

Intrinsic Value of Arctic Cooperation for Future Generations

Alexandra Middleton^a

During last 30 years Arctic scientific cooperation has created both tangible and intangible assets. Tangibles are the institutes and intergovernmental fora like Arctic Council. Intangibles are the knowledge networks, relationships, and the pool of shared expertise of Arctic researchers from around the globe built on principles of trust and respect for scientific rigor. Science from the Arctic and about the Arctic is used, for example, in International Panel on Climate Change reports¹, in negotiations on the Convention on Biological Diversity² and many other initiatives that are crucial for sustainable development worldwide. The Arctic cooperation via the Arctic Council, the primary intergovernmental cooperation, is on pause. Canada, the Kingdom of

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States issued a joint statement on March 3, 2022³ to pause cooperation due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Other cooperation avenues between all eight Arctic countries are also paused, *e.g.*, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council suspended activities involving Russia in the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation⁴ and the Northern Dimension followed⁵. Considering the Arctic cooperation void between all Arctic countries the following questions need to be addressed: Why do we have Arctic cooperation in the first place? What is at stake? How do we continue?

^a Postdoctoral Researcher, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Email: Alexandra.middleton@oulu.fi

¹ Abram, N., Carolina, A., Bindoff, N. L., & Cheng, L. (2019). Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. Intergov. Panel Clim. Chang, 1, 1-36.

² UN Biodiversity Negotiations. <https://www.conservation.org/events/biodiversity-negotiations>.

³ US Department of State (2022, March). Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine. US Department of State. 3, March 2022. <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-arctic-council-cooperation-following-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

⁴ The Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation (2022, March). Statements regarding Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation. The Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation. 4, March 2022. <https://www.barents-council.org/news/joint-statement-of-finland-denmark-iceland-norway-sweden-and-the-european-union-regarding-barents-euro-arctic-cooperation>

⁵ EU External Action (2022, March). Northern Dimension Policy: Joint Statement by the European Union, Iceland and Norway on suspending activities with Russia and Belarus. EU External Action. 8, March 2022.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/northern-dimension-policy-joint-statement-european-union-iceland-and-norway-suspending_en.

1 Why do we have Arctic cooperation in the first place?

The Arctic regions are undergoing unprecedented changes both environmentally and socio-economically. The impact of climate change is the most pronounced here. Scientists have now found that the Arctic area is warming up even faster than previously thought. Researchers reported on August 11, 2022, in *Communications Earth & Environment* that over the last 40 years, the average temperature in the Arctic has risen almost four times as fast as the average temperature around the world⁶. Previous studies have shown the average temperature in the Arctic to be rising two to three times faster than everywhere else. From a social perspective, the Arctic is experiencing demographic challenges, rapid urbanization and the emergence of new industries⁷. Intensification of extractive industries, increased inequality, plastic pollution⁸, loss of biodiversity and energy insecurity⁹ are just few challenges facing the Arctic. Monitoring and analysis of these trends require a large scientific base as well as coordination and cooperation between

international researchers. These challenges are here today, and they are not going to disappear unless something is done.

2 What is at stake?

As it stands, humanity and other species are facing existential threat due to climate crisis. Adverse effects of unmitigated climate change could endanger survival of the species and permanently change the earth. Future generations do not have control over the kind of world we will leave to them, which according to the philosopher Nick Bostrom makes their representation an important moral and political priority¹⁰. We have a responsibility to ensure future generations are given the opportunity to thrive. Future generations are fundamentally disempowered: they will inherit the world and society we leave behind yet have no influence in how our societies are governed. They are unable to vote and are not considered by our legal systems, the rights of future generations are compromised due to non-existence challenge, non-identity challenge, and their unactionable rights¹¹. Yet future generations, including our children and

⁶ Rantanen, M., Karpechko, A. Y., Lipponen, A., Nordling, K., Hyvärinen, O., Ruosteenoja, K., ... & Laaksonen, A. (2022). The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the globe since 1979. *Communications Earth & Environment*, 3(1), 1-10.

⁷ ECONOR (2020). The Economy of the North. Sustainable Development Working Group. Arctic Council. <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/2611>.

⁸ Arctic Council (2021). Plastics in the Arctic. <https://www.arctic-council.org/explore/topics/ocean/plastics/>.

⁹ Gjörv, G. H., Lanteigne, M., & Sam-Aggrey, H. (Eds.). (2020). Routledge handbook of Arctic security. Routledge.

¹⁰ Bostrom, N. (2013). Existential risk prevention as global priority. *Global Policy*, 4(1), 15-31.

¹¹ Gosseries, A. (2017). On future generations' future rights. In *Environmental Rights* (pp. 335-363). Routledge.

millions of future generations are all significant.

However, it is not easy to represent generations that do not yet exist and do not have a voice. Professor Dennis Thompson in his essay "*Representing Future Generations: Political Presentism and Democratic Trusteeship*" from 2010¹² claims that there is a tendency to neglect long-term environmental risks and that democracy is partial towards present. In the context of future generations short-termism means discounting future well-being for time preference, discounting future benefits due to uncertainty and discounting the moral importance of future people¹³.

