical terms, the implementation is questioned due to the Arctic’s high political profile: “the political interest, I mean, will likely end up on the national level fairly quickly”. The political benefits are instead witnessed on the EU-level, where significant opportunities are observed as a consequence of the EU’s increased attention in the Arctic region. Both Finland and Sweden are trying to function as the European Union’s channels in the Arctic – to which the apparent links are their northernmost sub-national regions. As such, mobilization in the context on a regional level also implies certain motivations related to marginality, since their very location provides an advantage in receiving national and international attention. The long distances, low population density and cold climate that characterizes the northernmost peripheral areas of Europe are factors that also grant Västerbotten the possibility of accessing additional funding from the EU cohesion policy. The peripheral location of the county therefore produces financial incentives, and the EU’s attention is seen as an opportunity: “[those arguments] are put forward very much when

99 Region Västerbotten (2013), pp. 23a, 26a, 28a, 34.
100 Ibid, p. 28b.
trying to, I mean, there are a large amount of EU-funds to be distributed, and sparse population and Arctic conditions are arguments for this”. Policy areas mentioned as part of regulatory motivations are infrastructure and transport, which are also identified in the Regional Development Strategy as an important focus for the broader development ambitions on an international level; where the Bothnian Corridor is highlighted as crucial in the Trans-European Transport Network, TEN-T, in which missing links in Västerbotten are put forward as instrumental.101

In terms of economic motivations, mobilization within the global context in its entirety is highlighted in the Regional Development Strategy as important for promoting regional businesses and finding new markets.102 In the Arctic area, with long distances and cold climate, infrastructure and transport networks are argued as being key to the development of the industrial base of the region, including the very important mining and forestry sectors. The prospects of improving transport and communications are, as with regulatory motivations in the EU, important factors for mobilizing internationally as an Arctic player. The interviewee mentions the specialized knowledge that exists in Västerbotten region, which can be used in a wider Arctic context. The harsh ice conditions in the Bothnian Bay has made the area one of the world leaders in icebreakers, creating unique technologies and experience. Sustainable energy consumption and building in a cold climate are other skills that are highly developed in Västerbotten, sectors where regional businesses could have significant opportunities in the Arctic and Barents area.

In Västerbotten, the cultural motivations for an increased regional insertion in the Arctic are important for Västerbotten’s role as an Arctic stakeholder. The Sami nation, Sápmi, encompasses large parts of the county of Västerbotten, and the Sami people are put forward as an important minority group and a unique asset for the region, while unleashing the business potential of the Sami culture is identified as one of the strategic ambitions by the Regional Development Strategy.103 Their culture and identity are strongly connected to the Arctic region and the specific conditions in the area, and connecting the peoples of the Arctic is an important aspect of maintaining cultural values and traditions. Additionally, international collaborations is stated as often originating in cultural activities and exchanges – making them especially valuable for establishing contact with other sub-national actors.

102 Ibid, p. 23b.
103 Ibid, pp. 9b, 11.
7.3.2. How

Measures and strategies employed by Västerbotten in international affairs are numerous, if considering that several actors on the regional level are working with regional development activities in the county. Inter-regional networking is described as an important tool, especially in the Arctic/Barents region, where the collaboration organization Region Västerbotten and the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten are running a joint office in the Russian city of Petrozavodsk, the Swedish-Karelian Business and Information Centre. Maintaining the contact with Russia is put forward as an important ambition in the Regional Development Strategy of Västerbotten, but also to establish partnerships in the northern geography, and to promote international exchange and learning. Neighboring sub-national regions in Norway and Finland are pointed out as valuable partners, and in the Arctic area – stressed as vital for Västerbotten’s interests in its vicinity – the cooperation organization NSPA is specifically mentioned as key for Västerbotten’s international commitment. Such organizations can also be important for influencing policy, and for activities related to regulatory mobilization within the EU, the North Sweden European office in Brussels is an important tool. In terms of infrastructure, the Arctic context is important for receiving attention in the policy process: “vast distances, the primary industries, the heavy transports - all that is necessary and is very important. And it brings you back a little bit to the fact that it is possible to reach it [infrastructure investments] with regional collaboration”. The North Sweden office works extensively with informing about the specific conditions related to living in areas with cold climate and sparse population. The interviewee describes the lack of attention previously experienced from the EU system as “we are not even visible on the map, it really is like that – we do not even exist on maps over the EU”, and argues that there is still a lot to be done in terms of regulatory mobilization for spreading knowledge. A big part of this work is raising the region’s Arctic profile, as there is an interest in the EU towards that area. Financial mobilization is undertaken with the same approach, as it is argued that being located in the Arctic is an argument for attaining additional funding.

