

# Sustainable Development in the Arctic: New Social Challenges and Responsibilities

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## Introduction

Climate change is a recognized reality, and changes in accessibility of the Arctic region and its resources are obvious consequences which need to be dealt with in a responsible way. An increasing scientific focus on the Arctic is reporting on changes and foreseeing future environmental consequences, paralleled by reporting from the Arctic population that emphasizes different implications and consequences. While some see the changes as challenges to traditional lifestyles, others envisage new opportunities. And while the international focus on present climate change has drawn attention to one set of constraints for the future, this focus at the same time tends to divert a certain amount of attention away from other facts of life in the far north, which adds to the complexity in perspectives for the future.

## Rights to Access – Rights to Resources

The melting of ice has direct consequences at many levels: first of all in relation to accessibility, where the reduction or even disappearance of sea ice in the Arctic Ocean and adjacent sea areas opens up for new activities, for instance by means of new transportation routes. Here, the Arctic Ocean acts in the same way as the Mediterranean Ocean does between Europe, North America and Asia, affording a substantial reduction in transport distances and transportation costs between the continents.<sup>1</sup> The reduction of ice cover also influences the access to mineral and energy resources, both on land and on the continental shelf, feeding into action on the part of both companies and States on a dynamic world market with cheap and highly needed resources. Similarly, the melting of ice will have substantial impact on changes in renewable resources and their dynamics – increase in fisheries, changes in the stock of marine mammals, and substantial changes in the terrestrial ecosystems – opening up for new opportunities such as within agriculture, but also limiting a number of traditional activities based on the dynamics of colder climates.

The possible changes indicated above are no longer considered to be challenging news. What is often forgotten, however, is the fact that the changes are raising a

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<sup>1</sup> Rasmussen 'Hot Issues in a Cold Environment' *Journal of Nordregio* 7(4) (2007) 7-9.

number of crucial questions which are seldom discussed, let alone answered in the public debate. For instance:

- Which resources should be exploited and which should be protected?
  - What kind of regulation of new transport activities should be imposed in order to prevent damage and endangerment of traditional activities in the Arctic areas?
  - Who should benefit from the new options?
  - Who may be affected by these activities?
- And last, but not least:
- How and by whom should these options be regulated?

## Control of Access

In response to these questions, the Arctic States, especially those bordering the Arctic Ocean, emphasize that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)<sup>2</sup> already provides what is needed in order to resolve any disputes.<sup>3</sup> UNCLOS encompasses four principal conventions, which were outlined in 1958 and adopted by different nations since 1973: the Convention on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone,<sup>4</sup> the Convention on the Continental Shelf,<sup>5</sup> the Convention on the High Seas,<sup>6</sup> and the Convention on Fishing and Conservation of Living Resources of the High Seas.<sup>7</sup> After adoption, however, it became clear that UNCLOS at that point in time might have been a reasonable framework for resolving disputes, but that important elements were missing. This led to the introduction of an addendum in 2001 in the form of the United Nations Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.<sup>8</sup> The addendum was devel-

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (concluded 10 December 1982, entered into force 16 November 1994) 1833 UNTS 396.

<sup>3</sup> This was probably the most important conclusion from the meeting in Ilulissat in May 2008, organized by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, cf. Ilulissat Declaration, Arctic Ocean Conference, Greenland, 27-29 May 2008 <<http://arctic-council.org/filearchive/Ilulissat-declaration.pdf>> (10 July 2009) para. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone (done 29 April 1958, entered into force on 10 September 1964) 516 UNTS 205.

<sup>5</sup> Convention on the Continental Shelf (done 29 April 1958, entered into force 10 June 1964) 499 UNTS 311.

<sup>6</sup> Convention on the High Seas (done 29 April 1958, entered into force 30 September 1962) 450 UNTS 11.

<sup>7</sup> Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources of the High Seas (done 29 April 1958, entered into force 20 March 1966) 559 UNTS 285.

