

Combining critical security studies in the Barents Region

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As the 2006-2012 Arctic hype has settled and we are now heading towards the second decade of the 21st century, a sober approach to Arctic security is needed. Traditional military security may never disappear from the Barents, a region that includes a border between Russia and NATO. However, environmental and societal security could keep traditional security aspects in the background, as contemporary critical security aspects are becoming more important for the prosperity of the region. By deepening and widening the security agenda, it is easier to identify who is threatened, whose security we are concerned about and who would be responsible to provide security in the Barents Region. So, in what ways could critical security studies contribute towards a holistic approach to the Barents Region, concerning the environment and local population? Redefining the security of the Barents is imperative in order to pursue solutions for actual security problems instead of hunting ghosts from the past. Environmental and societal security are inherently connected in the Barents Region and a thorough analysis of their interdependence is essential. Chain reactions that could be triggered through a potential damage to the environment could have severe impacts on population that depends heavily on traditional ways of living like fishing, gathering and herding. Moreover, environmental concerns exist within geopolitical agendas as environmental disasters could lead to turmoil and migration. Nevertheless, international and bilateral cooperation in the area, concerning environmental protection and human prosperity, is favouring the endeavours for a better future of the Barents Region.

Introduction

While examining a harsh and fragile area like the Barents Sea, which is a part of the Arctic Ocean, from a geographical perspective, it is very important to consider the environmental issues of the area. Additionally, this environment is the home of Indigenous and other local populations whose prosperity is inherently connected with the welfare of the land and the sea of the region. Critical security studies provide a useful toolbox of analysis of those aspects, by focusing on different referent objects like the environment and people. The environmental security of the Arctic has a twofold application. The first one concerns the protection of the region from potential endogenous sources of environmental harm like an oil spill from an extraction platform or shipping, nuclear waste, plastic waste, biodiversity loss, overfishing and degradation of herding

lands. The second one deals with the exogenous effects of the global climate change in the Barents Region. The rising temperatures, which lead to the shrinking of the sea ice extent and the thawing of the permafrost, should be tackled on the global scale and not in the region under examination per se. The burning of fossil fuels does contribute negatively to climate security issues, while the impacts are often geographically displaced and diverse.

Environmental security in the Barents Region

The environment became part of the security concerns of Norway in the early 2000s. As Hossain et al point out, “While traditional security issues, like war and conflict, may not be a source of tension in the region, non-traditional security issues – transcending national jurisdictions – often pose significant challenges for northern communities” (2017: 3). Even during the first decade of the new millennium, a prevailing concern for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was nuclear waste in northwest Russia. As the Ministry argued,

There exists in our immediate vicinity nuclear energy along with a great number of demobilised nuclear submarines, large stocks of spent reactor fuel and radioactive waste in solid and liquid form. There are hundreds of lighthouses along the coast of the Kola Peninsula run by inadequately secured and highly radioactive sources. We are confronted by a threat to the environment and security; it is obviously in our interests therefore to help solve the problems (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004).

Nuclear contamination or an oil spill in the Barents Sea could ruin its rich fishing waters and severely harm the economies of both Norway and Russia.

