

# Collaboration Across the Arctic: A Tool of Regionalization or Simple Pragmatism?

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*The Arctic is witnessing the rise of a new paradigm caused by an increase in pan-Arctic collaborations which co-exist with the region's traditional linkages with the South. Using an analysis of concrete examples of regional collaborations in the Arctic today in the fields of education, health and infrastructure, this paper questions whether pan-Arctic collaborations in the Arctic are more viable than North-South collaborations, and explores the reasons behind and the foreseeable consequences of such collaborations. It shows that the newly emerging East-West paradigm operates at the same time as the traditional North-South paradigm, with no signs of the East-West paradigm being more viable in the foreseeable future. However, pan-Arctic collaboration, both due to pragmatic reasons and an increased awareness of similarities, is likely to increase in the future. The increased regionalization process in the Arctic is both a tool and a consequence of the increasing pan-Arctic collaboration.*

## Introduction

Collaborations within the region above 66° north have gained in frequency and significance over the last decades. The rate and speed at which the Arctic transformed itself from a regional complex with a low level of regionness to a region with a high level of interdependencies and societal contacts means that the Arctic region is now at the forefront of international affairs. (See Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000; see also Knecht, 2013: 167-168). Prior to the Cold War, this present situation might have come as a surprise. Young suggests that “[a]nyone who had the audacity to forecast in 1986 the emergence of this agenda of international cooperation in the Arctic within ten years would surely have been dismissed as a starry-eyed visionary” (Young, 1996: 49). Traditionally, collaboration in the Arctic has been based on the North-South paradigm, where governments in the South would work with the Arctic part of their country in the North. Nowadays, based on a rising awareness of similar pre-conditions across the Arctic and an emerging regionalization, pan-Arctic collaborations in the Arctic can be regarded as being more viable than the more traditional North-South collaborations.

In this work, the main objective is to investigate whether the increase of pan-Arctic collaborations is based on similar pre-conditions and a sense of regionalization or whether this shift could be due to other reasons, and whether these collaborations support increasing Arctic regionalization. Through an analysis of concrete examples of regional collaborations in the Arctic

today from the sectors of health, infrastructure and education, this chapter questions whether pan-Arctic collaborations in the Arctic are more viable than North-South collaborations, and explores the reasons behind and the foreseeable consequences of such collaborations.

Although the 21st-century Arctic can be characterized as a zone free of tension, there remains some disagreements concerning the future of the region between “those who favor a state-centric view of the Arctic and those who contend that the region represents a new opportunity for subnational and non-state actors to play significant roles in fashioning [the Arctic’s] future.” (Nord, 2015: 304-5; see also Holm Olsen & Shadian, 2016). Moreover, globalization trends and a peaceful and stable situation in the region have fostered a climate in which international and pan-Arctic collaboration could significantly increase (Heininen, 2010b: 265; see also Heininen, 2010a). In this chapter, the term “pan-Arctic collaboration” is thus to be understood as transnational collaboration between Arctic stakeholders, from the East to the West. This work regards pan-Arctic as being opposite to the traditional North-South collaborations characterized as domestic collaborations between southern capitals and their Arctic regions. The first section of this chapter serves as a methodological and theoretical starting point in which the different region-building processes in the Arctic are outlined, and concepts of regionalization and regionalism are compared and contrasted. The second section analyses the similar pre-conditions that provide an incentive for local actors to collaborate. In light of the previous sections, the third section investigates concrete examples of pan-Arctic collaboration to assess whether pan-Arctic collaborations could be more viable than the traditional North-South collaborations.

