

## Briefing Note

# The social lives of Arctic expertise, or how to do transnational networks

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*What role does in-person interaction play in the networks of Arctic governance? As virtual rather than personal interaction is gaining ground in many fields, we need to examine the value of in-person communication in Arctic networks. Especially in the Arctic, a region which inhabitants live across twenty-four time zones, the organization of interaction matters greatly. It is vitally important for the Arctic that regional networks cultivate collaboration, professional trust, and a certain esprit de corps: we thus need to consider what practices foster these qualities.*

*This briefing note makes a two-pronged argument about Arctic networks. First, I suggest that these networks are strengthened by the accent on in-person interaction at key networking events. Second, I foreground a transprofessional field of knowledge—the networks that bridge scientific, diplomatic, business, and civil society realms—as the medium of Arctic expertise. Arctic networks are necessarily transnational and transprofessional configurations, and that is their strength. My underlying claim is about the social lives of transnational governance. To the degree that Arctic networks have retained resilience, it is in part due to value placed on in-person contact and transprofessional connections in the Arctic. There is a lesson here for international governance more broadly.*

## Introduction: personal contact in Arctic networks

Arctic governance accentuates the role of transnational professional networks. This happens in part because of the intensifying geopolitical and geoeconomic interest in the region by states as well as private companies and non-profit groups. Put simply, many new actors enter the scene and they all need expert knowledge to gain influence. The field of Arctic expertise is expanding rapidly and this creates a new mix of ideas and interests in that field. We thus need to examine how this expanding constellation of knowledge works.

This briefing note does so. It explores the social field of Arctic expertise—the social context that situates the actors and channels their actions—to make two points. First, I underscore the importance of socialization, as distinct from formal institutional structures, as a key medium of influence in Arctic networks. This is the stuff of social rather than institutional lives: of a certain

milieu of informality that is an integral facet of Arctic networks. That milieu relies on in-person contact and social trust cultivated over years of continuous interaction. Second, I highlight the role of the professionals whom I tentatively call the Arcticians: Arctic experts from academic, diplomatic, business, and non-profit spheres who work in the nodal positions of Arctic governance. They operationalize the knowledge that non-Arctic actors need but, given the specificity of Arctic matters, cannot quickly build. We should not overvalorize the Arcticians, but neither should we overlook their central role in facilitating communication and collaboration in the Arctic.

One effect of this expansion of Arctic expertise is that transnational networking events gain in importance. Such events both analyze the Arctic and make it: the Arctic as a field of connections and collaboration is created in part through networking events. Some of the inter-state competition in the Arctic is a competition for socialization cache. New players enter the Arctic conference carousel to participate in that socialization. Socialization is not an icing on the cake in Arctic networks: it is baked into the cake.

My point is not simply that networking matters: that knowledge is inseparable from the social networks through which it operates. My point is that networks in the Arctic matter more and in different ways than may first meet the eye because these networks are rapidly expanding in number, reach, and diversity. As the field expands, its core remains the filter that refracts the incoming flows of information and influence. It is therein, in the existing networks and traditions, that we can look for the possibilities of repair and renewal. When Arctic cooperation returns to something resembling pre-2022 levels, a diplomat notes ‘it will be your network’ that gives you the edge.

This is not a traditional academic book chapter: it is, rather, an invitation to appreciate the value of in-person professional interaction in transnational governance. Although I mobilize the academic study of diplomatic expertise from multiple disciplines, that work remains on the background. The foreground is given to primary empirical material from my interactions, including twenty interviews as well as conversations and participant observation at Arctic events in 2022-2023, combined with my previous fifteen years of studying diplomatic practice. My method is quasi-ethnographic: although I attempt no traditional ethnography with its detailed descriptions of the settings, I observe the scene with an ethnographer’s curiosity about how others see their world. Some interactions took the form of interviews with prepared questions and detailed notes; others were in the form of loosely planned or impromptu conversations with minimum notes taken. Either way, everything is off the record and non-attributable. I share vignettes and quotes, but only insofar as I can retain the anonymity of my interlocutors<sup>1</sup>.

The stakes in Arctic interaction go beyond the Arctic. The core difficulty in international governance is not about technical expertise but about the habits of mind that simplify the issues at hand into national and professional slices and thus inhibit the synthesis that we actually need to respond to the situation. The networks of Arctic expertise have something to teach us about the societal value of in-person interaction in transnational and transprofessional spaces.

## **‘The essence of my profession is meeting people’: interaction in Arctic diplomacy**

The social milieu of Arctic networks has traditionally been relatively informal, inter-field, international, and inter-regional. The Arctic Council and several other regional institutions trace their beginnings to the late Cold War and immediate post-Cold War years. They were established in the

context of thawing relations between the superpowers: that atmosphere of pragmatic cooperation is reflected in their institutional set-up. Their organizational cultures bear the traces of Nordic countries, whose systems and traditions of regional development, education and research, and international dialogue are integral to the scene. Many Arctic networks were created to facilitate people-to people contacts at the time when regions in several Arctic countries pushed for more autonomy from central governments. The Arctic context on the ground, from infrastructure and ecosystems to indigenous politics, differs markedly from the latitudes of capital cities: local actors, with their long-term knowledge of the region, have always been central to the field (Keskitalo, 2004). Stereotypical narratives of geopolitical conflict—narratives that are more likely to be peddled by and for actors outside the region than in it—have encountered strong pushback as a result (see Exner-Pirot, 2018 for a pithy summary of such narratives).