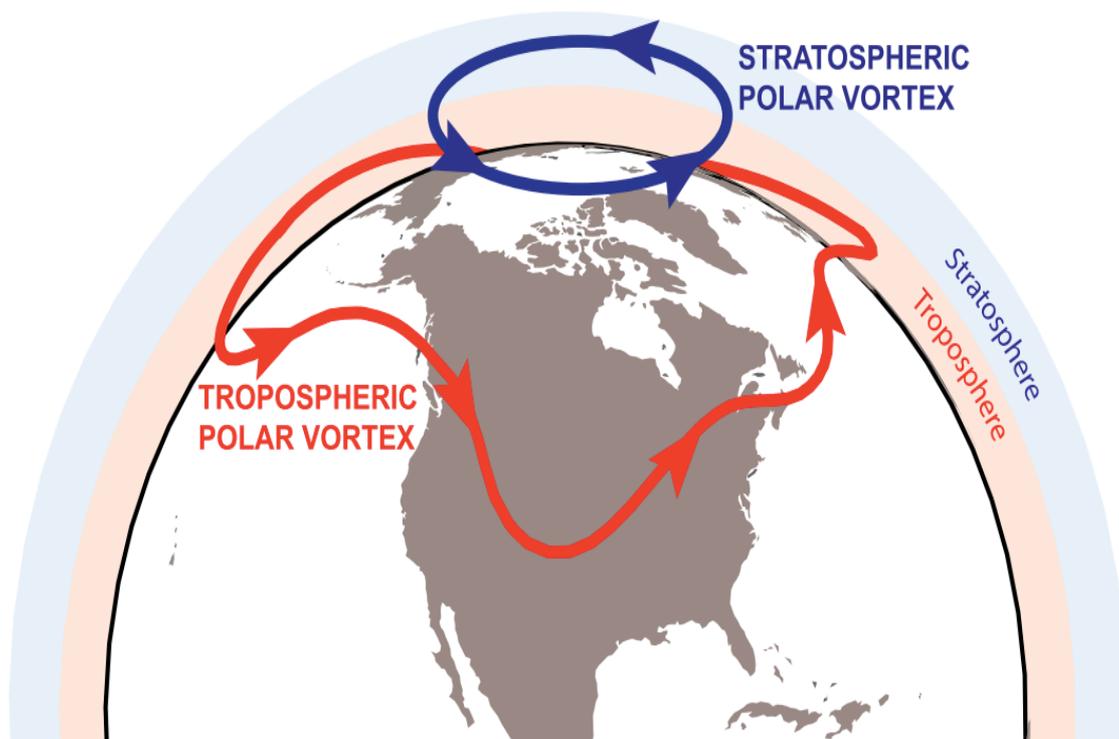
It is not just the physical environment that is changing but also the ecosystem. Global warming has caused several fish species in the Barents Sea to move further northeast at a considerable pace. It is imperative to monitor what is happening north of Svalbard. 2018 was the second-warmest year, after 2017, in the Arctic since 1900. A continuous, rapid increase in temperature has been seen in the region, greater than increases in the rest of the world (Markusson, 2018; Renner, et al, 2018). There are concerns about pollution in the fragile environment of the Svalbard archipelago, as even the smallest leak of diesel is enough to kill sea birds. Furthermore, it is very difficult to take action in the event of an oil spill in the area because of the harsh environmental conditions. If the oil reaches the sea, the damage is done (Berglund, 2013).

The Arctic will continue to change until 2050, even if we manage to stabilise the increasing temperature below the 2°C threshold agreed in the Paris Agreement. Melting sea ice, plastic waste and loss of biodiversity are the major environmental issues in the Arctic and are a significant burden for marine, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. The summer sea ice volume has already been reduced by 75% from the 1970s, and by 2040 it is very likely that the Arctic Ocean will be ice-free during summer (Kroglund, 2018). Along with the shrinking of sea ice, the habitats of sea-ice-dependent species are shrinking as well, with crucial effects on walrus, seals and polar bears. Recent changes in rain and snow patterns are also allowing ice to cover the vegetation (moss and lichens) and, as a result, reindeers and caribous cannot reach their food (Kroglund, 2018). For people who make a living from harvesting, fishing, herding and agriculture, these changes will have devastating effects. Sadly, significant quantities of marine litter have been found in the Arctic, including microplastics. Some of them come from the Arctic, but the majority reaches the Arctic through sea currents from all around the world. More research is needed to understand the true

hazards of microplastics, as they are being absorbed by filter feeding microorganisms that form the very base of the food chain (Gillman, 2018). As the Arctic sea ice retreats, more human activity, such as shipping, fishing and exploration for fossil fuels, is taking place within pristine habitats, increasing the possibility of a disastrous accident that pushes the Arctic region to the brink of a natural catastrophe.

