A Geopolitical Outlook on Arctification in Northern Europe: Insights from Tourism, Regional Branding, and Higher Education Institutions

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This paper discusses the everyday bordering practices of non- and sub-state actors in the European Arctic through a geopolitical lens. Specifically, we analyse the mechanisms, aims, and effects of how regional development and higher education and research institutions (HER), as well as the tourism sector, in climatically subarctic Fennoscandia, actively reposition themselves as centrally located in the Arctic. We depart from a critical and economic reading of geopolitics, which enquires into the production of territories of wealth, power, security, and belonging. Given the global publicity of the Arctic in media, research, and politics, the region has become an economic opportunity for sparsely populated areas in the European High North. This rescaling towards the global Arctic, also termed Arctification, offers non- and sub-state bodies the possibility to turn a historically deprived peripheral location into a competitive advantage. Hence, the Arctic moves southwards into Fennoscandian provinces that until recently had shown little identification with the region. The soft borders of the Arctic render the region a relational space that can be adapted and reinterpreted according to the interests of different actors. As such, Arctification appears to be a geopolitical process that alters representations of both the Arctic and the Nordic countries, which is nonetheless rooted in the global circuits of contemporary capitalism.

Introduction

A defining and widely discussed feature of the Arctic are the region's 'fuzzy borderlands' (Heininen, 2014: 241), located within the jurisdiction of eight nation-states. Research has addressed the dynamism of Arctic borders, for instance in the context of climate change. Diminishing sea ice has enabled the marine operations of a multitude of international players in the region, but this challenges conventional notions of sovereign resource rights of states and law (Shake et al., 2018). Moreover, border concerns are prominent in issues of Arctic governance, such as the clash between Indigenous self-determination and Westphalian state boundaries (Shadian, 2018), post-Cold War cooperation and the establishment of multilateral cross-border institutions (Wilson Rowe, 2018), or the Arctic Council's shift from territorially defined legitimation to open governance, which allows different states to take on observer roles in the organisation (Ingimundarson, 2014;

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Koivurova, 2010). Indeed, international interest in the Arctic and the alignment of non-Arctic states with the circumpolar region have dramatically increased over the past two decades and are said to be driven by economic, political, and ecological future(s) that are projected within the region (Dodds, 2013; Väätänen & Zimmerbauer, 2020). Against this background, the term 'global Arctic' emerged as a reference both to the co-constitution of the Arctic and the global and to the region's transformation into a platform for international cooperation (Heininen & Finger, 2018). It has been noted that this arena is inherently multiscalar and as such is not limited to nation-state actors and high politics (Stephenson, 2018). At the meso and micro levels there are private enterprises, sub-national bodies, research institutions, and people actively involved in transforming and negotiating the Arctic and its boundaries on an everyday basis (Rumford, 2008; Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019; Timothy et al., 2016). This vantage point has its roots in the focus of contemporary border studies on relational notions of space where borders are conceived as "an active verb – bordering – and a space of struggle where value, rationality, meaning, symbols, and action shape our knowledge and spatial practices" beyond the exclusive realm of sovereign countries (Peña, 2021: 15). Nevertheless, the nation-state dominates as the unit of choice in analyses of circumpolar geopolitics and border dynamics, while most research attention has been devoted to the A5 High Arctic. Climatically subarctic European regions have received far less consideration, although a number of recent studies underscore the growing incorporation of the Arctic in regional domestic matters (e.g. Coates & Holroyd, 2020; Tennberg et al., 2019). Müller and Viken (2017: 288) termed this phenomenon 'Arctification', denoting a process of creating "new geographical imaginations of the north of Europe as part of the Arctic and consecutively new social, economic and political relations."