## **Regionalization**

Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic has witnessed a surge in region-building processes through different actors (i.e., non-state actors and states) shaping the discourse in delineating the Arctic as a region for common policy purposes. Although there is no commonly accepted conceptualization of what is or makes a political region, the main criteria are increasing transnational interdependencies between states in relative geographical proximity (Knecht, 2013: 166). Theoretically, regional developments and region-building processes can be divided into “regionalism” which is construed as a “top-down” process mainly driven by national governments, and “regionalization”, a process based on grass-root involvement of local actors with similar preconditions (Keskitalo, 2004). Regionalization is also “a process whereby a geographical area is transformed from a passive object to an active subject capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region” (Hettne & Soderbaum, 2000). Methodologically, regionalism and regionalization should be construed as two sides of the same coin (Knecht, 2013: 167). Regionalization in the Arctic is a relatively new phenomenon, and historically, the Arctic has been rather passive. Arctic relations have mainly been defined as following a North-South axiom, which can be explained by the different colonial contexts in which most of the Arctic still finds itself at present (Keil & Knecht, 2016: 8). The southern capitals used to frame Arctic relations through the lens of a geopolitical paradigm whose discourse shaped and reinforced the Arctic as the “Last Frontier” (Knecht, 2013: 173). Regionalization can also be a tool of political change as local actors often challenge and rethink the region through the lens of decolonization (Rasmussen, 2011: 198; see also Markussen, 2017: 308). In changing the relation between former colonizers and colonized lands and peoples, local collaborations can challenge concepts of state sovereignty and of national boundaries.

At the end of the Cold War, an era corresponding with the onset of globalization, relations among Arctic territories were characterized by national collaborations. As Knecht observes, the concept of ‘last frontier’ was “marked by competition and contested stability” (Knecht, 2013: 173). This meant that the Arctic was never an attractive ground for collaboration especially when the territories belonged to other countries. Mikhail Gorbachev’s 1987 Murmansk speech is often pinpointed as the point at which the Arctic became an active subject with increased regionalization (See Åtland, 2008). In his speech, “Gorbachev suggested that the Arctic states should set aside their historical differences and join in a ‘general zone of peace and fruitful cooperation’” (Nord, 2016: 14; Gorbachev, 1987: 31). Whereas the Cold War was defined by a state-centric and protectionist approach to IR (Jegorova, 2013: 128) and by a rapid expansion of military facilities in the Arctic, the “contemporary situation represents a clear de-escalation,” (Laruelle, 2014: 113; Young, 2004: 3) even suggests that the end of the Cold War provided “the burst of energy in support of initiatives designed to replace old antagonisms with cooperative ventures cutting across the boundaries of national jurisdictions in the Arctic.” The collapse of the Cold War bipolar world system, as Jegorova (2013) describes it, has brought a multipolar global system in which international relations are viewed through multidimensional cooperation. The Arctic region is no different. Internationalization has played a role in constructing a cohesive Arctic region, that relies on both internal and external factors to advance its region-building process. Having gained global awareness over the years, the Arctic is now regarded as an international region with non-Arctic states becoming more influential and making their presence felt. Exner-Pirot (2013) suggests that as an international region, the Arctic is unique in how quickly it transformed from a passive [geopolitical] object to an active subject (121). Globalization has had a strong influence on regionalization in the Arctic, as “transnational linkages were facilitated by technological advances” (Ibid.). This made grass-rooted regionalization processes possible and allowed the Arctic to develop as a more cohesive unit (Ibid: 126). However, Arctic development also comes at a cost for individual national governments that are unlikely to have the financial resources to meet the high costs of such developments (Rasmussen, 2011: 73). Regionalization thus provides an incentive for more fruitful transnational cooperation where local actors can pool their resources to achieve a common goal (see Markussen, 2017: 308). However, the fluctuant economic context of the Arctic may make local development difficult to sustain for local and regional stakeholders.

In the Arctic, transnational interdependencies depend less on geographical closeness – the Arctic is one and half times bigger than Europe – and more on various stakeholders’ similar preconditions and on a transnational willingness to shape the region as a fertile ground for international cooperation. Regionalization or shaping the region-building discourse might not be the purpose of various local stakeholders collaborating with one another, but, unwillingly or not, local collaborations are both a tool and a consequence of regionalization.