<sup>8</sup> Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (done 4 August 1995, entered into force 11 December 2001) 2167 UNTS 3.

oped due to an increased recognition that fish, marine mammals and mollusks are not sedentary or bound by concepts like exclusive economic zones, territorial waters etc., but move freely across juridical borders. A consequence of this is that resource exploitation in one zone can harm the options for exploitation in other zones. The addendum therefore stresses that States should take measures to protect biodiversity in the marine environment, prevent or eliminate over-fishing and excess fishing capacity and take into account the interests of artisanal and subsistence fishers.<sup>9</sup>

The process of adding to UNCLOS as described above indicates that statements like “the Law of the Sea already exists as a legal framework for the solution of potential conflicts in the Arctic” might be proven correct in relation to a number of issues, but that the situation may not be so simple. There are a number of unresolved disputes regarding access and rights especially in international seas, but such unresolved disputes do not necessarily indicate that UNCLOS is unsuitable and that a new framework should be established. It may just be an indication of the fact that on one hand resolving disputes takes time, and on the other that the legal framework needs adjustments in order to comply with new types of problems that had not been considered when the original framework was established. A key aspect in this connection is that UNCLOS in its present form is based on the recognition of rights of States, but not on rights of people! Inherent in the present situation, therefore, is the option at the national level of reaching agreements that might violate the rights of peoples in the Arctic. Furthermore, simple solutions such as what has been done in the UNCLOS addendum with the inclusion of a sentence emphasizing protective measures by “tak[ing] into account the interests of artisanal and subsistence fishers”<sup>10</sup> do not address the core of the problem, namely that classic notions of State sovereignty may be acceptable in relation to an economic category such as “artisanal” and “subsistence”, but they cannot adequately address the issue of sovereignty of peoples. There is an obvious need to ensure that peoples of the Arctic, by means of regional arrangements, are granted not only a voice but also a say through the establishment of a comprehensive regime. As some have suggested, an approach could be the development of a constitutional contract treating the Arctic as a distinct region in international society. However, as emphasized above, classic notions of State sovereignty cannot adequately address the issue of sovereignty of peoples. Instead the principle of subsidiarity<sup>11</sup> may provide a con-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Art. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (note 8) Art. 5 (i).

<sup>11</sup> There are varied definitions of the concept, but a common feature is the principle that government power should be delegated to the lowest feasible level, for instance in a “Europe of Regions” where decisions are taken at the local or regional level, instead of the national or supranational level, and thereby affirming that action for justice should be on the part of the institution or level of society closest to the problem. The concept has been an important issue in the European discourse emphasizing the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

ceptual tool to mediate polarity of pluralism and the common good in a globalized world by providing a meaningful tool in relation to future governance in the Arctic, thus granting the peoples in the Arctic a voice by treating the Arctic as a distinct region in international society.

## Socio-economic Impacts

The increased interests in the Arctic, which have been intensified by the economic prospects opened up by the melting of ice that previously limited accessibility, have called for further attention. And it is quite clear that both economic and social life in the Arctic has already been – and in the future will be – exposed to marked economic and social impact. Increasingly, international attention has been drawn towards the rich mineral and energy resources in the north. Most of these activities are promoted and supported by external sources of capital, and are therefore also subject to decisions made by outsiders, with very limited influence exerted by local communities or authorities. Such activities are first and foremost related to world markets, as opposed to local communities, and usually generate very few jobs in the area. As a consequence, the benefits rarely remain in the region. Similarly, new transportation routes may serve the European and North American markets, but may also cause negative effects on traditional fishing and hunting in the region.<sup>12</sup> Also here, some of the benefits are retained, productively for instance through wages and contracts for local enterprises, but more often as transfer payment based on royalties, which in many cases have adverse effects, such as social stratification, inequity in wealth distribution and perceived deprivation. Economies in the north, however, are not determined by the one-dimensional capital/wage and transfer payment rationality, but very much influenced by other rationalities. So besides the dominating formal economy, an important role is still played by the informal economy and subsistence activities, with individual and family based activities in hunting and fishing ensuring basic supply.<sup>13</sup>

Increasingly, the third sector – the services provided by health care, education, care of the elderly, municipal services, administration, and so on – has become the key set of activities characterizing the north. In most of the circumpolar north, the third sector generates more than 70% of the economy and creates jobs for 80% or more of employed people. Although based on transfers either from outside the region or from royalties in connection with resource extraction, the sector ensures good income in northern communities by providing stable jobs.<sup>14</sup> This holds true especially for women, who seem to be more open to the new activities, not only

<sup>12</sup> Duhaime/Rasmussen/Comtois *Sustainable Development in the North: Local Initiatives vs Megaprojects* (Presses de l'Université Laval Quebec 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Andersen/Poppel 'Living Conditions in the Arctic' Social Indicators Research 58 (2002) 191-216.