The rate of warming in the Arctic is much faster than that for the rest of the planet, and unusual weather patterns are already developing, such as the “Beast from the East” in the UK in late February 2018 (Gabbatiss, 2018). Recent research has confirmed that temperatures in the Arctic are increasing approximately three times faster than the global average. One of the main reasons is the loss of sea ice in the Region. As Arctic sea ice melts, energy from the sun that would have been reflected is instead absorbed by the ocean. In combination with weather systems, this warming has global effects on climate. A polar vortex, a low-pressure weather system in the stratosphere over the Arctic, creates strong west-to-east winds that encircle the North Pole. Boundary winds between this polar vortex and another in the troposphere create the jet stream winds, and the position and strength of the jet stream have a big impact on mid-latitude weather. When the jet stream is strong, its fast-flowing winds provide a barrier between the cold air over the Arctic and the milder air further south. When it weakens, the jet stream slows and can develop kinks. This allows the cold Arctic air to spill out into the mid-latitudes and for warmer air to spill in the Arctic Region (McSweeney, 2018).

Figure 1: Schematic of stratospheric (blue) and tropospheric (red) polar vortices.



(Vaugh, Sobel, & Polvani, 2017: 38)

If the updated Paris agreement target of limiting the global rise in temperature to 1.5°C is not

achieved, important fish species, such as the Atlantic cod and its Arctic relative, the Polar cod, would have less chance of survival. Moreover, their habitats could move further north, as many of these species can spawn only in very cold waters. For example, Atlantic cod currently spawn near the Lofoten archipelago, northwest of Norway. The currents take the floating eggs, and later the larvae, northwards to their ideal living conditions in the Barents Sea (Ryan, 2019). Rising temperatures are not the only problem for the fish. Increased acidification of the oceans and seas has also been observed because as more CO₂ builds up in the atmosphere, more dissolves in the ocean. Carbon dioxide reacts with water to form carbonic acid, which acidifies the ocean. As a result, the traditional habitats of Atlantic and Polar cod around the coasts of Norway and Iceland are becoming warmer and more acidic. Consequent losses for the fishing industry could be severe, as £2 billion-worth of cod (800,000 tonnes) are caught in this area every year.

Societal security in the Barents Region

According to the Copenhagen School of thought, societal security is “the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats” (Wæver et al, 1993: 23). Societal security considers the issues that affect the identity of a society, because if a society loses its identity, it could cease to exist. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) argue that when the existence of a society or a societal identity is threatened, resulting in the possible loss of a communal feeling, protection of the society’s survival and sustainability call for extraordinary measures. Giddens (1991) has argued that societal security is rooted in political sociology – it is about a relationship between community and security. The Aberystwyth School of thought has contributed to the deepening of the security agenda from the state towards community and individuals. In the Barents Region, the Indigenous communities could be the most valuable actor and contribute the most to the welfare of the Indigenous population. As has been argued by Booth, security of the state does not always mean the security of the individual.

Human security can adequately promote societal security for the populations of the Barents Region by protecting their identities and the existence of their distinct communities. “Human security, as a concept and theoretical platform, can support different voices and perspectives” (Hoogensen, 2014: 70). The understanding of human security overlaps with the concept of societal security, as “the ability of a society to persist under changing conditions and possible and actual threats. More specifically ... the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom” (Hosain et al, 2017: 61). Placing the individual and the societies where they belong as referent objects, the key aspect of societal security becomes the security of every individual.