Although the marginal location of Västerbotten is used in attaining financial aid and priority in infrastructure planning, marginality it is not described as a principal asset on the international arena. Indeed, the Regional Development Strategy describes the cold climate, sparse population structure and long distances as a potent foundation for innovation in sustainable development, testing operations, service solutions and distance-bridging.

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technology. But the question on whether Västerbotten is Arctic or not seems to be dominating the image of the region as marginally located. “This very big difference on the national level, what is the Arctic? And should the regions be part of this? I mean, Finland is much clearer in the government, [saying that] the whole of Finland is Arctic and [...] Sweden is much more vague, like, are we even in the Arctic?”

In terms of international missions and delegations of regional representatives in the Arctic context, Västerbotten is – at least in the Barents area – arranging journeys together with businesses, politicians and various organizations as a way to “open doors” for the county in other areas. The County Administrative Board of Västerbotten occasionally organizes such international delegations lead by the County Governor, in order to raise the profile of the event to a higher political level – also achieved by inviting media to participate. Other types of promotional events, with an Arctic or Barents theme, are also arranged in the county, often in connection with some cultural activity, but also by hosting delegations from other areas, and working with the primary municipalities. For both international missions and events ‘at home’, Västerbotten is often inviting national representatives, from the Foreign Ministry, the embassies, etc.: “we try to include the national level in journeys and so on, but still, it is often arranged regionally anyway”. When it comes to national activities in relation to Arctic issues, regional actors can be invited by general consulates, embassies and other organizations on the national level, especially when it comes to cultural events. But as the interviewee describes it: “it is not as if, at least in Sweden, those things are very clear – that when it comes to national commitments, they tend to forget the regions, so it is not as if we are apparent players in such travels or... But they do their own thing.” Norrbotten, Sweden’s northernmost sub-national region, has taken the initiative to establish an Arctic forum together with Västerbotten, and several ministries of the Government Offices of Sweden. The interviewee contemplates whether this forum might be an attempt to “initiate a regionalization of this Arctic collaboration”. But as mentioned above, the sub-national regions’ role and influence in the Sweden’s Arctic policies are described as relatively limited, and in the Regional Development Strategy of Västerbotten, a better integration and coordination of international activities both with regional actors and with national authorities is identified as important. 

106 Ibid, p. 28c.
8. Discussion

Generally, the relevance of the Arctic context seems to be less prominent in Västerbotten than in Northern Ostrobothnia in terms of international mobilization and regional development. The peripheral location of these regions, from an international point of view, and the possible advantages of marginality in terms of Arctic matters is on the whole more pronounced in Northern Ostrobothnia than in Västerbotten. As the entire Arctic region has been awarded increased attention from global actors, Northern Ostrobothnia perceives itself as centrally located in an exciting context, being a key stakeholder and regional hub – resulting in substantial opportunities for regional development. Indeed, neither in Västerbotten or Northern Ostrobothnia, the sense of ‘being Arctic’ is especially prevalent among average citizens. However, in Northern Ostrobothnia, people working with regional development and international affairs seem to have a clearer view of the possibilities for their region on the international arena by becoming a more pronounced Arctic stakeholder – pointing at a stronger relevance for the marginality element of Arctic mobilization in Northern Ostrobothnia. Conversely, in Västerbotten, regional development activities tend to be more directed towards the south – as noted in both the Regional Development Strategy of Västerbotten and in the interview. Moreover, although some policy arguments are based on the marginal geographical location of Västerbotten, is it not labeled a ‘main development opportunity’ as it is in Northern Ostrobothnia.