### **Similar Pre-Conditions and Shared Values**

A rising awareness of similarities among Arctic actors has gone hand in hand with increasing regionalization. Arctic collaboration and cooperation have both been encouraged and made possible through the development of international bodies such as the Arctic Council. When the Arctic Council was created in 1996, it was argued that “[t]he Council will provide a mechanism for addressing the common concerns and challenges faced by their governments and the people

of the Arctic” (Arctic Council, 1996). The Arctic as a globalized region faces the common challenges of dealing with the effects of climate change while developing a stable economic system. The establishment of the Arctic Council brought the eight Arctic countries closer together by creating a framework that strengthened transnational relations across the Arctic. (See Koivurova, 2010). The work of the Arctic Council contributed to both increased regionalization as well as a better understanding of similarities in the Arctic. The regionalization of the Arctic provides a platform for developing new initiatives and finding solutions to common challenges. This similar set of pre-conditions and challenges is seen as a valuable asset for local stakeholders, as local collaborations are likely to increase cultural revitalization and raise global awareness of the Arctic (Larsen & Schweitzer, 2010; Poppel, 2015).

From an International Relations (IR) point of view, there are evident benefits in collaborations based on shared interests. Jackson and Sørensen (2012) argue that the liberalist approach regards humans as rational beings, who engage with each other because of shared interests. In international affairs, this rationality can result in greater cooperation (Jackson & Sørensen, 2012: 96-98). Historically, interactions due to shared interests in the Arctic were limited, and they were often enabled by national governments and southern stakeholders. Presently, similar preconditions in the Arctic regions are often underestimated and current regional cooperation is relatively low. Nevertheless, increased collaborations based on similarities would be beneficial (Lyck, 2015). Furthermore, Sejersen (2015) suggests that “[t]he contemporary regional understanding [in the Arctic] has something to offer in cultural, social and economic terms and the area has increasingly been able to emerge as a distinct region in policy discussions” (Sejersen, 2015: 9). This argument highlights the extent to which these similarities help the Arctic stand out as an integrated region. As Keskitalo (2007) argues, “[w]hile globalization does create the need for interaction on a larger scale, it may be more viable politically to construct institutions for cooperation at the regional level instead, where there is some commonality of culture, history, social systems and values, and political and security interests” (Keskitalo, 2007: 187). There is a continuous need for North-South collaborations, especially high-level transnational collaborations and increasing the number of collaborations at the regional level. To achieve the goal of a more stable Arctic region, local stakeholders must be involved in matters related to security and politics. Arctic regions should be involved when working with security and politics, however it is questionable if these should be discussed on a regional level only.

## **Examples of Collaborations Across the Arctic**

### **Education**

Education in the Arctic is a widely-discussed topic, as many Arctic regions struggle with providing local education. Challenges include a lack of tradition for formal education, and a small population size that makes it difficult to provide education locally. This has led to migration with consequences for the individual and the local society (see Larsen & Fondahl, 2014; Larsen & Schweitzer, 2010; Rasmussen, 2011). Traditionally, youth in the Arctic would be sent southwards for further education when it was not available locally.

A collaboration between schools in Iqaluit, Canada, and Sisimiut, Greenland is a concrete example based on the challenges and similarities the two Arctic towns experience in regard to education. Established in Spring 2017, the collaboration enables college students to take classes in the respective school in Nunavut/Sisimiut, enabling the students to take classes which are not

currently available locally (Zeheri, 2016). The president of the Nunavut Arctic College, Joe Adla Kunuk, claims this pan-Arctic collaboration is of significant importance because “[t]he similarities between our land here and their land, and our spoken language in Inuktitut and Greenlandic means it will be an easier transition for students, not like going to Vancouver or Toronto” (Zeheri, 2016), referring to cultural and environmental similarities between Nunavut and Greenland.

Raising awareness for the similarities between the Arctic regions, as well as the aspiration for a better education for their youth is the driving force behind this cooperation. Traditionally, young people would go South to urban areas if classes were not locally offered. By sending them across the Arctic instead, the actors hope for an easier transition, as today many Arctic residents that are, for example, sent to Vancouver, Toronto or Copenhagen, struggle with the adaptation to the new environment, which is so foreign from the North.

The above outlined case is an example of how local stakeholders take fate into their own hands and rely less on state actors. Education is crucial for the continued development of the Arctic region. The effects of greater collaboration between regional education institutions could lead to better education in the Arctic regions. It could decrease the North’s dependency on the South if regional actors in the Arctic would supply each other with education opportunities, and contribute to overcome the traditional relations between former colonizer and colonized. However, due to the small population size of the Arctic regions, it will not replace the traditional education exchange with the South in the foreseeable future.