<sup>14</sup> Stefansson Arctic Institute *Arctic Human Development Report* (Stefansson Arctic Institute Akureyri 2004).

accepting jobs outside the traditional primary sector but also ready to meet the training and educational requirements. And in these communities, an increasingly large number of households are depending on the incomes generated by females. Data from Greenland show that more than 70% of the professional hunters and fishermen have income from second jobs. And in more than 50% of the hunting and fishing-dependent households, the major part of the income is generated by the wives.<sup>15</sup> These incomes provide highly needed investments in hunting and fishing and ensure an acceptable household income. Single men without these income sources, however, are confronted with severe financial difficulties.<sup>16</sup>

## Arctic Social Change

Development in the north has undergone marked changes during the last century. From a situation where pre-industrial characteristics implied minimal communication with the rest of the world and the main livelihoods secured by harvesting the region's natural resources, communities today are experiencing the influence of large-scale renewable resource exploitation and a growing influence of large industries. And the communities are experiencing the influence of an increasing degree of income transfers, and growing national and international interdependencies, affected by the exploitation of resources at many levels, in the same way that the economic behavior of individuals, families and communities has been transformed by the extension of monetary incomes, with their health being affected by long-distance and locally generated pollution and by changes in food intake. Customary hunting, fishing and herding activities have by and large been transformed through intensified harvesting for commercial purposes. So in spite of attempts to maintain images of Arctic peoples as traditionalized hunters and trappers, reality shows modernized circumpolar societies, with new technologies, satellite dishes, snowmobiles and welfare societies where concerns regarding future socio-economic structures have become the focus of politics – and should be the focus of research as well.

The changes in the overall economic structure and the influence of globalization are affecting the household structures as well as the settlement pattern. An increase in the general pattern of out-migration of both males and females, looking for education and work opportunities outside the villages and smaller towns, is contributing to increased urbanization in the Arctic. And in the past few years the process has been accelerated by a higher rate of out-migrating females, eventually leading to a substantial increase in the number of single-men households in the villages.

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<sup>15</sup> Rasmussen *Analyse af fangererbvervet i Grønland (Analysis of Hunters and Fishers in Greenland)* (Roskilde University Press Roskilde 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Rasmussen 'Adjustment to Reality: Social Responses to Climate Changes in Greenland' in: Ørbæk et al. (eds.) *Arctic Alpine Ecosystems and People in a Changing Environment* (Springer Berlin 2007) 167-78.

The question of opportunities has very much to do with availability of educational options, first of all through national programs, but increasingly through new initiatives regarding circumpolar cooperation in education such as the University of the Arctic, providing a new world of possibilities. It has, however, also much to do with the difference in gendered approaches to education and responses to issues such as globalization and knowledge societies. Already in the 1990s, women had become a majority group in relation to higher education in many parts of the Arctic. This very much contrasts with 10 to 15 years ago, when men dominated the higher education sector and women's opportunities were limited to vocational training.<sup>17</sup>

The break-up of previous gender-based divisions of labor appears to be moving towards a situation where a successful male hunter or fisherman very often has to be funded by wage incomes generated outside the sector, and very often by his wife. These households are thereby enabled to focus on investments which provide them with the means necessary for them to become competitive. In addition, it generates the positive spin-off that the profession becomes attractive to the next generation. A negative consequence, however, is that it contributes to an increased polarization within these communities. Some households are able to expand, whereas an increasing number of small households – especially single men – are experiencing hard times. They may become dependent on transfer payment, and even dependent on parents' pensions.