According to the regional security complex theory of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, “since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters – security complexes” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 4). Within a security complex, states and other actors are strongly related such that their securities are entangled and inseparable. In the Arctic region, this idea applies to the environment and the Indigenous populations, who are spread across national borders. The work of the Arctic Council – from the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (ACIA) and Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) to the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) (2009) and Search and Rescue agreement (2011) – follows the principles of a regional security complex. Security complexes are particularly remarkable in the Arctic, as they address traditional security

issues even though the primary basis for the interdependence of security issues is human security (Exner-Pirot, 2012). Sven-Roald Nystø, former president of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament, argued that the renewed securitisation of the Norwegian Arctic through the government's High North Initiative (Jensen & Skedsmo, 2010; Jensen, 2012) has produced a dynamic, with negative implications for Sámi:

We are talking on environmental security, society security, energy security, and so on and so on. And that in itself puts much more light on the high political issues in the Arctic and excludes a lot of stakeholders in the discussion on how to put forward civility in the Arctic debate. I think we have taken a couple of steps back in the desecuritization on the Arctic, and where it ends I'm not quite sure, but one of the losers in that process are, of course, Indigenous peoples" (Greaves, 2016: 473).

When an issue or a complex set of issues is moved into high-level politics or onto the security agenda, the voices of the weaker stakeholders, who are still concerned about these issues, are usually excluded from the new policies or strategies. In the Barents Region, where human, environmental, energy and economic security are interconnected, the voices of the Indigenous population must be seriously considered. Climate change is integrated with environmental security and has many different implications. The ongoing climate change and its effects have to be controlled, while at the same time populations have to adapt, to the already observed impacts at societal level, as it pressures Indigenous communities into certain ways of living. Consequently, climate change is a major threat to the "wellbeing of Arctic residents and their communities" (Althingi, 2011).

Life-changing threats of societal and human security in the Barents Region are related with widespread economic development, environmental protection, culture and identity. By

using human security as an analytical tool, factors that threaten the societal security of Arctic populations can be identified. In this way, human security can be used as a tool to voice the concerns, perceptions, and desires of Arctic populations. It can also be used by policy-makers and local stakeholders to decide on matters that will benefit both local Arctic populations and the region at large (Hossain, Martín, & Petrétei, 2018, p. 391).

The industry of fossil fuel exploration and exploitation is associated with unethical activity that has caused environmental and human insecurities, mostly in the global South, with the support of authoritarian or repressive regimes (Moody, 2007). In 2006, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights and TNCs (transnational corporations), John Ruggie, claimed that

the extractive sector – oil, gas, and mining – utterly dominates this sample of reported abuses, with two-thirds of the total ... The extractive industries also account for most allegations of the worst abuses, up to and including complicity in crimes against humanity, typically for acts committed by public and private security forces protecting 15 company assets and property; large-scale corruption; violations of labour rights; and a broad array of abuses in relation to local communities, especially Indigenous people (UNCHR, 2006: 25).

It has been argued that the extracting industry is one of the greatest threats for Arctic Indigenous

communities, as they depend on land and natural resources. Membership of an Indigenous community depends on certain Indigenous practices. For example, reindeer herding is an important symbol of Sámi identity and it is an exclusive right of the Sámi in Norway and Sweden. “When extractive industries hinder such traditional ways of living, the unity and societal cohesion of the Indigenous community is threatened, which in turn threatens their community security, which is the source of a unique identity” (Petrétei, 2016: 158).

An interviewed Canadian academic expert on Indigenous Arctic populations has confirmed that in Russia, Indigenous populations are viewed completely differently from how they are viewed in Scandinavia or Canada. “They [the Russians] do not have the same ethos of protecting indigenous [people]. In Russia, to be considered indigenous, your ethnic group has to have less than 40,000 people. So, for example Yakuts and Komi are not considered indigenous. They don’t speak Russian but still they are not indigenous for the Russian government. They have some protection through the federal system but not through the Indigenous system and that is very different from Canada or Norway. Everything is more centralised, to Russia” (Canadian academic expert, 2017). However, a Russian affairs expert that I interviewed commented on the fact that there are Russian Indigenous communities with special rights in the vast Russian Arctic lands, and that their permission is needed in order to explore for gas or oil. Nevertheless, there is corruption because these communities are vulnerable. “It is easy to treat them in a nasty way. You can bribe them, they are vulnerable to alcohol, and you can find ways to make an agreement that will dis-benefit them” (Senior lecturer of human geography, 2017). This statement aligns with the report of UNCHR (United Nations Commission on Human Rights), which showed that the Indigenous population of North-Eastern Russia have been mistreated for the benefit of the extractive industry.

