

INDIGENOUS CULTURES, LOCAL LIFESTYLES?

‘Culture’ in the Northern Strategies of the Eight Arctic States

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In arenas of political and popular debates about the Arctic region, both ‘sustainability’ and ‘culture’ feature prominently (Sköld, 2017; AHDR, 2015). The interest in them is not, however, a wholly new phenomenon; sustainability and sustainable development, as well as their cultural dimension, have occupied a key position in Arctic international cooperation since its very beginning. The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy—the official beginning of state-level international Arctic cooperation and the predecessor of the Arctic Council, founded in 1996—established that the sustainable development of the Arctic region requires taking into account the cultural impacts and consequences of development (AEPS, 1991). Later, the Arctic Council explicitly included culture and cultural dimension in its definition of sustainable development (Arctic Council, 1998). More recently, an increasing focus on culture in the circumpolar North has been observed: linguistic and cultural revitalisations are ‘ongoing trends’ in the region, and Northern identities and cultures have gradually been turning into a resource and benefit instead of the source of marginalisation that they might have served as in the past (AHDR, 2015).

In discussions on (Arctic) cultures and their sustainability, the emphasis on change, its causes and consequences are defining features. In the context of the Arctic region, in particular, the ongoing societal and natural changes have been portrayed as rapid and unforeseen, both in rate and magnitude: the prospects of the region’s communities and societies are intimately entangled with the mutually reinforcing impacts of

climate change and other environmental concerns, increasing resource extraction and transportation activities, economic and cultural globalisation and changes in international political climate (Heininen, 2010; Käpylä & Mikkola, 2013). While many of these developments can undoubtedly be seen as unprecedented in many ways, framing them and their potential impacts as something completely novel lacks historical perspective. Many of the developments described above can also be seen as part of a long continuum of non-Arctic actors and developments influencing life and prospects in the Arctic region (Nuttall, 2010). Diverse cultures and communities have inhabited the Arctic region for millennia; during this time, the region's societies and communities have thrived, adapted and survived amidst the pressures and possibilities brought about by environmental change, internal factors, increasing external influence and Arctic states' colonisation and assimilation efforts. From this perspective, societal and cultural change can be seen not only as a threat to Arctic communities but also as a 'normal' and healthy part in Arctic societal and cultural life (e.g. AHDR, 2004; Southcott, 2010).

As both culture and sustainability are ambiguous terms and open to interpretation, they are also open to mobilisation and manipulation; their different articulations convey and construct different kinds of understandings of what culture entails, why and for whom it matters and how it should be sustained and maintained. In this article, I explore these themes and analyse the contemporary Arctic discussions on the content and roles of 'culture' and its sustainability through focusing on the Arctic strategies of the eight Arctic Council member states, namely Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the United States. The focus on state-level strategies instead of the Arctic Council's joint declarations and documents is justified by the fact that despite its weighty role as a policy-shaping international political entity, the Council itself is not a decision-making body and lacks jurisdiction within the region and its states' boundaries. An analysis of the state-level strategy rhetoric is pivotal in its own right, as the policy documents create the conditions for culture in the circumpolar North, equally in the context of culture as meaningful everyday life and experience as well as in terms of cultural activities and events. As such, they are not only descriptions of what 'culture' entails but also performative in the sense that they promote specific policies, activities and definitions of culture while marginalising or wholly side-lining others. In this, they are also profoundly political in the constructivist sense of the term as the battle for the right to define what culture is and why and for whom it matters (e.g. Palonen, 1983).

Against this background, this article investigates the strategy language on culture through a set of four data-based thematic questions: (1) what constitutes culture and for whom? (2) Which factors or developments pose a threat to these cultures (and their sustainability)? (3) Why should these cultures be sustained (4) How and by whom should they be maintained? In addition to these questions, specific attention is also paid to the themes and discussions deriving from the definitions and policy prescriptions, with a particular interest on the largely unaddressed question of non-indigenous cultures in the changing circumpolar North. What is not, however, discussed in this article are the practical outcomes and implementation of the Arctic Council member

states' strategies and their cultural policies. The analysis focuses on the discursive frameworks through and by which the states address culture or cultures and its or their sustainability in the circumpolar North.

