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Arctic Challenge for Sustainability – Intergenerational Everyday Life Perspective on Traditional Livelihoods and Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

The Arctic is often described as vulnerable, cold and exotic place with stereotypical images of indigenous and non-indigenous communities, where people live in peace and harmony with the environment and have special skills in surviving in the nature. Arctic is also equal to climate change. No stories go without connecting the vulnerability of the Arctic to the survival of our whole globe. However, it is not realistic to generalize when we talk about “Arctic problems”, “Arctic challenges”, “Arctic indigenous peoples”, or that the states are weak in implementing environmental rights. The Arctic is not a homogenous area or territory but there are many different states and actors living in the area. According to Flavia Schlegel who is UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, Arctic indigenous peoples are considered “resilient”: “They respond, innovate and adapt to this changing context, and this source of resilience is deeply rooted in their lifestyles and social solidarity”.

The changes in the Arctic are not only a concern for local people who are directly affected by the change, but also among people who live in the rest of the world, because the Arctic plays a special role in the global climate. The Arctic Challenge for Sustainability, ArCS is a national flagship project of Japan funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, already providing excellent research results on sustainability in the Arctic where international cooperation is needed in order to better understand the holistic approach as well as to provide contemporary knowledge for decision-makers.

Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Sustainable development can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present *without compromising the ability of future generations*.

The Issue of Intergenerational Justice

Intergenerational equity or justice in economic, psychological, and sociological contexts, is the concept or idea of fairness or justice between generations. The concept can be applied to fairness in dynamics between children, youth, adults and seniors, in terms of treatment and

interactions. It can also be applied to fairness between generations currently living and generations yet to be born.¹

A wide range of issues in moral, political, and legal philosophy fall under the heading of “intergenerational justice,” such as questions of justice between the young and the old, obligations to more-or-less distant past and future generations, generational sovereignty, and the boundaries of democratic decision-making.

Everyday Life in the Arctic

This presentation focuses on everyday life in the Arctic, specifically in Finnish Lapland as a case study.² Lapland as a region has strong potentialities, as well as specific problems.³

Lapland is an interesting place, since it is the largest and northernmost region of Finland, and also a home for indigenous people; the Sámi. Altogether, Lapland is a home area for approximately 183,000 people and there are only four cities in the southern part of the region. I live in a small reindeer herding community, 60 km west of Rovaniemi, at the Arctic Circle. We have a school in the village, with 15 pupils, a small grocery store and few tourist resorts. Most of the working people commute to Rovaniemi every day, while others get their income from reindeer herding.

Lapland as a region has strong potentialities, as well as specific problems. The lack of roads and railway connections, as well as east-west flight connections, a general shortage of job opportunities, and sparse population and sparsely populated areas are only some of the issues that affect the region and the Arctic in general. A major health disparity in the Arctic is the high rate of suicide, especially among young men, when compared with the populations in other regions of the world. In the last decade there has been a massive migration from small villages of the north to the big cities of the south. Also, the relative role of traditional activities as a source of livelihood has been declining over the last century. This has led to changes in lifestyle that have brought about a cultural transformation, including alterations in family structure, values and cultural forms of expression. In northern villages, young families with many children start to be a rare sight. The population is getting older, and many want to move nearer to the cities and closer to services. In Finland, from the northern cultural point of view, the situation is alarming: at the moment 70% of the Sámi are living in the urban southern cities of Finland, 85% of the children are born there. This means that they are already third or fourth Sámi generation born in the cities with no ties to Sámi languages or traditional livelihoods.

In the northern communities of Lapland, cultural growth takes place in a social environment where family and family relationships are important. Traditional knowledge is forwarded naturally, utilizing the words and meanings associated with nature and animals. Throughout the centuries, nature, lands and waters, their origins and their sustainable use have been an

¹ "The Big Read: Generation wars". Herald Scotland. August 5, 2017.

² The presentation is part of a Finnish Academy research project: Live, Work or Leave? Youth – wellbeing and the viability of (post) extractive Arctic industrial cities in Finland and Russia (WOLLIE) at <https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/youthwellbeing>

³ See more: Polar Prediction matters. Tanja Joona, Everyday life in the Arctic. At <https://blogs.helmholtz.de/polarpredictionmatters/2018/11/everyday-life-in-the-arctic/>

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integral part of the indigenous Sámi culture, and they are still today. Culture lives in everyday life. It is part of everyday life, though this is not always recognized. Often, nature-relations begin as a “hobby”. It is fun to go fishing, it is wonderful to get a catch, you’re proud to get your hunting license, and there are memorable moments spent by the camp fire after picking berries in the forest. At the same time, you observe the nature, you teach kids the names of the hills, lakes and rivers. And you teach them how to respect and live with the nature. As “it has always been done”.

In the north, many people still live in annual rhythm, especially in communities that depend on traditional livelihoods. This means that certain things are done in a certain order. Usually, it starts with the beginning of the new reindeer herding year: 1st of June. Before this, end of April, reindeers which are fed at home fences during winter are released back into the forest to breed. Timing is exact: there needs to be at least something to eat in the forest. In some areas the herd has to cross the frozen lake to the forest, so the ice needs to hold up the herd, but also the herders with snow scooters which can be dangerous.

In the early summer weeks, new calves are born, and in the midsummer they get ears marked with owners marks (by knife). Summer is also the time to make hay for the animals and prepare for the coming winter. This means also fishing and berry picking in August. Fall time is for hunting of birds, moose, and bear. From the beginning of December until the end of April, many reindeers are fed with extra food, which means that some of the reindeers are kept in home fences, some of them are in the forest and mountain areas. Feeding usually requires work by the whole family, but at the same time, children learn how to take care of an animal. A very popular hobby is also to tame a reindeer to pull a sledge or race with it with skies. Before the real winter comes and covers the landscape with soft snow, weather can be rainy and icy so that it is very difficult for a reindeer to dig through the ice, and extra feeding is needed even more.

With respect to intergenerational justice, that is the idea that present generations have certain duties towards future generations, *climate change* raises particularly pressing issues, such as which risks those living today are allowed to impose on future generations, and how available natural resources can be used without threatening the sustainable functioning of the planet's ecosystems. Moreover, when one talks about the rights of future generations this inevitably seems to raise the issue of how to balance the rights' claims of those alive today against the rights' claims of future generations.

The main focus of my research lies on the moral problems of intergenerational risk imposition and the ethical requirements of just and sustainable natural resource governance. Both issues very much affect the world in which our children, grandchildren and future generations will live.

The purpose of the ArCS is to elucidate the changes in the climate and environment, clarify their effects on human society, and provide accurate projections and environmental assessments for internal and external stakeholders so that they can make appropriate decisions on the sustainable development of the Arctic region. Therefore the cooperation between ArCS and the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland is important, as it promotes effective and

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important information to stakeholders such as international organizations, domestic and foreign policy makers, and communities of indigenous peoples. With my research I can contribute by explaining the significant role of climate change and sustainability in the everyday life context.

The cooperation will include contribution for the ArCS blog, joint articles and possible research exchange at the Polar Cooperation Research Centre in Kobe as well as participating for the 13th Polar Law Symposium in Kobe, 2020. Future research themes and plans pursued under the post-ArCS project for the year 2020-25 could involve themes associated with the future of Arctic youth and children as well as the gender imbalance – women leave and men stay at the Arctic.

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