Nonetheless, as the economic interests in the Arctic region have led to new prospects of investments and growth in the area, the specialized knowledge and experience in Northern Finland and Sweden are recognized in both sub-national regions as an important asset to the future development of the Arctic as a whole. Sustainable energy consumption, construction in cold climate, and extraction of natural resources in sub-Arctic conditions are some of the sectors which are highlighted as having economic potential – and where firms in both regions are considered to have substantial business opportunities. In addition to this, the development potential as policy actors within the European Union is identified by both sub-national regions, as a consequence of the growing interest in the Arctic area from the EU. Although centrality in the context and the potential of the region’s geographical location for the European Union as a whole is not stressed to the same level in Västerbotten, the regulatory and financial motivations are nevertheless considered evident. Infrastructure is put forward by both regions as a key ambition to mobilize as an Arctic stakeholder. In both sub-national regions, the long distances and cold climate are argued as factors creating an especially
challenging environment to live and work in, which requires a well-functioning transport network and communications. This argument is used both to access greater financial support from the EU budget, but also to spread information and influence certain policy areas to the benefit of the sub-national region themselves. In Northern Ostrobothnia, however, the role as a ‘regional hub’ is more pronounced – and connecting this part of the world with all of Europe is argued as representing an opportunity for the entire EU in terms of competitiveness and growth, while the ambitions of Västerbotten are more modest. Prospects concerning the EU cohesion policy and structural funds are referred to by both regions, and financial and regulatory mobilization to influence policymaking in the EU is conducted mainly through cooperation organizations – where both regions specifically mention the NSPA collaboration and their respective EU lobbying office in Brussels.

Both sub-national regions in this study recognize the importance and potential of collaborations with neighboring areas on the sub-national level in the Arctic and Barents area, as a means of becoming more relevant on the international arena, defending regional interests, as well as informing about and arguing for the certain challenges of living in Arctic conditions. Consequently, they are both active players in the Arctic context through inter-regional networking activities within collaboration organizations, initiatives by their respective EU offices in Brussels, as well as having permanent representation in other regions of the Arctic/Barents area to maintain and improve contact with other sub-national actors. In the Barents area, and in relations with Russian authorities, both Västerbotten and Northern Ostrobothnia perceive the sub-national level as important – where Västerbotten has long history and extensive operations in Karelia. The cultural exchange in the Arctic and Barents area is perceived by both sub-national regions as having considerable opportunities, and improving the attractiveness of the area. And for Västerbotten, cultural activities are seen as an important first step to improving contact and commencing broader exchange. Also, connecting their sizeable Sami minority with other indigenous communities in the Arctic is also considered important. This ambition is less apparent in Northern Ostrobothnia, which is explained by the limited number of Sami people living in the region. Both sub-national regions arrange events and international trips with regional delegations related to the Arctic context, described as a potential door-opener to the international arena by Västerbotten – although Northern Ostrobothnia appears to be more keen on profiling events, and, importantly, themselves as ‘Arctic’. Participation in such events arranged by the national authorities also occurs in both regions, which is described as quite unproblematic in Northern
Ostrobothnia, while the interviewee from Västerbotten states that invitations to Arctic-related events by embassies and other national authorities generally concern cultural activities, and that they are not at all given participants in national arrangements. Moreover, when higher political interests are involved – matters concerning the Arctic are described to quickly end up on the national level.

The interviewee from Västerbotten labels the relationship with the national level in terms of Arctic policies as somewhat limited, in relation to the approach held by the neighboring nation, while, in contrast, the interviewee from Northern Ostrobothnia states that their region has actually gained political power on the national level in terms of Arctic policies. The relative lack of interest from the Swedish national level towards the sub-national regions in terms of Arctic matters, is explained by the interviewee from Västerbotten as a probable consequence of the different position by the national levels of Sweden and Finland in terms of Arctic matters. Whereas the Swedish government does not operate through the sub-national level at any considerable length and tends to “forget the regions”, the Finnish government recognizes the lower levels of government as instrumental in such issues and include them in national policymaking processes and implementation. Correspondingly, the Regional Development Strategy of Västerbotten expresses an ambition is to improve the integration and coordination of international activities between regional actors and national authorities. The relationship with the national level in Finland seems to be lacking the dimension of disinterest expressed by the interviewee from Västerbotten, an observation which is reinforced by the shortage of references to the sub-national regions in the Swedish Arctic Strategy and put in stark contrast with the respective Finnish strategy, in which the role of sub-national regions is emphasized.