This paper examines these everyday 'geo-graphing' or bordering practices of non- and sub-state actors in the European Arctic through a geopolitical lens. Specifically, we analyse the mechanisms, aims, and respective effects of how regional development and higher education and research institutions (HER), as well as the tourism industry, in the Fennoscandian north actively shape the Arctic. While these three sectors are central spheres of contemporary Nordic society and economy (Coates & Holroyd, 2020; Husebekk et al. 2020), scrutiny from geopolitical vantage points has been rather limited. Nevertheless, this perspective not only amends the nation-state predominance within the circumpolar International Relations (IR) and political science literature but also highlights the significance of the service and knowledge-based economy in the Arctic, which are oftentimes overlooked given the region's vast natural resource reservoirs (Busch, 2021; Mineev et al., 2020).

In the remainder, we first introduce the main tenets of geopolitical thought that have permeated Arctic (border) research. We then apply a material reading of geopolitics, as outlined by Moisio (2018) and Väätänen (2021), to the examination of tourism and regional development, plus the research and education sector, in northern Sweden and Finland with the aim of illuminating how the Arctic is put to work and filled with meaning. In our case, geopolitics refers to "the production of territories of wealth, power, security and belonging (…) [including] the conflicts and contradictions entailed therein" (Moisio, 2018: 41) and merges absolute and relational dimensions of space. In other words, the objective of our enquiry is to connect the effects of the political choices – rooted in the social and economic dynamics of capitalism and globalisation – of non- and sub-state actors to the region's human and non-human environments. As Dodds (2018: 194) reminds us, such analysis of the 'global Arctic' is a timely undertaking, given that power geometries

can "be reconfigured, reimagined and restored in ways that benefit some people, places, practices, interests, and ideas more than others." We conclude by discussing our findings in the light of the Arctic in the Anthropocene and the global ecological and economic challenges for local societies that lie ahead.

Arctic geopolitics and shifting borders

The Arctic itself is frequently referred to as "a space of and for geopolitics" (Dittmer et al. 2011: 202). As such, geopolitics has been employed as both a theoretical foundation and an empirical object of research. Most examinations within an Arctic context depart from a classical, neo-realist approach to geopolitics, which focuses on nation-states' interventions in the region driven by security concerns and resource competition, including the race for new shipping routes (Powell & Dodds, 2014). With respect to borders, current geopolitical scholarship particularly emphasises the consequences of geophysical alterations caused by climate change, which manifest due to Arctic amplification being much more severe in the northern hemisphere than elsewhere on the globe (Jayaram et al., 2021). Retreating sea ice and melting glaciers challenge maritime borders and the sovereignty of the littoral Arctic states, while external countries justify their presence in the region with its global commercial, political, and scientific relevance (Strandsbjerg, 2012). Especially critical geopolitics scholarship, which emphasises spatialising discourses, underscores that the region is a space where geopolitics and geoeconomics are deeply intertwined in the global scramble for its resources, yet peaceful interstate cooperation and multiscalar governance outweigh conflict (Busch, 2021). Nilsson (2018) argues that there occurred a shift in the region from a concern for human or national security during the Cold War to retaining peace also for the sake of safeguarding business operations of firms and states. Indeed, in most of the A8 strategy papers, the Arctic is seen as an economic opportunity for sustainable development, and a multi-stakeholder engagement of private, public, and third-sector bodies is favoured (Heininen et al., 2020). Väätänen (2021) exemplifies this in the case of Finland's endeavours to gain a competitive edge in the global race for the Arctic by highlighting the country's unique geographical expertise in generating solutions to the region's problems. The reconfiguration of 'the Arctic from a global economic periphery to a landscape in which numerous state and non-state actors from within and beyond the region hold a significant stake' also gives rise to further border dynamics (Stephenson, 2018: 183). Drawing upon critical geopolitics, Väätänen and Zimmerbauer (2020) explore how France and Japan reposition themselves as Arctic countries in order to gain legitimacy in the region. Furthermore, using ice as a geopolitical metaphor, Dodds (2021) elucidates how the thawing and melting of the cryosphere can be understood in tandem with political, economic, and social changes in the region that accompany mobile borders. Regional and nation-state branding is another sphere of geopolitical typesetting that aims to generate a competitive advantage in global capitalism. As a strategic instrument "for the politics of geographical imaginations", branding is inherently a balancing act between competing narratives on the genuine nature of a spatial entity that might exclude unwanted subjects and thus be a form of bordering (Browning & de Oliveira, 2017: 496). Concerning the audience of branding strategies, international investment and tourism are the prime targets. Particularly the latter is increasingly regarded as a geopolitical force itself with respect to the sector's power to shape the image of places (Mostafanezhad et al., 2020) and its utility for states to exert territorial influence without official power, as seen in China's strategy for enhancing tourism in the Arctic (Bennett & Iaquinto, 2021).