At the same time, it has been argued that the new Russian Arctic discourse does not depict the North as a remote and hostile region that should be ‘conquered’, but instead indicates that the Russian state and society treat the Arctic region as a natural and integral part of the country that should be taken care of. A more positive and attractive image of the Arctic has been developed, as it is now related with ideas of growth, prosperity and innovation. Additionally, as Sergunin argues, Russia recognises the Arctic as a region of peace and stability, where different identities can be reconciled and harmonized (Sergunin, 2018: 54).

The concepts of human security and sustainable development have now been established within the Russian Arctic municipalities. Nevertheless, most Russian Arctic cities are not aware of the human security and sustainable development strategic documents, and the economic, ecological and social dimensions are often not harmonized with one another. The major difficulty is how to translate the words into actions, as many planned human security and sustainable development projects have not materialised. A lack of transparency in the policy planning process and a lack of co-operation within civil society institutions are the major weak points of the urban development strategies. Unfortunately, “to a large extent, the policy planning and implementation process is still of the top-down rather than bottom-up nature” (Sergunin, 2018: 69). Better co-ordination of human security and sustainable development strategies is, therefore, imperative. Yet, as Sergunin argues, “despite the problems and shortcomings, the total ‘balance sheet’ of the Arctic cities’ human security and sustainable development strategies and general dynamics is rather positive. The AZRF municipalities are serious about solving numerous socio-economic and environmental problems and making these urban areas better and more comfortable places to live in” (Sergunin,

2018: 70).

It could be argued that, although Russia is behind other Arctic regions in relation to human and societal security in the Barents Region, it is trying to enhance the economic prosperity of its Arctic populations while taking into account the environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development. An important element of this process is the participation of the local communities in decision-making and the implementation of these decisions.

Growing awareness of the importance of environmental security, access to health and education, food security and Indigenous governance within the Barents Region is shaping future resource extraction. For that reason, these topics have become higher on the agendas of northern governments and peoples even from 2007 (Heininen & Nicol, 2007). The authors elaborated more on how climate, food, health and education are forming new security aspects. “The real tension is in reconciling how our understanding of how environmental conditions, like climate stability or access to resources, food and health and education services, are de facto ‘human rights’ issues and should be calculated into any consideration of the meaning of security” (Nicol & Heininen, 2013: 80). So, it is clear that critical security studies, even indirectly, are gaining more recognition among the security agenda. Environmental protection aspects, access to resources, food, health and education are now among the major security elements of the Barents’ populations.

In Norway, the costs and benefits of Arctic development have been intensively discussed, especially in relation to the Lofoten Islands. “Unlike in Canada and Greenland, in Norway there is not about Indigenous versus non-Indigenous populations but a discordance among fishermen and oil executives, green parties and other political institutions, corporate interests, such as Equinor, and regional and local governments” (Finnish Professor on Arctic politics, 2017). Deep-water oil and gas drilling have been postponed in the Lofoten–Vesterålen region because of their potential impact on cod fisheries and sensitive spawning grounds, yet the oil industry has significant licensed areas for exploration and active offshore drilling operations in the Barents Sea.

The Canadian expert on the Arctic’s Indigenous people that was interviewed pointed out a significant differentiation between the North American Arctic and the Barents Arctic. “The Sámi are so few compared with the populations in Canada and have been integrated for hundreds of years in their Scandinavian countries’ life. They are richer, better educated and more integrated but they have less power. It is the opposite for the Canadian and Alaskan Indigenous people” (Canadian academic expert, 2017). Similarly, a senior researcher from the Arctic Institute argued that the Sámi people are very well integrated within Norwegian society. “In general, they live side-by-side with the non-natives. There are some minor problems in their societies but no major problems in general. Some who live more traditionally face some problems concerning herding fields and mining, and there are key cases of dumping mining materials in northern Norway. There are no Indigenous concerns on the oil and gas debate” (Senior researcher at the Arctic Institute, 2017).

Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway, has stated: “The degradation of the environment in Inuit and Saami traditional territories caused by pollution, non-sustainable natural resource extraction and climate change constitute a great threat to their traditional lifestyles and culture” (Keskitalo, 2006). It is clear that Sámi in Norway see the natural environment and its link to Indigenous cultural practices as being at the centre of what insecurity means in their Arctic homeland (Greaves, 2016). The ongoing expansion of fossil fuel exploitation in the Barents Region

is a worrying concern to the coastal Sámi, as it could have negative effects on the fishing sector (Kristoffersen & Dale, 2014).

Norway tried to eliminate the Sámi cultural and religious distinctiveness through state policies of ‘Norwegianization’ until the mid-20th century (Minde, 2005), but in the past 30 years, Sámi institutions have promoted linguistic and cultural communities throughout Norway, and language has become one of the most important markers of Sámi self-determination (Greaves, 2016: 471). During the Cold War, and the securitisation of the Norway–Russia border, Sámi’s rights on land use were hampered as the states took security and defence decisions without considering Sámi interests, “so Sámi deliberately avoided the language of security in order to keep open their options or possibilities for resolving their struggle for political good will” (Greaves, 2016: 473).

The two major issues for the Sámi are conflicts about land use, which affect their reindeer herding areas, and the preservation of Sámi language and culture. Their security is defined by protecting the environment, indigenous identity and cultural practices, and autonomy and self-determination. The establishment of institutions of self-determination in northern Norway prevents the political rights of the Sámi from being endangered. Even climate change is not a security issue per se, and it relates only to reindeer herding and other food sources. In general, Sámi do not use securitising language to describe hazards for their interests, and they do not want to securitise social and environmental issues, even though they use security language occasionally (Greaves, 2016).

One more crucial reason that Sámi are not keen to securitise their interests is that security in Norway is still seen as a discourse within the authority of the state, mostly because the existing threats – including military conflict – are from Russia. Fear of the ‘Russian Other’ has always been present in Norway and Russia affects many contemporary security policies of Norway (Åtland & Pedersen, 2008; Pedersen, 2009; Jensen & Skedsmo, 2010). As Jensen argues,

Everything that smacks of ‘security’ acquires a very particular status in Norwegian discourses on the High North. Discourses are wrapped in history, and here in the north, close to Russia, discursive fragments from the Cold War continue to ring like echoes from the past ... There is no more obvious place for prolonging a sense of paranoia and general insecurity than in relation to the High North, where Norway’s national identity as a tiny, vulnerable land and the image of massive Russia (‘the Russian bear’) as ‘the radical other’ are clear and easily resuscitated in the ‘collective Norwegian mind’ (Jensen, 2012: 90, 94).

Sámi have not outlined their security concerns as security threats. Firstly, changing climate patterns do not present an existential threat to the Sámi community. Secondly, Sámi are integrated into Norwegian society and have the full benefits of citizenship in the only social democratic petrostate¹ of the world, and there are no claims of insecurity of the Sámi from the Norwegian state. Thirdly, the importance of Russia in Norwegian security policy means that other security issues are mostly overshadowed. Also, as a researcher from the Fridtjof Nansen Institute added, “most of the Indigenous live in the Finnmark region of Norway, where they use the territory and are not marginalised. The Hammerfest’s offshore oil field [Goliat] is a very important investment, creating many jobs. The oil field [is] a regional issue as well, as it is a development for the whole population. Unlike in Russia or Alaska, there are no onshore activities, which can create conflicts with the Indigenous populations” (Senior researcher at FNI, 2017).