Towards Cultural Sustainability

According to Sköld (2017, p. v), it is unlikely that 'there is any keyword that is more prominent and frequently mentioned in the whole discussion about the Arctic than sustainability'. Most traditionally, sustainability and sustainable development have been conceptualised in terms of three interconnected and overlapping pillars or dimensions: the economic, the environmental and the soci(et)al (WCED, 1987). In these definitions, issues related to culture have often been implicitly included in the social dimension of sustainability (e.g. Del Río & Burguillo, 2008; Psaridikou & Szerszynski, 2012; Hiedanpää, Jokinen, & Jokinen, 2012); explicit discussions on cultural sustainability in the academic literature are still relatively recent and fragmented to a notable extent. Indeed, both culture and sustainability are complex notions open to interpretation, which has contributed to ambiguous understandings of what cultural sustainability entails. Cultural sustainability has been defined in terms of cultural heritage, as the vitality of local communities and societies and as cultural changes required to achieve sustainability (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). In a similar vein, debates have revolved around the question of whether culture should even be understood as its own dimension of sustainability or predominantly as instrumental in achieving other sustainability goals (Soini & Birkeland, 2014; Dessein, Soini, Fairclough, & Horlings, 2015). Indeed, not only are cultural patterns of acting and thinking challenging sustainability in contemporary societies, but the solutions and means of addressing them are also inherently and unavoidably penetrated by culture (WCED, 1987; Dessein et al., 2015). Equally, the notion of sustainability is culturally bound and value-laden; its underlying assumptions about what the nature of societies and the environment is and what constitutes 'development' and how best to achieve it are thoroughly culturally mediated.

Sustainability and especially its social dimension are profoundly complex, situated and contested concepts (see Lempinen, 2018), and the same features also apply to the concept of culture. While no universally applicable definition of what culture entails is neither possible nor desirable, some general remarks on what constitutes 'culture' can be made. In its broadest terms, culture can be understood as the diverse ways of living, being and making sense of the world; the exact contents of this broad definitions are bound to vary in different spatial and temporal settings and from different perspectives of inquiry (e.g. Mercer, 2002; Wilk, 2002; Dessein et al., 2015). In the specific context of the Arctic region, such understandings have translated into defining culture(s) as a 'non-static, creative process that imbues people's actions with particular meanings, saturates their words with distinct sounds and frames their relations within certain logic' (AHDR, 2015, p. 107). Owing to the open-endedness and malleability of the definitions

above, scrutiny of how state-level strategies and policies concretely define culture and its contents in the Arctic region is both important and exciting. As the primary political actors within the region and inside their boundaries, the states and their strategies and policies are powerful in bringing specific understandings of culture into being at the expense of marginalising others and implementing measures that support and promote—or undermine—cultures and their sustainability in the circumpolar North.

Materials and Methods

This article investigates the cultural dimensions of Arctic policies through an analysis of the Arctic strategies of the eight Arctic Council member states, namely Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the United States. The strategies under investigation were published between 2009 and 2017. In the context of the states that have published updated versions of their strategies, the most recent strategy documents have been considered for this analysis. The strategies under scrutiny are the documents identified by Schulze (2017) in his summary, with two exceptions. In the case of Canada, the country's Arctic strategy is seen as comprising two separate documents: (a) the 2009 strategy focusing on the domestic Arctic issues and (b) the updated 2010 strategy that complements the first document through focusing on the international Arctic and Northern affairs. For Norway, the strategy document under analysis is the 2017 updated Norway's Arctic strategy. What must be noted is that many of the other states are in the process of revising or completing their Arctic strategies; the programme papers for their strategy work have not been included in the empirical analysis in this article.

For all the strategies, the English-language versions have been consulted, except for Russia whose strategy has not been published as an official translation. Hence, an unofficial English translation has instead been used, which was first published but later removed from the Russian government website. For convenience, this article cites the strategies by referring to the name of the country and the strategy's publication year (e.g. Finland, 2013). What must be explicitly noted is that the documents are very different in nature; while some of them (e.g. the Icelandic or the US strategy) have been published as policy documents and resolutions in plain Word or PDF documents, the strategies of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Canada and Denmark have aimed for broader audiences and published in a more 'reader-friendly' format with a designed layout and colourful pictures. Although the visual representations of the Arctic societies and cultures of the strategy documents would serve as a worthy object of analysis in their own right, they have been omitted from the scope of this article where the focus is on the comparison and analysis of the textual materials in the strategies.