Although sub-state and commercial bodies are frequently mentioned alongside transnational actors as significant players in the Arctic (Stephenson, 2018), there do not seem to be many geopolitical enquiries into how these entities harness the region spatially. In order to fill this gap, we draw upon Moisio's (2018) aforementioned economic reading of geopolitics in our discussion of tourism, regional development, and higher education and research because this conceptualisation offers a platform for combining structure and agency as well as the representational and the material. In the following section, we first introduce the interrelationships between our three case fields, along with the socioeconomic significance of these fields in the Arctic.

Geo-graphing the Arctic: a geopolitical examination of tourism, regional development, and higher research and education institutions

Not only in the Arctic but also in other places, there has been a strong call for "a triangular alliance of government, academia, and private business" as a promising pathway for sustainable regional development (Heininen et al., 2020: 249). Such sentiment has its roots in the governance revolution (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2020) and in the economic shift in Western nations from industrial production to the dominance of the service sector and the knowledge-based economy (Moisio, 2018). The former denotes a wave of public management reforms in OECD countries that were triggered by advancing globalisation, financial crises, and calls for more efficient administrative structures able to absorb growing economic and societal complexities. As such, state power devolved not only to corporate bodies in the form of public-private partnerships, network structures including higher education institutions, NGOs, and civil society, but also to sub-state governments. The knowledge-based economy, as a post-Fordist mode of producing goods and services, represents a fundamental alternation in socioeconomic organisation that is generally rooted in neoliberal political regulation. It is argued that knowledge-intensive capitalism requires a human subject characterised by an entrepreneurial attitude, and is spatially constituted through places, such as technopoles, smart cities, or trans-border regions (Moisio, 2019). HER are crucial in this respect as institutional agents that equip students with the desired enterprising mindset, support regional development, and produce research outputs that are (economically) competitive at a global scale. Yet, given the common view of the Arctic as resource extraction periphery, innovative business activities based on "northern lifestyle and values" are often side-lined in regional reviews (Mineev et al., 2020: 147). Tourism emerged in this context as a vital option in many Nordic regional development strategies due to the sector's low entry barriers and the possibility to obtain EU funding for exploiting regional assets such as the natural environment (Giordano, 2017). Before the COVID-19 pandemic brought international travel to an abrupt halt, tourism based on the aurora borealis, the cold, snow, nature, and Indigenous culture had been growing significantly in many Arctic regions (Müller & Viken, 2017).

Stereotypes and fuzzy borders of a touristic Arctic

Although the Arctic is a conglomerate of various biomes, political systems, environments, and cultures (Müller, 2015), in tourism the region seems to always relate to the same images of a cold, white landscape devoid of any human trace (Hall & Saarinen, 2010). In line with this, Saarinen and Varnajot (2019) observed that, whatever the location within the circumpolar North, tourism products and experiences coalesce around identical activities as well, namely snowmobiling, dogsledding, reindeer farm visits, and chasing the northern lights. These Arctic tourism practices resonate with the collective imaginaries forged by outsiders through the media, movies, and popular

myths (Fjellestad, 2016) that are, nonetheless, major pull factors for incoming tourists. However, these issues overshadow the reality and diversity of the Arctic region (Rantala et al., 2019), and Arctic tourism appears to be grounded in a stereotypical production of cryospheric elements and an oversimplification of the region's nature and cultures, both of which are defining components of the Arctification phenomenon (Carson, 2020; Lundmark et al., 2020).