Last but not least, the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy has also commented on the populations of northern Norway:

Sustainable development activities rendered enormous opportunities for employment. Local communities have made themselves relevant to these activities by supplying goods and services to oil and gas activities. So, the activities are not a threat to the population, but an opportunity for employment. Activities are bases for supplies, growing population and families. Instead of asking for challenges, ask for opportunities. Bases were built for supplying the oil and gas industry, which led to population growth and indirect employment. As a result, there are more taxi drivers, restaurants, many other jobs and, consequently, more families in the northern Norway. Before an area becomes open for oil and gas licensing/activities, the government produces impact assessments. And it is important that it is not just a certain environmental impact assessment, but it is a total impact assessment, as it also deals with socioeconomic challenges but also opportunities of activities. This is part of the thinking that was mentioned before – instead of asking for challenges, ask for opportunities (Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, 2017).

The Indigenous communities had to deal with abuses and injustice from the states in the past, but through international recognition, they are now more capable of securing their rights and pointing out their security concerns, which are mainly environmental and human security issues. The Norwegian side of the Barents Region has many differences from the Russian side that create different issues in relation to Indigenous populations. In Norway, the main disputes onshore concern mining activities and installation of infrastructure for renewable energy rather than the oil and gas sector, which is the main source of disputes on the Russian side. By contrast, in the Norwegian Barents Sea there is much more exploration and exploitation than on the Russian side. In both countries, Indigenous populations face the effects of climate change on herding and fishing activities, and the communities that depend heavily on these activities are at considerable risk.

In order to achieve greater Indigenous participation in Arctic discourse, the agenda could be broadened to acknowledge and include the concerns of the Indigenous populations that relate to contemporary Arctic geopolitics. In that respect, power would be counterbalanced by knowledge, physical space would be replaced by identity and resilience, and people would be the referent object rather than states. For this to be achieved, organisations that represent Indigenous populations should be included in the A5² conferences and discussions and enhance their involvement in the A8³. Furthermore, the eight Arctic states should prioritise activities that would improve co-operation on Arctic aspects. For example, arguing that exploitation of fossil fuels should be done under stricter environmental standards is less reasonable than investing in and favouring the renewable energy sector, which would suggest an honest attempt at sustainable development. Moreover, scientific knowledge on climate change and its impacts on local, regional and global scales could be enhanced by the local, traditional environmental knowledge of the Indigenous Arctic populations. In this way, regional institutions – both state and non-state actors – are very important and should be included in the discussions. Institutions such as the Arctic Council promote co-operation at the regional level on climate change, sustainable development and quality of life, highlighting that the most important elements of analysis are within the field of

development rather than geopolitics. Conversant, critical and broadened discussion of northern human security is essential for the Arctic and, as a consequence, for the Barents Region (Nicol & Heininen, 2013: 84).

It is widely accepted that the current most significant changes in the Barents Region are environmental, such as disrupted and unpredictable seasonal patterns, thinner sea ice each year and thawing permafrost (ACIA, 2004; ACIA, 2005). These environmental changes pose a risk to those who depend on nature (fishing and herding) for their livelihoods. Besides the impacts of climate change, global and local polluters, such as plastic and nuclear waste, are threatening the region and its inhabitants. In addition, food and health insecurity and high rates of alcoholism, suicide and domestic violence reduce the quality of life and wellbeing of Arctic inhabitants. Hundreds of years of interactions between humans and nature have made the Arctic what it is today and preserving this environment and ecosystem for the future generations is invaluable. It is obligatory and urgent to balance economic activities with environmental preservation if we want to provide social and human security to the next generations, as the exploitation of fossil fuels is not only the major source of pollution and a challenge to traditional uses of land, but also the main source of jobs and revenue in many Arctic regions. Though the region is connected historically with fossil fuel exploration and exploitation, more and bigger future developments of this kind could impede the security of other local communities, groups or individuals. It is vital to scrutinise the predominant societal and human security challenges of the Barents Region to obtain substantial support towards the development and implementation of targeted policies (Hossain, Martín, & Petrétei, 2018).