9. Conclusions

Overall, the ambitions to position themselves as Arctic stakeholders seems to vary quite considerably between the two sub-national regions investigated in this study. Indeed, both regions recognize the relevance and opportunities in the Arctic context concerning each of the motivational factor identified by the theoretical framework. However, in Northern Ostrobothnia, the desire to possess the role as regional ‘owners’ of Arctic policymaking is more pronounced, and stressing their location in the Arctic is described as a key instrument in their ‘branding strategy’ – demonstrating the vital importance of the Arctic context in their
international mobilization activities. In turn, the relevance of Arctic matters in Västerbotten is less noticeable. An interesting observation is that, despite a varying degree of motivation to engage in the Arctic context by the regions, the EU’s increased interest in the Arctic is highlighted as a major motivation to mobilize by the sub-national regions – indicating the significant effect EU policy-making has on lower levels of government in its member states. Moreover, all measures and strategies put forward by the theoretical framework are utilized in the Arctic context by both regions, with some variations. In Västerbotten, international activities in terms of Arctic issues appear to be more discrete, which corresponds with the lower perceived relevance of the context among people working with regional development.

A central observation, and a recurring theme in both cases, is that the mode of interaction between the national and sub-national levels in Arctic matters is argued as being a factor in the sub-national region’s motivations to mobilize as an Arctic stakeholder. The uneven relationship between Västerbotten and the national level of Sweden in terms of Arctic policies, contrasting with the unproblematic relationship between Northern Ostrobothnia and the Finnish national authorities, does not seem to affect their attempts to interact with the national government – cooperation is still the preferred mode of interaction. However, even though the channels of interaction between sub-national and national levels lack priority by the government of Sweden, and cooperation is not always achieved, international activity in the Arctic seems to be occurring anyway. And as the same measures and strategies are used by both Västerbotten and Northern Ostrobothnia, it cannot be concluded that the weak interaction between sub-national and national levels in Sweden in Arctic issues is causing Västerbotten to resort to bypassing strategies to a greater extent than Northern Ostrobothnia. Moreover, when international activity is indeed occurring without the involvement of the national authorities, non-participation seems to be on the initiative of the national level itself, rather than as a consequence of sub-national bypassing strategies. Nevertheless, by comparing the two sub-national regions investigated, a key point that can be identified is still that the lack of open and stable channels with the Swedish national level in Arctic policies is indeed correlated with a relatively low activity by Västerbotten in the context. These observations strengthen the notion planted by the theoretical framework in two aspects. Entirely independent mobilization, bypassing, is indeed not the preferred mode of interaction, but a limited interaction between national and sub-national levels is associated with a relatively low overall activity by the sub-national region in the relevant policy area.
10. References


Appendices

Appendix A “Map 1: Boundaries of the Arctic Council Working Group”

Arctic boundaries

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Appendix B “Map 2: Arctic administrative areas”

Arctic administrative areas

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Appendix C “Interview form”

Why?

Relevance

1) Would you consider your region to be in ‘the Arctic’?
2) What do you think is the view of the average person in your region?
3) How about people working with regional development? Is the Arctic region more relevant for them?
4) Do you think mobilizing politically as an Arctic stakeholder could make your region more central in an international context?
5) Does your region have important skills and knowledge that would benefit the Arctic region as a whole?

Opportunities

6) What do you think would represent the main benefits from being an active Arctic stakeholder?
7) Are there any economic opportunities in the Arctic for your region?
8) Can mobilizing as an Arctic stakeholder result in financial benefits from the European Union?
9) Are there any cultural opportunities in the Arctic for your region?
10) How important is the Sami people positioning the region as an Arctic stakeholder?
11) Are there any political opportunities in the Arctic for your region?
12) In terms of the European Union – are there any possibilities to influence politically by ‘being Arctic’?

How?

13) How (if) does your region work to position itself as an Arctic player? What are the main tools for this?
14) Does your region have any permanent representation (office, secretariat) in political or commercial centers?
   a) In the EU?
   b) In other Arctic nations?
   c) In Arctic organizations? Barents Regional Council? Arctic Council?
15) Do you organize missions by politicians or professionals from the region to “put the region on the map”? (Scientific excursions, political journeys, etc.)
16) Do you arrange events “at home” related to the Arctic context?
17) Does your region participate in events related to the Arctic as a part of national delegations?
18) Is the Arctic context – certain challenges, opportunities, knowledge, etc. – used by your region in any way to influence EU policy-making? How?
19) Is the same used in any way to gain financial benefits from EU transfer mechanisms?