In the European North, Arctification has been increasing alongside the rapid growth of tourism in the region and is palpable in the production of Swedish and Finnish Lapland as standardised representations of the Arctic (Müller & Viken, 2017). Given the rise in touristic interest in the Arctic, usually explained by the intensifying public attention to the Arctic (Lundmark et al., 2020) and climate change debates (Hovelsrud et al., 2011), these Arctic core elements have become central to strategic tourism promotion and offer opportunities for economic development. This has resulted in "places and regions using Arctic imaginary [despite] being geographically located south of the Arctic Circle, which is generally regarded as the border of the Arctic region" (Tervo-Kankare & Saarinen, 2020: 58). In this respect, there are several places in northern Finland, located south of the Arctic Circle, that have developed tourism activities grounded in Arctic imaginaries. For instance, in Kemi icebreaker tours are arranged in the frozen Bothnian Bay (Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019), and Oulu hosts a 'reindeer fair' every year (Tervo-Kankare & Saarinen, 2020). Similarly, in Sweden, the recently built 'Arctic Bath' spa and wellness hotel – situated north of Luleå and south of the Arctic Circle – promotes typical Nordic sauna activities infused with Arctic semantics and imaginaries.

Within the fuzzy borderlands of the Arctic (Heininen, 2014), tourism emerges as an interesting point for conceptual discussion. Although the Arctic Circle has often been regarded as the border for Arctic tourism (Varnajot 2019a), Arctification operates as a driving force that shifts opportunities for Arctic tourism experiences and products southwards and, therefore, also pushes the border of the Arctic in tourism southwards. This circumstance gains significance regarding the generally absent historical economic and social identification of northern Sweden and Finland with the Arctic prior to these countries' membership in the Arctic Council (Keskitalo, 2004). Moreover, these touristic bordering processes are exercised by private and sub-state actors on a rather mundane basis instead of at the level of high politics (Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019). Müller (2021) finds that, even though the travel sector has been acknowledged in the A8 nations' Arctic strategies as a meaningful economic activity for peripheries in the High North, tourism represents no significant geopolitical tool of statecraft in these documents.

Conversely, from the vantage point of critical geopolitics, Arctic tourism discourses, found in texts and illustrations of promotion materials, on websites, or during guided tours, become "political processes of representations, whereby [Nordic] places became [Arctic] destinations laden with multiple but often recurring and similar histories" (Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2016: 226). Therefore, in the northern European context, Arctification offers intriguing grounds for studying the relationship between tourism and popular geopolitics. Popular geopolitics focuses on how popular culture such as films, TV shows, and novels can shape geopolitical discourses (Dittmer & Gray, 2010). As noted above, current popular culture representations of the Arctic (see Fjellestad, 2016) materialise as a set of homogenous tourism experiences and narratives in the Nordic region and are reproduced by tourists in their social media holiday documentation (Varnajot, 2019b). These imaginaries might also shape what Gillen and Mostafanezhad (2019: 71) termed "geopolitical

encounters", which exist "between and among people (hosts and guests or guests and guests), places, objects, and meanings." With respect to the promotion and development of Fennoscandian places as a touristic Arctic, it might not only be that a clash occurs between hosts' heterogonous everyday realities and guests' stereotyped expectations, but this might also hold material consequences. While a narrow focus on a distinct and highly trend-dependent tourism product renders the possibility for wealth creation, it might worsen seasonality effects and trigger an alteration of labour structures by increasing the reliance upon a mobile and seasonal workforce. Moreover, there arises the danger of reinforcing a vulnerability to economic 'boom and bust' cycles that jeopardise regional sustainability and long-term prosperity (Carson, 2020; Carson & Carson, 2017).