Avoiding a securitised sustainable development

Global climate strikes held on March 15th, 2019 by more than 1 million students and young people were a call for politicians to act fast on climate change. In April 2019, climate protests in London lasted for more than a week with the aim of pushing the British government towards a more aggressive climate target than the existing target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. It could be argued that these actions are pushing the issues of climate change and sustainable development into high politics and even onto the security agenda. In this situation, the audience is convinced by scientists and researchers that the referent objects – the Earth's climate and development that could allow the system of the planet to continue indefinitely into the future – have to be placed further up the political agenda. Consequently, the audience is trying to convince politicians to push for stricter policies on sustainable development and climate change.

Besides environmental issues, sustainable development also refers to economic and social issues. As it has been argued in the past, sustainable development does not mean environmental preservation. Development incorporates the aspects of economic improvement that are imperative for the preservation and functionality of human societies. The concept of national security has been transformed in the age of globalisation, and the military security within a territorial area has been interwoven with human, economic and environmental aspects. Nevertheless, any attempt to achieve sustainability in a few countries is quite inadequate if other countries are using unsustainable practices, as the environment is global and its protection needs global agreements (Dresner, 2002). In addition, it is very difficult to prove that sustainability has been achieved. Even if we could minimise or eliminate all known unsustainable activities, it is ambitious to try to deal with activities that are only suspected to be unsustainable, and it is impossible to remove all present

and future cradles of unsustainability. But ultimately, “The alternative to the pursuit of sustainability is to continue along the present path of unsustainability, leading to disaster” (Dresner, 2002: 173).

A highly politicised sustainable development could mean that the principles of sustainability – the environment, human societies and their economic prosperity – could be placed high in the political agenda and scrutinised as a system rather than independently. However, the problems and potential solutions must be developed and introduced into the political agenda by the societies that face the difficulties, thereby combining local and scientific knowledge to create a bottom-up policy approach. If the combination of sustainability awareness in high politics and inclusion of local societies could be achieved, the possibility of sustainability would be increased.

Environmental protection must remain on the political agenda, as securitisation of sustainability issues could have adverse effects not only for the population but also the environment. A securitised sustainable development would not include local knowledge and scientific consultation would be limited. Using pretexts that something is contributing to or impeding sustainable development, governments could use the securitised sustainable development speech to justify an action, undermining local communities and neglecting the environmental needs of a region.

Conclusion

The Barents Region is not a homogenous region. Nevertheless, there are common elements that create a common, distinct societal identity. Such elements include the geography and the traditional communities with specific norms, customs and traditional livelihoods that are based on herding and fishing. The most important issue for Indigenous societies in the Barents Region is sustainability, as sustainability is the only way that they could continue to practice their traditional way of living and preserve their society. At the same time, they are enduring the challenges of climate change and economic globalisation.

The Copenhagen School of thought is useful for bringing the environmental and societal insecurity of populations in the Barents Region onto the political agenda, by broadening that agenda from military security to other forms of insecurity without securitising acts for those issues. Inclusion of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in the formal decision-making institutions could be very helpful for balancing the interests of every actor in the region. Accordingly, the Aberystwyth School of thought has a substantial effect on the analysis of the region by deepening the agenda from the state level to the community and individual level, which helps to examine the societal challenges in the Indigenous communities. It becomes clear now that the combination “...of the two schools into a larger approach paves the way for a more critical engagement with security on part of the security analyst, allowing for normative – but denying infinite – conceptualisations of security” (Floyd, 2007: 336).

In this article I outlined the contemporary environmental and societal issues within the Barents Sea and the Barents Region of Norway and Russia, and how they are inherently connected. In a region with a historically important border between NATO (Norway) and Russia, securitising moves towards environment or societal issues are not going to materialise because traditional security aspects would continue to exist, even in the background. Nevertheless, international and bilateral co-operation in relation to environmental protection and human prosperity in the area favours a better future for the Barents Region.

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Notes

1. Petrostate: A state whose wealth stems from the sale of fossil fuels, mainly oil.
2. A5: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, Russia, and the United States.
3. A8: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States.

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