Methodologically, the article approaches the key themes—the culture-related rhetoric and policies of the Arctic Council member states—through applying the principles of data-based qualitative content analysis (see Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004; Julien, 2008; Pickering, 2004). The strategies have been read and analysed focusing

on how culture, its threats and sustainability opportunities are framed and referred to in the strategy texts. Based on these observations, the strategy talk on culture has been grouped around four partly overlapping and interconnected questions that were mentioned earlier in this article.

Whose Culture?

Sustainability and sustainable development are addressed in all of the eight Arctic states' strategies; furthermore, the social dimension of sustainability is highlighted consistently. Many of the strategies emphasise or prioritise social or human development (e.g. Canada, 2009; Sweden, 2011), socioeconomic sustainability (Russia, 2013) or social considerations (Norway, 2017). These references to the societal dimension and its content and constituents remain at a very general level and thus mainly leave it open, regardless of whether culture and related issues are included under the umbrella of the 'social' or remain unaddressed. References to social well-being (Iceland, 2011; Sweden, 2011), identities (e.g. Canada, 2009; Finland, 2013), respect for Arctic communities (Denmark, 2011) and the 'human dimension' (Canada, 2009; Sweden, 2011) can equally be interpreted as implicitly including or leaving out cultural concerns. Of all the Arctic states, Sweden (2011) is the only country that explicitly refers to 'culturally sustainable development' in its strategy. All in all, in this context, how Arctic strategies address the societal dimension of sustainability very much follows the lines of the academic social sustainability debate, often leaving underdefined the 'social' in the sustainable and its relationship to the cultural dimension unexplained (also see Lempinen, 2018).

There are also occasions when culture and related issues are explicitly discussed and addressed. Often in these framings, what 'culture' actually refers to is—again—not defined or outlined; instead, culture is discussed in very generic terms among other references to 'cultural values' and 'cultural interests' (USA, 2013). At the same time, culture occasionally receives a concrete content, when it is framed in terms of cultural services, activities, spaces and products: 'socio-cultural centers, cultural and sports facilities, information intelligence centers, mobile library' and their funding (Russia, 2013, p. 6) as well as 'local and community cultural and heritage institutions' (Canada, 2010, p. 16). However, the amount and patterns of talking about culture change dramatically when the attention is turned to the indigenous populations of the region. Strategies refer to the 'unique' (Iceland, 2011) cultures of indigenous populations, equally characterised by their distinct social structures and values (Denmark, 2011), social challenges (Canada, 2009) and close relationship with nature (Sweden, 2011). Also, specific references to what in these cultures needs sustaining and maintaining abound in the strategy texts: the sustainability of indigenous cultures is framed in terms of indigenous traditions (Denmark, 2011; Iceland, 2011), languages (e.g. Canada, 2009; Sweden, 2011) and livelihoods (Finland, 2013; Russia, 2013; Sweden, 2011). In general, indigenous people of the region are seen to have 'an important cultural and linguistic heritage to be preserved' (Norway, 2017, p. 11). In the context of the non-indigenous

residents of the North, such references are non-existent. This remains the case even in situations where the overwhelming majority of the regions' residents are not of indigenous backgrounds (see AHDR, 2004), although both the AEPS and the Arctic Council have established the tradition of addressing Arctic cultures, cultural sustainability and cultural well-being both in the context of indigenous and non-indigenous populations of the North (see AEPS, 1991; Arctic Council, 1996).

Threatening Cultural Sustainability

In the strategies and their discussions on cultures and their sustainability, an important theme relates to the question of what challenges and threats (usually indigenous) cultures are facing. In this, the strategy texts echo the contemporary popular and political debates, primarily entwining the prospects of cultural sustainability to environmental and climate change. Climate warming and environmental changes are seen to have an especially detrimental impact on the indigenous cultures, languages and livelihoods, which are portrayed as being heavily dependent on environmental conditions and seasonal patterns (Sweden, 2011; Denmark, 2011; Iceland, 2011; Finland, 2013). In a close and reciprocal relationship with biophysical processes of change, also changes of another kind are shaping the region and its prospects: challenges to cultures and their sustainability opportunities are equally posed by forestry, energy resource development, land use conflicts and in some areas the increasing work-based immigration to Arctic communities (Sweden, 2011; USA, 2013; Denmark, 2011).

Meanwhile, other threats and challenges are arising from within the Arctic states themselves. The cultural values and social structures of indigenous populations do not necessarily fit those of the nation-state centric ways of thinking and governing the North (Sweden, 2011). The same applies to the potential mismatch between the Northern values, cultures and livelihoods and the functions of the international political system. Both Canada (2010) and Denmark (2011) explicitly refer to the European Union's ban on the import of seal products as a gross violation of Northern cultures, traditions, livelihoods and needs in international political arenas. In general, the threats and challenges facing Arctic cultures are thus manifold and often mutually reinforcing, entangling the future of Northern communities with global environmental and sociocultural change as well as with national and global politics.