Regional development, branding, and smart specialisation: the Arctic as a competitive imaginary

Within the far-ranging but variegated transformations in Western welfare states from Fordism/Keynesianism to Post-Fordism/Neoliberalism from the 1970s onwards, new governance frameworks emerged (Brenner, 2009). Nordic countries have seen continuous reforms to the administrative apparatus that have multiplied municipalities' and regions' responsibilities for social service provision and regional development (Sjöblom. 2020). While the geopolitical authority of city regions has gained research momentum, particularly in the context of the knowledge-based economy (Moisio, 2018), sub-national governments' attempts at territorial moulding have been examined to a lesser degree.

Unlike its Swedish neighbour Norrbotten, Finnish Lapland mobilised and institutionalised its Arctic position for regional development purposes, evidenced particularly in regional branding efforts. The vision of Lapland's Provincial Programme 2018-2021 states that "in 2021 Lapland will be Arctic, open and smart. We produce sustainable success in the world's cleanest region" (Hyry et al., 2017: 10, authors' translation). In the document, particular emphasis is placed on the competitive advantage of jointly utilising resources that are not located within the national state borders, and the strategic position of Lapland as a transport node in the Arctic:

> Arctic cross-border co-operation in the utilisation of the northern region's assets guarantees competitiveness in the global market. Lapland has grown into a hub for Arctic transport and an internationally renowned environment for the development of intelligent traffic (Hyry et al., 2017: 9, authors' translation).

This spatial upscaling corresponds to Browning and de Oliveira's (2017: 496) observation that a common denominator of place-branding activities is "to transform a stigmatized geopolitical location into a more positive one" by presenting the spatial entity as an opportunity providing a gateway or crossroads between different regions. Finnish Lapland has faced all the strains of peripheries caused by socioeconomic restructuring, namely declining primary production, outmigration, dependency on external development funding, and difficulties maintaining public services in sparsely populated areas (Grunfelder et al., 2017). Furthermore, Lapland had previously had marginal political influence in Finland's national government, but the country's EU accession in 1995 opened up new possibilities for the region to discard its status as a powerless periphery (Arter, 2001). This window of economic and political opportunity, linked to Lapland's spatial re-imagination as an Arctic and a European player instead of simply a region in Finland, runs as a common thread through the Provincial Programme 2018-2021:

> It is desired that the active role of Lapland in Arctic policy increase, and it is expected to have a significant impact on the region's business life and competitiveness. In the coming programming period, internationality will be elevated more clearly into the centre of Lapland's regional development so that Lapland is an Arctic and international success. The aim is to make Lapland the most innovative and entrepreneurial region in the EU's sparsely populated and circumpolar regions. This will be achieved by bringing together Lapland's actors to build the province's role as an international actor and to commit to securing Lapland's economic development in structural change. The Arctic is an integral part of the internationally known Lapland brand (Hyry et al., 2017: 16, authors' translation).

In order to substantiate Lapland's 'spatial socialization' (Paasi, 2010) economically, the region has also placed the Arctic front and centre in its smart specialisation programme, 'Arctic Smartness'. Smart specialisation (S3) denotes a place-based policy approach that aims to promote competitiveness through bottom-up mobilisation of territorial assets, technological innovation, and entrepreneurship. Establishing an S3 framework has been a precondition for European regions' eligibility for EU Structural and Investment Funds during the 2014-2020 programme period. Lapland's S3 programme has gained some research momentum, and is generally perceived as a success in terms of local actors' improved inclusion in extra-regional networks and access to international R&D funding (Morales & Sariego-Kluge, 2021). However, in their study, Ghinoi et al. (2021) conclude that Lapland's S3 implementation lacks currently effective stakeholder networks that would expedite diversified specialisation as well as actual entrepreneurial discovery activities and significant business diversification. Indeed, like the strategies of most of the other northern European regions, it is built around the exploitation of natural assets. However, the geopolitical caveat of Lapland's S3 strategy is that it aims to transcend its hard administrative regional borders – the standard scale for most of the EU's S3 programmes – in order to employ the Arctic's fuzzy borders. In the document, the Arctic is portrayed as "one of the cleanest and best-preserved places on earth but facing yet many dynamic and complex changes… In addition to challenges, global changes bring great potential" (Arcticsmartness.eu, n.d.). This vantage point taps into the common future-oriented geopolitical conception of the Arctic as a territory of economic opportunity (Busch, 2021). Hence, the strategic aim is to tie the natural and cultural resources of the Arctic hinterlands, under the banner of sustainable growth, into the flow of capital accumulation and wealth creation. Related to this, Lapland's spatial socialisation aims to spur an entrepreneurial society that strongly associates itself with the Arctic instead of merely with Finland.