Research from northern regions seems to indicate very similar patterns regarding affinity for rural community life. It has been clearly documented that more females than males tend to migrate permanently away from their home community and region. The restructuring and decline of primary and secondary activities in rural areas and the growth of the service sector fundamentally affect women, who first of all look for education and job opportunities that better fit their qualifications and provide opportunities outside traditional economic activities.<sup>18</sup> And these are only found to a limited extent in the rural setting of small communities, whereas they are abundant in urban areas.<sup>19</sup>

The question of what defines "better opportunities" is very much linked to the difference in gendered approaches to education and responses to issues such as globalization and knowledge societies. While education used to be a privilege held by men, women already during the 1990s became a majority group in relation to higher education in many parts of the Arctic. Except in parts of northern Canada, where the level of education in a circumpolar comparison turns out to be remarkably low, the general pattern today shows that between 55 to 70% of persons with

<sup>17</sup> Rasmussen 'Gender and Generation: Perspectives on Arctic Communities in Transition' in: Kankaanpää et al. (eds.) *Knowledge and Power in the Arctic: Conference Proceedings* (University of Lapland Press Rovaniemi 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Hamilton/Seyfrit 'Town-village Contrasts in Arctic Youth Aspirations' *Arctic* 46 (3) (1993) 255-63.

<sup>19</sup> Hamilton/Seyfrit 'Female Flight? Gender Balance and Outmigration by Native Alaskan Villagers' *Arctic Medical Research* 53 (Suppl. 2) (1994) 189-93.

tertiary education qualifications are women. Men, on the other hand, tend to finish their educational careers after primary or secondary education, or after gaining a vocational training qualification.<sup>20</sup>

As already mentioned above, the new pattern is very much in contrast to the situation 10 to 15 years ago. At that point in time, men dominated the higher education sector, whereas women's opportunities were limited to vocational training.<sup>21</sup> Differences in responses to changes affect the options of staying or leaving. Young persons who consider education and qualified jobs to be an important option simply have to leave in order to pursue a future for themselves. And today there are marked gender differences in choice. It is especially women in the age group from 16 to 35 who are leaving, the youngest seeking education and the older seeking jobs, whereas men tend to see the local opportunities as adequate or their own qualifications as too limited. Many northern communities are therefore experiencing a situation where there are only 6 or 7 females to 10 males in the age group from 16 to 35. And this gender imbalance has a marked impact on the community, affecting both social life and the economy, through fewer opportunities for marriage, for maintaining family life and family structures, for natural reproduction, and for influencing cultural activities.

These economic, social, and familial changes create a kind of catch 22 situation for the young males. They are socialized into maintaining traditional work activities that no longer enable them to ensure the proper investments needed in order to modernize and expand their activities. And without a wife with a second income, the investments needed are absent. At the same time, they lack the education that might provide them with alternatives. Consequently, they are stuck, without options for mobility, either geographically or socially.<sup>22</sup> And as worst-case scenarios, the situation leaves the males in situations where increased alcohol and drug consumption, violence and other desperate measures seem to be alternatives. As described by Rasmussen,<sup>23</sup> the rates of forcible rape are substantially higher in the north, as is the rate of reported child sexual assault. The pregnancy rate for young women has increased at an alarming rate; there is an increasing number of hidden homeless or "couch surfers"; the spousal and interfamily abuse rates are extremely high, forcing many women to leave their communities to escape domestic violence; and the suicide rates in the north are 5 to 10 times the level found elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> While previous generations had to cope with violence within their community,

<sup>20</sup> Rasmussen 'Polar Women Go South' *Journal of Nordregio* 7(4) (2007) 20-22.

<sup>21</sup> Rasmussen et al. *The Demographic Challenge to the Nordic Countries* (Nordregio Stockholm 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Hamilton/Otterstad 'Sex ratio and community size: Notes from the Northern Atlantic' *Population and Environment* 20 (1998) 11-22.

<sup>23</sup> Rasmussen 'Gender and Generation: Perspectives on Ongoing Social and Environmental Changes in the Arctic' *Signs: Journal of Woman in Culture and Society* 34(3) (2009) 524-32.

<sup>24</sup> Leineweber et al. 'Suicide in a Society in Transition' *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* 60(2) (2001) 280-87.

leaving women as victims, the present options for women have provided them with alternatives. They are no longer dependent, neither on males nor on family norms.

## Perspectives

It is essential to react to changes in the Arctic. However, it is also important to realize that the ongoing changes are multi-dimensional. Changes in climate and the environment are important factors, but in relation to the future of settlements, communities and cultures, it is ultimately the people in the Arctic that are crucial. And to quote Eleanor Roosevelt: "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt's remarks at the presentation of a booklet on human rights ('In Your Hands: A Guide for Community Action for the Tenth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Right') to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, United Nations, New York (27 March 1958); see <<http://www.udhr.org/history/frbioer.htm>> (9 July 2009).