Still there is a hope that the interests of future generations have started to be recognized. Several countries have had initiatives to address the rights of future generations, *e.g.*, The Commission for Future Generations was established in

Israel (active during 2001-2008)¹⁴, the Finnish Committee for the Future was established in 1993 and is still active¹⁵ and the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner has been operational since 2016¹⁶. Apart from the creation of national institutions for future generations, the need to address this issue at the UN level has been evident since 2012¹⁷. The UN report "Our Common Agenda" from 2021 looks ahead to the next 25 years and represents the vision on the future of global cooperation¹⁸. "Our Common Agenda" claims that addressing risks to our planet needs to be part of every decision, every policy, every investment and every budget. It also recognizes how existential risk reduction is beneficial for those alive today, but an overwhelming amount of the value accrues to future generations.

The UN declaration on Human Rights¹⁹ celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2018. The UN is currently working on a Declaration on

¹² Thompson, D. F. (2010). Representing future generations: political presentism and democratic trusteeship. *Critical review of international social and political philosophy*, 13(1), 17-37.

¹³ González-Ricoy, I., & Gosseries, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Institutions for future generations*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (2022). Knesset Commission for Future Generations. <https://www.fdsd.org/ideas/knesset-commission-future-generations/>

¹⁵ Parliament of Finland (2022). The Committee for the Future.

<https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/Pages/default.aspx>

¹⁶ Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2022). <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-commissioner/>

¹⁷ Ward, H. (2012). *Committing to the future we want: a High Commissioner for Future Generations at Rio+ 20*. Londres: Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development. World Future Council. <https://www.fdsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Committing-to-the-future-we-want-main-report.pdf>

¹⁸ UN (2021). *Our Common Agenda*. <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda>

¹⁹ UN (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Future Generations. The current draft paper makes a distinction between youth and future generations (the Elements Paper²⁰ defined Future Generation as 'all those generation that do not yet exist, are yet to come and who will eventually inherit this planet'). The draft paper is built on recognition of the need to identify, monitor and manage existential risks as key to ensuring that Future Generations can benefit from the full range of measures identified in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Arctic scientific cooperation is an indispensable part of our human activity toward reducing existential risks and cannot be neglected. The Arctic is an essential piece in the puzzle to understand and mitigate climate change; it is home to Arctic Indigenous Peoples and local Arctic people already experiencing the consequences of climate change. Moreover, the future generations living in the Arctic are likely to experience even graver effects of climate change first-hand.

3 How do we continue?

Currently, formal cooperation channels between seven Arctic countries and Russia are paused. Still, at the same time, the message issued by the University of the Arctic is that " *collaboration between individual researchers in Thematic Networks and educational activities for students shall continue where possible*"²¹. Similarly, the Human Rights Committee of the Council of Finnish Academies stated that " *collaboration with individuals can in many cases be continued or even reinforced during times of crisis*"²². International Science Council, in its statement from February 28, 2022, warns that " *our capacity to work collaboratively on global challenges, and on cutting edge research such as Arctic and space research, is only equal to our capacity to maintain strong collaboration amidst geopolitical turmoil. Ultimately the isolation and exclusion of important scientific communities is detrimental to all*"²³.

We need to ask ourselves what happens if cooperation between Arctic researchers does not continue. How can we address

²⁰ UN (2022). Elements Paper for the Declaration for Future Generations. <https://www.un.org/pga/76/wp-content/uploads/sites/101/2022/09/Elements-Paper-Declaration-for-Future-Generations-09092022.pdf>

²¹ University of the Arctic (2022). UArctic Actions on Ukraine. <https://www.uarctic.org/news/2022/4/uarctic-actions-on-ukraine/>

²² The Council of Finnish Academies (2022). Human Rights Committee's recommendations for organising research and collaboration during the times of crisis. <https://academies.fi/en/uutiset/human-rights-committees-recommendations-for-organising-research-and-collaboration-during-times-of-crisis/>

²³ International Science Council (2022). International Science Council Statement on Ukraine. <https://council.science/current/news/isc-statement-ukraine/>

existential risk and safeguard the interests of future generations in the Arctic and worldwide? The scientific community should be empowered to inform, create awareness, cooperate, and be engaged in science diplomacy when the future of the Arctic and the whole world is at stake while government-to-government cooperation is on pause. Scientific cooperation needs to continue despite political tensions.

Inspired by “Our Common Agenda”, we can adopt the same thinking for the Arctic and call it “Our Common Arctic Agenda”, in which we explicitly address future generations, existential risks, and long-term thinking. Let’s engage in scenario planning: what if scientific cooperation does not continue in the long perspective? Can the Arctic science community self-organize, or does it need a facilitating agent?

We should consider different options for sustained Arctic cooperation between

scientists. We need to utilise the crucial intangible assets of Arctic scientific expertise and related scientific networks. One option could be the creation of an Envoy for the Arctic or Arctic programme, for instance, under the UN cooperation umbrella to represent the interests of all Arctic People and the interests of future generations. The Envoy for the Arctic can be entrusted to facilitate science cooperation in the Arctic involving scientists and Arctic Indigenous Peoples using the principles of impartiality and inclusion. Furthermore, dialogue on the avenues for scientific cooperation on climate change and human adaptation to climate change in the Arctic needs to be initiated. As the international scientific community, we are the holders of the intrinsic value of Arctic cooperation, and we need to act and come up with the solutions to be accountable to future generations and preserve our planet and all life.