Education and research institutions: producing knowledge of and for the Arctic

Research played a decisive role in institutionalising the Arctic with respect to rendering "descriptive authority" on which policy-makers could build their (geopolitical) agendas (Keskitalo, 2004: 166). In these pre-Arctic Council times, region-specific research typically focused on environmental matters due to the growing ecological awareness of Western nations, as well as on the region's Indigenous communities. In the late 1990s, the Arctic Council commissioned a feasibility project for establishing an Arctic university, which was officially inaugurated in 2001 and today consists of a decentralised network of HER around the globe that offer programmes, courses, and academic

exchange (University of the Arctic, 2021). The geopolitical underpinning of the UArctic is particularly evident in the organisation's Strategic Plan 2030:

> The Arctic is where we see the strongest impacts of the climate change today. While the Arctic has just a fraction of a percent of the world's population, it contributes nearly 20% of many globally important resources such as minerals, energy, fish, freshwater, and the most pristine nature, which illustrates its interdependence with the rest of the globe. The Arctic is a vital region for the world, and UArctic has a key role in ensuring that those outside the region understand northern realities. …Southern solutions are often ill-suited to the northern experience. UArctic works for the people in the Arctic; that they have a central role in defining the future of the region, and have sufficient knowledge and capacity to do so (UArctic, n.d.: 1).

The University of the Arctic justifies its legitimacy and power by referring to the universal significance of the Arctic as a concern for the whole globe, where climate and natural resources denote a geopolitical top priority. By emphasising the exceptionalism of the Arctic, the organisation charts out its unique ability to speak 'truth' for and on the behalf of its inhabitants, as well as its capacity for crafting solutions available to northerners in the form of support for policy and "knowledge-based decision-making" (UArctic, n.d.: 6). Yet, such bordering practice leaves one wondering where the 'South' begins: Is it in Helsinki or Stockholm, Brussels, Bologna, Paris, or Dubai? The document clarifies this question by pointing out the region's relational character and stating that "northern or Arctic is more often about [the] attitude than latitude of the location" (UArctic, n.d.: 1). The University of Oulu, located below the Arctic Circle, makes use of this relational association with the region as well. The university chose 'Science with Arctic Attitude' as its mission slogan, and on its website highlights its geographical proximity to the Arctic as a duty as well as a competitive advantage in international knowledge production:

> We are situated close to the Arctic region, humanity's new frontier. As one of the Northernmost international science universities, we have a particular responsibility toward questions related to the Arctic. The Arctic area is changing, and it affects to the future of the whole globe. We at the University of Oulu, are in the front line searching for solutions to the global challenges of Arctic and relieving the effects of changes (University of Oulu, n.d.).

On the one hand, these statements of how HER position themselves in the Arctic illustrate the geopolitical tensions enmeshed in "determining in practice which issues are relevant for an 'Arctic region' and which actors are entitled to speak on 'the Arctic'" (Keskitalo, 2004: 104). On the other hand, the strong emphasis on the global challenges around the Arctic might outweigh local perspectives and aspects that are relevant for societies in the Arctic. Nevertheless, a few smaller institutions dedicated to Indigenous Arctic perspectives can be found across the circumpolar North. Located in Kautokeino, the Sámi University of Applied Sciences was founded "as a result of the needs of the Sámi society for higher education and research in order to safeguard and further [develop] the Sámi language, culture, land, and traditional ways of living" (SUAS, n.d.). Similarly, although not situated in Europe, the recently reorganised Yukon University has developed strong links with local First Nations in both the organisation of courses and the management of the university (Yukon University, n.d.). Yet, Junka-Aikio (2019) points out that the recent upsurge in attention to Indigenous studies – which has also ensured additional research funding – is coupled

to global processes, namely the Arctification of the Nordic political economy and the neoliberalisation of academia.