From a pragmatic perspective, it is not easier or cheaper to travel across the Arctic, as infrastructure often mainly connects to the South. It would not make education cheaper for the residents. In addition, the different school systems across the Arctic could make collaboration difficult. On an individual level, pan-Arctic collaborations in the field of education can be more viable than the traditional North-South collaborations, due to the cultural, environmental and social similarities, it can be easier for the individual person to adjust to the region. In the foreseeable future, the traditional collaborations will not be replaced by these pan-Arctic collaborations in regard to education, as the educational opportunities in the Arctic are very few compared to the South. Local collaborations like the example above will, however, contribute to an increasing awareness of similarities between locals, and also increase local fate control and capacity, as actors take initiative themselves. These initiatives will come to exist side by side with the traditional North-South collaborations, and likely increase at the same time as regionalization in the Arctic increases.

The above example can be linked to other similar kinds of collaboration in the field of higher education in the Arctic, such as collaboration between universities.

In 2015, Fróðskaparsetur Føroya (Faroe Islands), Ilisimatusarfik (Greenland), Háskólinn á Akureyri (Iceland), Háskóli Íslands, and Nord University (coastal Norway) launched a new international and interdisciplinary collaborative master’s program that allows students to spend one or two semesters studying at one of the partner universities. The program, ‘West Nordic Studies,’ aims to increase the knowledge of common issues in the area, as well as to enhance mobility and strengthen the network, in order for the students to ‘take part in shaping the West-Nordic region’ (UArctic, 2017; WNS, 2017).

In Russia, UArctic's North2North program has also allowed several universities to be involved in student exchanges across the region. This program "gives students in Arctic countries access to different cultural conditions and the possibility to study in other countries in the region" (Ivanov, 2015: 38). However, exchanges are not the only tool in the toolbox for furthering academic collaboration (see Korteniemi, 2011). For a little over 25 years, education has also been a tool for Russia and Norway to develop cross-border collaboration. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Nord University (Nordland, Bodø) in Norway has developed a collaborative network of undergraduate and graduate programs with key Russian universities. The collaboration network started as a bilateral agreement between the Baltic State Technical University in Saint-Petersburg, but successfully grew to include other Russian universities such as MGIMO University (Moscow), Murmansk State Technical University, Northern Arctic Federal University (Arkhangelsk), Tyumen State University and Ukhta State Technical University. Funded by federal governments and local governments and spearheaded by several businesses and research councils, these different programs mainly focus on business administration, engineering, energy management and sustainable management in the High North as they bring together professors and specialists from outside academia (Nord University, 2016).

The above outlined examples of university collaboration were mainly established in order to share and create knowledge about the region, as well as scientific cross-border collaborations on current challenges in the Arctic region. Cross-border university collaborations are not only in the interest of the regional actors, but also the states. Through university collaboration states can show their willingness to cooperate across borders, which can be a state tool for a higher agenda than education, including security issues, peace and stability in the region.

Both the Arctic youth as well as local and regional actors benefit from the knowledge sharing by increasing university collaborations in the Arctic. The collaborations have an effect as more knowledge and research will be produced, and the regional population benefits from research. By working together, the actors highlight their commonalities which reinforces the feeling of belonging to a common Arctic region.

University collaboration across the Arctic adds to the existing collaborations with the South. It helps to collect local knowledge, and these Arctic competencies can contribute to the development in the Arctic as they are based on similarities and common challenges. On the other hand, for now there are still too many disciplines that do not exist in the Arctic, which keeps Arctic actors in a dependent relationship with the South in regard to education and research. This is not likely to change in the foreseeable future.

### **Infrastructure**

The wide distances in the Arctic have traditionally been a barrier to regional collaboration. The development of regional transportation could, however, enhance business opportunities between regional actors. It does not come as a surprise that the number of pan-Arctic transportation collaboration has been increasing over the years.

The local government initiative, Arctic Airlink, has established regular air traffic in the European Arctic, serving airports in northern Finland, Norway and Sweden via direct flights since January 2015 (Arctic Airlink, 2017). The initiative is based on a common understanding of the region's potential, but a lack of direct pan-Arctic transportation in order to make use of the potential:

“Better infrastructure and accessibility is a prerequisite for more and better business, greater labor market, increased tourism, attractiveness and openness between good neighbors” (Ibid.). Through better infrastructure, the actors wish to bring development to the entire region (Idem.).

