

Non-state Actors in the Arctic Governance Process*Nikolas Sellheim*

In some media discourses, the Arctic has been termed the 'last frontier' where a 'scramble for resources' is taking place. The idea behind this narrative is that the Arctic states compete over the vast natural resources, first and foremost oil and gas, that become more and more accessible due to climate change and melting sea ice. What this narrative implies is that it is first and foremost nation states who shape the state of affairs in the far north. This in a simplified version of the different stakeholders that interact to make the Arctic a place of cooperation, business and science. These actors make the Arctic a place that expands beyond the reaches of national jurisdictions. These non-state actors cannot necessarily be grouped due to their different but also aligning interests and scopes, although they can be identified as belonging to the following categories: 1. finance; 2. indigenous; 3. industry; 4. institution; 5. non-governmental; 6. research; and 7. university. In addition, media play a significant role in shaping the view on the Arctic and influence decision-makers both inside and outside the region.

One of the most known group of actors are indigenous peoples' organisations that play important roles within their respective nation states and some of which act as Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council. While they are not decision-makers in the Council per se, no decision should be made without their approval, thus identifying them as crucial stakeholders in Arctic affairs. On a national level, these de facto non-governmental organisations (NGOs) represent the interests of the respective indigenous people and may also defend these against actions of the state. The Arun Association, for instance, vividly fights for land rights of nineteen indigenous communities in the Krasnoyarsk region in Siberia. By also legally representing their interests, the applicability of legislation concerning indigenous peoples in Russia is put to the test. Similarly, other NGOs, often engaged in environmental protection, have had a long-standing history in the Arctic. Their influence has also contributed to legislation that directly impacts Arctic livelihoods, best exemplified by the EU's ban on trade in seal products in the adoption of which NGOs played a major role.

But apart from NGOs, also rather newly emerged think tanks increasingly provide expertise beyond the academia. In many instances, these organisations build a bridge between state representatives, the academia, indigenous peoples and other actors. While they do not act as decision-makers, they nevertheless provide for expertise and skill that enables the exchange of knowledge and increased levels of science communication, thereby indirectly shaping Arctic governance processes and law-making.

While state-wide cooperation is well-established in the Arctic, for instance in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council or the West Nordic Council, this cooperation also takes place on a more local level. For instance, the Arctic Mayors' Forum, established in 2019, advocates the interests of municipalities all around the Arctic. As such, fourteen municipalities from all Arctic states have started to create a common voice in lieu of a formalised mechanism for the inclusion of local governments in Arctic governance processes. This resembles the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas Network (NSPA), which represents the 13 northernmost regions of Finland, Norway and Sweden, advocating their aligned interests and circumstances on an EU-level.

Non-state cooperation also occurs for the development of business opportunities. Bearing in mind the narrative of the Arctic as a remote landscape, innovative businesses thrive all across the circumpolar north: the farming of sea weed in the Faroe Islands, the development of space technology in Sweden, an indigenous-operated highway project in Canada's Northwest Territories, a large-scale wind-farming project on the Kola Peninsula, or a ruby and pink sapphire mining operation in southwestern Greenland are but some examples for the vast business opportunities the Arctic provides. Given the active inclusion of local expertise in these projects, their benefits for local communities are substantial. On an Arctic-wide scale, the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) comprises businesses operating in or with the Arctic from all Arctic States. The AEC's purpose is to foster business opportunities, investment and trade, paying due regard to environmental protection and sustainable development. Business in the Arctic consequently serves as an example for non-state opportunities to implement the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) beyond the nation state.

Also, the Arctic research and science community shows well-established non-state activity. The International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), for example, has been in operation since 1990 and serves as a key player for science communication and the conduct of Arctic research. Apart from representation from all Arctic states, IASC has expanded far beyond the Arctic and now includes fifteen non-Arctic states as well, including China, India, South Korea and Japan. While being an NGO, over time, IASC has become the main hub for all aspects relating to Arctic research and thereby a key player in Arctic affairs. Similarly, the University of the Arctic (UArctic) now combines more than 200 educational institutions from across the Arctic and beyond, having become a key player in capacity-building for and about the north.

With such a vast array of non-state actors, the Arctic provides for exceptional opportunities to serve its inhabitants. While Arctic discourses are still shaped by the interests of the nation state, the mere existence of a plethora of non-state actors shows the diverse manner Arctic cooperation has developed since the end of the Cold War and how the Arctic is not merely a source for natural resources, but also an opportunity for prosperous development on the ground.

For more on this, read...

Johannsdóttir L and D Cook, 'Discourse analysis of the 2013–2016 Arctic Circle Assembly programmes' (2017) 53 *Polar Record* 276

Scopelliti M and N Sellheim, 'Sustaining a conservationist agenda? NGO influence on Arctic sealing, whaling and hydrocarbon regimes' in: A Shibata and Others (eds), *Emerging legal orders in the Arctic. The role of non-Arctic actors* (Routledge 2020)

Sellheim N and D R Menezes (eds) *Non-state actors in the Arctic region*. (Springer 2022)