Globalisation is also at play in the networked nature of HER institutions in the circumpolar North. Moisio (2018: 87) underscores that regional network formation among HER is characteristic in the knowledge-based economy, where these webs represent "nodes or sites of globalization" and a "decisive strategic-political infrastructure of competitiveness" in global value chains. In addition to the UArctic organisation, the northernmost universities of Finland (the Universities of Oulu and Lapland), Sweden (Umeå University and Luleå Technical University), and Norway (University of Tromsø) together form the 'Arctic Five' network. According to Husebekk et al. (2020), this structure is a capacity-building response to the common demographic challenges of northern peripheries. The fuzzy Arctic borders make it possible to cooperate across hard national borders while still offering a unifying image – the Arctic. Moreover, the Arctic bestows on these universities a space for upscaling the significance of their research outputs to the global level. For instance, Umeå University in Sweden has been conducting circumpolar research for three decades. Since 2012 the university has hosted the Arctic Research Centre Arcum, which unites scholars from various departments across the university and produces knowledge on a wide range of Arctic topics, such as climate change, culture and history, tourism, geopolitics, economy, health and well-being, law, and natural resources and energy (Umeå University, n.d.). Framing empirical work on Nordic issues as 'Arctic' is beneficial for researchers in terms of internationalisation and obtaining research funding (Müller & Sköld, 2021). In addition, hosting the International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences in June 2017 "further [contributed] to creating relations between Umeå and a wider Arctic discourse" (Müller, 2021: 77) in academic spheres. Scientific Arctification has benefited some fields such as Sámi studies (Junka-Aikio, 2019), connected researchers intra- and extra-regionally, and elevated local research concerns to issues of global significance (Husebekk et al., 2020). Broad-focused research centres like Arcum might also introduce additional perspectives on the region that amend the dominant discourse on the Arctic as a pristine natural environment and Indigenous cultural space. While the latter might be perceived to be for the good of the Arctic, it also locks the region into a rather restraining and homogenous representation.

However, given the increasing dependence of HER on external funding, which is allotted by decision-making centres that are often located outside the Arctic and driven by agendas revolving around international relevance and competitiveness, disciplines and fields that generate no measurable economic yield might be existentially threatened. Thus, accelerating neoliberalisation – also tangible in governmental pressure on universities to define distinct research profiles – might redefine the territory of academic belonging towards market viability as its main criteria, while research that is locally important in the Arctic but fails to attract a global audience might vanish.

Discussion and conclusions

Drawing upon a critical and economic reading of geopolitics, this review unearthed Arctification processes advanced by non- and sub-state actors in the Fennoscandian North. Prior to the countries becoming members of the Arctic Council, the northernmost regions of Finland and Sweden did not exhibit a strong economic and social identification with the Arctic (Keskitalo, 2004). Yet, given the global attention in the region fuelled by media reports, last-chance travel, and climate change awareness, the Arctic has become an opportunity for sparsely populated areas in the European High North to capitalise on the region's future prospects (Väätänen, 2021) and turn