Instrumental Cultures

Equally interesting compared to what 'culture' entails and what kinds of trends and developments are seen as a threat to its sustainability is the question of *why* sustainability of cultures is a cause of concern in the Northern policies and strategies of the Arctic states. Again, the strategy documents mainly deal with this question in the context of the region's indigenous cultures. Safeguarding indigenous cultures is seen as beneficial

in many ways: cultural diversity is seen as a resource that can make an important contribution to the development of the economic sector and overall society (Finland, 2013; Canada, 2009; Sweden, 2011). In the strategies, the role of the region's cultures and the potential advantages of sustaining them are highlighted, especially in the context of the rapidly growing tourism sector of the North. The unique features and cultural contrasts of the indigenous cultures of the region are seen to hold massive potential in fuelling the growth of international tourism in the circumpolar North (Finland, 2013; Russia, 2013; Norway, 2017; Sweden, 2011). In this context, the strategy texts and their framings of culture echo the observations made in the most recent Arctic Human Development Report: that Arctic cultures have 'become more and more a resource' and that there is 'a growing marketability of symbols and things northern' (AHDR, 2015, p. 142).

Alongside the needs of tourism and economy, sustaining the Arctic cultures and their traditions and languages are also seen to hold value in another respect: the centuries-old accumulated knowledge on surviving and thriving in harsh Northern conditions is framed in terms of administrative benefits it can bring. The significance of local and traditional knowledge is understood not only in terms of supporting overall sustainable development in the region (Sweden, 2011) but also in more specific contexts. For example, the strategy of Denmark constructs the traditional knowledge as pivotal for the military forces present in Greenland (Denmark, 2011). Overall, the integration of traditional knowledge and cultural values into scientific knowledge in the processes of decision-making in the Arctic region is framed as instrumental in both senses of the term, that is as important and as a potential for bringing about administrative savings and gains (Canada, 2009; Denmark, 2011; USA, 2013).

In the strategy texts, cultures, their sustainability and safeguarding converge in one more context; alongside the domestic arenas, they also come into play in the spheres of international politics and in the practices and processes through which the region's states are constructing and advocating their positions and identities. In the strategy of Sweden, the Northern cultural heritage is framed as having a pivotal role in the country's identity as an Arctic state (Sweden, 2011). For Denmark, the Inuit of Greenland and their cultural history are framed as making the Arctic region a part of the cultural heritage of the whole of the otherwise southerly Kingdom of Denmark (Denmark, 2011). Similarly, the Canadian (2010) strategy traces the roots of the country's soul, culture and identity back to its Northern regions. However, the Arcticness of the cultures of the region's states and their efforts to preserve them are not only important in terms of their identity construction and self-understanding but also in terms of how the region's states wish to be perceived by other states and actors dealing with the Arctic region. Measures taken to protect the Arctic indigenous cultures and cooperation in the Arctic affairs and promote regional sustainable developments are framed in terms of the credibility they bring to the states as legitimate, progressive actors in the rapidly changing and globalising arenas of the Arctic international politics (Denmark, 2011; Finland, 2013; Norway, 2017; for Russian 'state branding' in the Arctic region, see Larouelle, 2014).

Who Will Sustain Culture and How?

To date, it has been established that the strategies of the Arctic states deal with culture(s) mainly in the context of the region's indigenous populations. Moreover, it has been concluded that mutually reinforcing natural and societal developments are threatening cultures and that safeguarding their sustainability is instrumental not only in their own right but also for the various benefits that their sustainability entails. The strategy texts also address a wealth of concrete measures for achieving the goal of cultural sustainability and development.