Shared interests from local actors built the basis for the initiative. By creating better connectivity across the Arctic, the actors aim for the creation of a regional market. The initiative is anchored in the field of transportation but potentially has influence for development for all kinds of stakeholders, as it ties the region closer together and opens up for further cooperation throughout other sectors. The involved regions with their small airports and small or medium-size cities also show similarities in their geographical delineation. Scholars suggest an increasing urbanization in the Arctic in the future, and the above initiative contributes to tying the region closer together (Nord, 2015: 304-5).

By creating local infrastructure collaboration, the region will rely less on “southern” airlines for travels within the European Arctic, as well as save time when travelling. In the long term, it might have an effect on the traditional airlines which might experience fewer passengers, which might influence prices. On the other hand, there are no indications that Arctic air traffic will become less expensive in the future (Rasmussen, 2011: 170). Pan-Arctic collaboration in the field of transportation, such as the above, can serve as a stepping stone for region-building in the Arctic as it potentially could show an effect in all kinds of sectors. The collaboration could be more viable than the traditional connection with the South as it connects the region faster at the same price level.

Another example from the transportation sector is the newly established agreement between the Icelandic shipping company Eimskip and the Port of Portland, Maine, and especially further cooperation that has followed from the agreement. In 2013, Eimskip announced Portland, Maine on the east coast of the United States as their new port in the North-Atlantic (Eimskipafélag Íslands, 2013). The managing director for Eimskip in the US, Larus Isfeld, claims that the choice of Portland was not only because of logistical reasons, but also due to similarities in culture and values with the Arctic home market, which can enhance cooperation for Eimskip:

The reason we came to Maine to start with is we thought the community is like our culture in our other North Atlantic offices, especially in Scandinavia. [...] I think we’re very compatible with the people of Maine. We all come from harsh winters with long dark periods and we’ve always had to fight for our existence. [...] so we understand each other better. A lot of the values Mainers have, you find the same values in Scandinavia. (Mainebiz, 2014).

It is these similarities that make pan-Arctic cooperation easy and beneficial for local actors. Since the arrival of Eimskip in Maine, the potential of further future cooperation between Maine and the Arctic has been investigated by the actors from both sides of the Atlantic. Delegations from Maine visited Iceland and Northern Norway in order to look for future business opportunities (USM, 2017; Arctic Frontiers, 2017), the Arctic Council’s Senior Arctic Officials and Permanent Participant organizations met in Portland in 2016 (Arctic Council, 2016) and Rambøll organised an Arctic Round Table in Portland (Rambøll Group, 2017).

Portland reached out for the collaboration with Iceland mainly for pragmatic reasons, such as logistics, the prospective of a northern shipping route and attractive business opportunities. In addition, the collaboration is enhanced by shared values and conditions in the respective region

as well as good timing for establishing the collaboration. Portland also reached out to Iceland at the same time as Icelandic politicians were keen on developing Iceland's position during their post-crash recovery.

The collaboration will contribute to better connectivity between Iceland/the European North and North America, and offer new business opportunities for local actors. Increasing regional infrastructure collaborations also shows the trend of an urbanizing Arctic, and a general movement to rethink traditional connections. The increasing urbanization of the Arctic will have an effect on the traditional, non-Arctic actors, as these could lose some of their businesses. Pan-Arctic collaboration on infrastructure could be more viable than relying on external (outside the Arctic) ports in the long run, and thus serve as a major contribution to the continued regionalization of the Arctic, especially depending on the melting of the sea ice.