a historically deprived peripheral location into a competitive advantage. Sub-state entities, HER, and the tourism sector actively reposition themselves as centrally located in the Arctic. This relational approach to space, coupled with the fuzzy Arctic borders, is instrumental in transcending administrative hard borders in order to extend territories of wealth, power, and belonging. In many places and regions located both south and north of the Arctic Circle, the tourism sector draws upon stereotypical Arctic imaginaries in the production of signature experiences such as dogsledding, aurora borealis tours, reindeer safaris, and overnight stays in glass igloos for international markets (Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019). These products were highly successful before the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted international travel. Nevertheless, touristic Arctification often promotes a static vision of the Arctic, overlooking the diversity and dynamic nature of the region, which in turn can negatively affect host communities with respect to tourists' expectations of an uninhabited frontier that awaits discovery (Rantala, et al., 2019). The narrow product portfolio on winter- and cryospheric-based tourism also amplifies seasonality effects and increases the reliance upon a mobile and temporary workforce, while the serial reproduction of an identical tourism infrastructure across the Arctic region reinforces the vulnerability to boom and bust cycles (Carson & Carson, 2017). Taken together, these spatial development processes undermine the universally proclaimed goal of tourism to bring sustainable employment and growth to peripheries. Additionally, the international travel restrictions accompanying policies for curbing the spread of COVID-19 unearthed the volatility of human mobility-based sectors like tourism when wealth accumulation clashes with biosecurity and previously invisible borders suddenly become impermeable for leisure travellers.

At the sub-national level, Lapland incorporated the Arctic into regional development efforts as a competitive geopolitical imaginary. The Finnish region presents itself in branding and smart specialisation strategies as being centrally located in the Arctic. These spatial socialisation attempts are directed both at an extra-regional audience by displaying to the world that Lapland provides access to the Arctic region and at its own society, which should develop an entrepreneurial mindset. With respect to the S3 programme, research has found that Lapland focuses on the utilisation of natural resources instead of promoting more diversified innovation (Ghinoi et al., 2021). Hence, the strategic aim is to appear as a legitimate Arctic player with the power to tie the natural and cultural resources of the northern hinterlands into the flow of capital accumulation.

HER institutions not only constitute societally important stakeholders in the Arctic but are also actively engaged in shaping the region in geopolitical terms. At its foundation lies the local-global dichotomy to which the Arctic is tied. On the one hand, global interest in the region and academic Arctification have helped local issues of a formerly insignificant northern periphery to be presented as Arctic topics, which are of global concern. On the other hand, however, global neoliberalism entails downsides when regional universities are dependent on grants from extra-regional funding bodies that decide what is worthwhile to study and what is important for the Arctic. This in turn influences what is known about the region (e.g. Carey, 2007), how its peoples are portrayed (e.g. Saarinen, 1999), and what kinds of evidence-based policies are pursued.

The fuzzy, soft borders of the Arctic render the region a relational space that can be adapted and reinterpreted according to the interests of different actors. As such, Arctification appears to be an everyday geopolitical geo-graphing process that alters representations of both the Arctic and the Nordic countries and is exercised with material, economic ends in mind. Furthermore, the Arctic

"is caught up in an assembly of cultural, political, literary, economic and strategic registers and interests" (Dodds, 2021: 1141). Thus, building on Dodds's argument, not only does the process of Arctification have implications for representations of the Arctic; it also has direct outcomes on regional geopolitical developments. Examining the everyday geopolitics of sub-national and non-state bodies is especially crucial when sectors, such as tourism, are depicted in apolitical terms. As our review has shown, regional development authorities, tourism, and HER organisations engage in space-making, which is a deeply political process.

Regarding future research on the production of territories of wealth, power, security, and belonging, a critical variable entails the bordering practices between the inclusion and exclusion of people and discourses, as well as the regimes of truth that they together constitute. In an Arctic context, this could be translated into the enquiry of the geopolitics of sustainability that goes along with soft borders, the age of neoliberal capitalism in which responsibilities are passed down to the individual level, and a shrinking cryosphere. What will the future of the Arctic – a white, wild, cold, and always snowy space – be like when glaciers further retreat, lakes barely freeze over the winter, and snow begins falling later in the winter and melts earlier in the spring? What are the ecological and social consequences of Arctification in a post-Arctic context (Varnajot & Saarinen, 2021), and what will the geopolitical ramifications be?

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