In their most generic terms, the strategies only make general references to factoring in and integrating cultural features and values in Arctic decision-making (USA, 2013) or the administrative mechanisms required to safeguarding the 'ethnocultures' of the North (Russia, 2013). Meanwhile, the scope of concrete measures introduced to support the aim of cultural sustainability is diverse and range, among others, from documenting the indigenous and traditional knowledge (Canada, 2010) to providing culturally attuned health services (Denmark, 2011), supporting research and education in history, languages and cultures (e.g. Iceland, 2011; Denmark, 2011; Sweden, 2011; Finland, 2013), establishing natural reserves for securing traditional living environments (Sweden, 2011) and offering specifically designed cultural events, services and facilities for the region's indigenous populations (Canada, 2009; Russia, 2013). The problem of securing funding for such activities is also acknowledged; several of the strategies explicitly refer to different potential funding mechanisms (e.g. Canada, 2009; Russia, 2013; Finland, 2013; Sweden, 2011). Through these references, cultural sustainability becomes an economic opportunity from two perspectives; first, through the financial benefits that it brings and, second, through the costs that safeguarding cultures will incur.

While the state-level strategies and their mechanisms for supporting and preserving cultures inevitably focus on state-level measures, actions for cultural sustainability are equally called for from sub-state and international entities. First, culture is consistently framed as a dimension of international cooperation and dialogue (see Canada, 2010; Sweden, 2011; Iceland, 2011; Finland, 2013). Culture-related cooperation is expected to take place at various levels of the 'international' and equally in the context of the Barents cooperation (Finland, 2013; Norway, 2017), the European Union and its Northern Dimension (Sweden, 2011; Norway, 2017), within the Arctic Council (Norway, 2017) and under the auspices of undefined cross-border, Nordic, Northern or international cooperation (Norway, 2017; Iceland, 2011). In this cooperation, interstate agreements related to indigenous cultures, languages and livelihoods are also perceived as having a crucial role (e.g. Sweden 2011; Denmark 2011).

Peculiarly enough, state actors and systems appear to be playing a paradoxical role, in that their actions and policies are framed as concurrently threatening and protecting the region's indigenous cultures and their sustainability. The challenge of sustainability and the future of indigenous cultures are not, however, framed solely as the responsibility of state actors; instead, many of the strategies serve to set the

goal of supporting and enabling the region's indigenous populations in developing and sustaining their cultures and identities (Sweden, 2011), controlling their political, economic, social and cultural situation (Denmark, 2011) and developing in their own terms (Finland, 2013; Iceland, 2011). However, implicit in these calls for support is the demand and responsibility for 'development' even if it were according to indigenous peoples' terms.

Concluding Thoughts

Despite the prominent role of issues and concerns associated with culture and its sustainability in international Arctic cooperation since its outset, the state-level Arctic strategies of the Council's member states do not prioritise culture and the related issues to any meaningful extent. Often cultural concerns are implicitly included in the broad and elusive references to the human or societal dimension of sustainability in the North; as such, the strategies and their analysis provide limited insights into the conceptual debates about cultural sustainability. When culture is explicitly addressed in the strategy texts, it is most often done in the specific context of the region's indigenous peoples. References to non-indigenous local cultures are rare; in this context, expressions such as well-being, socioeconomic development and lifestyles are preferred. Thus, for non-indigenous residents, who comprise the vast majority of the inhabitants of the circumpolar North, there is hardly a personal culture to be sustained and maintained, and they are exclusively given space to embrace the improvements in income and lifestyle brought about by the rapid economic activities and developments in their vibrant and productive settlements and communities. For them, 'culture' is reduced to cultural facilities, services and events to be consumed.

However, sustaining and developing the cultures of the indigenous residents of the North cannot be seen as merely a worthy goal in its own right. Through mobilising cultures and their sustainability as arguments accentuating their Northern identities and underlining their exemplary policies in safeguarding indigenous cultures, the states of the region are actively positioning themselves as credible and weighty players in the rapidly globalising arenas of Arctic politics. The cultural diversity of the region and centuries-old accumulated knowledge in facing and resolving the particular challenges of surviving in the North are also reserved a role in regional economic development and governance; harnessing them can serve to bring administrative savings and financial gain. Similarly, the cultural events and improved cultural services expected in some of the strategies are explicitly framed as bringing competitive economic advantage and luring workforce and through them, keeping the Northern communities and regions of the Arctic states inhabited. Through its instrumental focus, culture and how it is framed in the strategies echo the broader critiques of sustainable development, where the means and goals of sustainability are framed in terms of market mechanisms and neoliberal lingo. The intimate and instrumental

relationship between culture and the economy is crystallised in the Finnish strategy and its reference to developing and supporting economically viable, ‘customer-oriented’ local communities and cultures (2013). Despite the comprehensive references, cultures and their sustainability are not valued in their own right and maintaining them is ultimately justified by the economic, administrative and reputational gains that sustaining them will yield.

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BIO

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