

## **The Thematic Network on Managing SMEs in the North**

### **Who we are, what we do and for whom?**

We are a community of researchers, teachers and practitioners who share an interest in small (including micro-companies), and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the circumpolar North. This includes micro-companies with 10 or less employees.

The we here include researchers, teachers, and practitioners from North America (Alaska), Iceland, Norway, Finland and Russia.

Our purpose lies in identifying, describing, understanding, envisioning and developing viable and sustainable business practices and business-models for SMEs in the High North.

The circumpolar North constitute a vast and diverse region with ample opportunities as well as challenges.

The circumpolar North is a rich in terms of natural resources but also in terms of diversity of cultures, languages, traditions, including different organizational forms.

Still the circumpolar North also face a series of challenges that include great distances, both between Northern communities and to domestic and international markets, access to an educated work-force, venture capital, small and dispersed markets and limited infrastructure with respect to roads, railways, airline-routes or broadband.

The circumpolar North is also undergoing dramatic changes: local communities are adversely affected by emigration and urbanization, and the North is warming at a higher rate than anywhere else.

Business courses in the North still fail to adequately reflect the reality of many small and medium sized enterprises. Small, Northern businesses are still underrepresented in business research.

Around the circumpolar North academic institutions do research and develop cases based on local companies and a local context. Our goal here is to leverage this research and stimulate to the creation of new research projects by connecting Northern researchers and educators.

### **Our stakeholders:**

SMEs – together with Northern SMEs our ambition is to develop actionable knowledge that can help Northern SMEs develop socially, environmentally and financially sustainable business-models.

Students – along with this we seek to use this knowledge in our educational programs and courses so as to better prepare students for careers in the North.

Local communities – including indigenous communities. Local SMEs form an important and integral part of many communities – SMEs contribute to as well as benefit from their connections to local communities. Developing sustainable, financially viable businesses hence, is also critical to local communities.

Governmental agencies: regional and economic policies rely on available knowledge. A better insight into

The research community – nationally and internationally. We seek to produce rigorous, relevant and impactful research and contribute to a more general research literature. We see rigorous research as a precondition for delivering value to all stakeholders including Northern SMEs, students and communities.

Given our emphasis on sustainable Northern business practices and business models, we are open to a wide range of research themes including both theory building as well and application.

In line with this, we also welcome different methodologies, including conceptual contributions, ethnographies, surveys, action-research, qualitative interviews, diary-studies, experimental designs, text analyses or the study of historical and archive data.

We are interested in the role and meaning of place and embeddedness and more specifically how places as physical, material and social phenomenon influence business practices.

We value the diversity of our region and believe that we, by harnessing this diversity, with respect to culture, material conditions, economies and institutions not only contribute to developing better theories for the region but also better general theory with applications beyond the region.

In contrast to much of the strategy-literature which tends to see decision makers as rational profit-maximizers, we are interested in the whole specter of different motivations, values and institutional logics.

### **Our values**

- Respect. We seek to further the interests of our stakeholders. This means working together with and on the conditions of our stakeholders. Stakeholders should gain from working with us.
- Relevance / impact: We seek to do research that impacts practice – through education or through business practices.
- Rigor: Rigorous, theoretically and methodologically sound research, is a precondition for relevance and impact.
- Innovation and openness: We seek research that change perceptions of what is possible – not simply reproduce existing practices.

### **How we work.**

The thematic network seeks to accomplish its objectives by leveraging the combined resources of our members.

This can mean developing new projects and project applications based on the joint input from our members.

It may also involve sharing and disseminating research that members have conducted independently.

It can also mean developing new courses or educational material (cases) based on research within the thematic network.

### **The organization**

A general Assembly constitutes the highest decision-making authority and meets once every year preferably in conjunction with the University of the Arctic Congress or if a physical meeting is not possible, virtually.

A board consisting of representatives from North America, Europe and Russia, and elected by the General Assembly for a period of two years, oversees the thematic network between the meetings of the General Assembly.

The network is coordinated by a thematic network coordinator supported by two vice-coordinators elected by the Annual meeting for a period of two years.