### **Health**

Health care is another sector that provides examples of pan-Arctic cooperation. The North of Norway and its neighboring Russian region have engaged in a region building process during the last 90 years. Amongst others, the region established a visa-free zone in order to enhance the opportunities to travel within the region (Barents Observer, 2017). The towns of Tromsø, Norway and Murmansk, Russia have had a cooperation agreement for more than 90 years. Today, this agreement focuses especially on common interests in public health, health services and infrastructure. One of the aims of the agreement is “[i]mproving competence related to environmental and ‘Arctic’ medicine [...]. There should also be emphasis on strengthening emergency medicine capacity and disaster and emergency preparedness.” (Helse Nord, 2010: 18). The cooperation is thus focused on better health services for local communities across the borders. A similar example can be given from Greenland, where the health care system has had an agreement with Iceland and Denmark since 2009, in order to provide the best service to patients. A concrete outcome of this agreement is the recent decision to send patients from the settlement of Ittoqqortoormiit in East Greenland to Iceland or Denmark instead of Nuuk, the capital of Greenland. In doing so, patients are guaranteed more efficient services (Peqqik, 2017).

The health of their population and provision of ‘the best service’ is a common interest of both regional and state actors, and the Arctic regions “have a long history of international collaboration and cooperation when dealing with issues that affect their communities including human health” (Parkinson et al., 2015: 249). This can also be connected to competency and capacity building as an effect of collaboration in the field of health. Mainly, health collaboration is established due to pragmatic reasons, such as logistics and the lack of local specialists, and shorter distances to specialists across the Arctic than to the South.

Regional health collaboration can result in faster health services and has an effect for the local population, although it also could result in various costs for the local population, such as higher transportation costs and language challenges. Collaboration in the health sector also influences local competency development, as it helps to build competencies in Arctic medicine. In the foreseeable future, collaborations in the health sector might increase the development of local and regional competences, which in the long term can have a positive effect on the whole region. Pan-Arctic collaboration in the health sector has been going on for a long time, and with the right infrastructure (transportation and interpreters) it could become more viable than the North-South collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

With an increase in pan-Arctic collaborations, the Arctic as a globalized region witnesses the rise of a new paradigm, which operates simultaneously with the traditional linkages with the South. Traditionally, the Arctic has been a rather passive object. However, this has changed, and the Arctic is now construed as an active subject in international relations. Through different region-building processes, such as regionalization, these newly established pan-Arctic collaborations between local Arctic stakeholders help accelerate the region-building process, which eventually leads to a better integrated region with a high level of regionness.

In general, pan-Arctic collaborations add to the development of local expertise and competencies, and to more fate control on the part of local stakeholders, as they use their respective local expertise in expanding their collaborations. Although collaborations often start because of pragmatic reasons, in the long term they have an effect on regionalization and the region-building process, as they turn local stakeholders into active actors. Regionalization is a tool of political change as local actors often construe, challenge and rethink the region through the lens of decolonization. In changing the relation between former colonizers and colonized lands and peoples, local collaborations can challenge concepts of state sovereignty and of national boundaries.

Collaborations are both a tool and a consequence of increasing regionalization in the Arctic. Pan-Arctic collaborations often start because of pragmatic reasons, but the similar pre-conditions shared by the local actors also play a role in their developments. The examples outlined in this chapter show that in the field of education, similarities and increased regionalization were the determining factors for collaboration. Collaborations in health service and infrastructure are much more based on pragmatic reasons. The similar pre-conditions are not the root of collaboration in these two areas, but they only help to streamline collaborations between local stakeholders. The pragmatic background may make them more viable than the traditional North-South paradigm in the long term. Collaborations based on similar preconditions add to existing linkages as well as the regionalization process.

In the foreseeable future, collaborations in the Arctic will become more local as the detachment from traditional linkages proceeds. At the same time, the future role of non-Arctic actors, which have evolved outside of the traditional North-South relation, is not to be underestimated, as global interest in the Arctic is booming. In addition, the links between the Arctic and the globalized South are becoming stronger on several levels (e.g., economic level with commercial shipping or even socio-cultural developments). The Arctic as a region evolves at the center of a complex web of relations as it becomes a more integrated region in a globalized world. The new emerging East-West paradigm cannot yet be described as being more viable than traditional North-South collaborations. Instead, the two paradigms operate simultaneously with complex outcomes. However, it is possible to foresee that East-West initiatives are likely to increase in the future. Instead of polarizing the Arctic, the evolution of pan-Arctic collaborations following these two paradigms transforms the Arctic into a more complex region with new opportunities that help the Arctic build itself into a more integrated region.

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