The central role of diplomats, in and beyond the Arctic Council, is another central feature of Arctic networks. The Arctic is a prime example of what Constantinou, Cornago, and McConnell (2016, 2) call the ‘transprofessionalization’ of diplomacy: a process that expands diplomatic space and intensifies diplomats’ networks beyond their profession. That expanded space transforms the boundaries of diplomatic spaces within state structures and within modern societies (*ibid.*: 20-34). Arctic networks thus illustrate what might be called the diplommatization of state-governing expertise: in the Arctic, all state-governing knowledge is becoming interwoven with the diplomatic profession.<sup>2</sup> To study governance expertise in the Arctic is to study diplomatic expertise. To suggest this is not to overvalorize one profession, but to note how diplomatic culture is woven into the culture of Arctic expertise.

As the title quote of this section implies, diplomats value in-person interaction. Personal contact, another diplomat notes: ‘is not a part of diplomacy: it is diplomacy’. Pressured and tense situations make such contact more important, they continue. In diplomacy: ‘We are out for a result. We need a decision.’ In-person interaction makes getting to the decision—one that works well enough for multiple parties and thus holds in the long run—easier. This is in part because in-person interaction provides a backstage for managing friction and thereby generates trust. ‘The reason you send diplomats out to foreign capitals is to engage personally and share confidences,’ Singapore’s ambassador to the United States Ashok Mirpuri says of his field of work (Heath, 2020). It is well established that in-person sociability forms a central building block of the *esprit de corps* in the diplomatic profession (see also Nair, 2020; Kuus, 2023a).

In Arctic diplomacy, then, the diplomats’ preference for in-person interaction is not a matter of touchy-feely idealism or elitist indulgence: it is a pragmatic evidence-based choice for effective communication.<sup>3</sup> That preference is discernible in the set-up of transnational Arctic meetings, such as the Arctic Circle, Arctic Frontiers, and Arctic Encounter meetings: all of them are devised to facilitate interaction. The growing constellation of such events also indicates that many actors recognize the need to bring Arctic professionals together in person. ‘Everyone wants an Arctic meeting these days’ says one regular participant: how a meeting is organized and how it facilitates interaction is of vital importance in determining who attends.<sup>4</sup>

That video platforms undercut trust-building became clear when the pandemic struck. ‘Spare a thought for the world’s diplomatic elite’, Politico implored in the thicket of the spring 2020 lockdowns: ‘they’re prowling around Zoom like caged animals, deprived of their most potent tool – personal contact –right as the world is looking to them to coordinate the response to a crippling

pandemic' (Heath, 2020). Building and acting on trust is 'about the cues and nuances that aren't available online', Mirpuri commented. Austria's ambassador in Washington Martin Weiss agreed, noting that the benefits of digital tools 'stop when the discussions get complex'. A video platform creates a very different dynamic, he explained: 'There isn't the same pressure to compromise you would experience if you were in the same room. It's easier to hide behind your own screen' (*ibid.*; see also Eder 2020; Kuus, 2023a). A virtual platform, a diplomat says to me when looking back at the pandemic, is unsuitable for long-term cooperative relationships because it 'removes the element of humanity from interpersonal communication'. To the degree that Arctic meetings worked in virtual format during the pandemic, several diplomats explain, it was because the key actors knew each other already and could rely on the trust built up before the pandemic. Moving forward, in-person contact needs to be restored and maintained.

What is less noticed and appreciated is that the central role of in-person interaction extends much beyond diplomacy in Arctic networks. Many of the stories of professional connections and initiatives are of specific ad hoc interactions, off the cuff remarks, serendipitous encounters outside one's 'own' national or professional circles. The Arctic was remote not only physically but also in mainstream spatial imaginaries: it was and still is removed from most people's field of attention. The indifference and sometimes incompetence of outsiders goes beyond some capitals or some ministries: many Arctic professionals can tell colorful tales of the ignorance of 'their' national politicians and civil servants. The *esprit de corps* in Arctic networks is in part a response to the provincializing gaze of the capital: it is a regional and not only a professional affinity.

Arctic scientists, for example, need to regularly interact with Arctic experts much beyond science. In part because of the growing attention to social issues in the region, from health to indigenous sovereignty, natural scientists increasingly need to grasp such issues. What is needed for professional success is not only the knowledge of one field but also the ability to navigate multiple professional fields. 'I sometimes feel sorry for [the natural scientists]', an interlocutor familiar with academic networks remarks: natural scientists, too, increasingly need to grasp social affairs to obtain big grants, but they are not trained for this. They now need to learn, fast. An Arctic scientist needs attend quasi-diplomatic receptions. That scientist may be skeptical at first, grumbling that diplomats are not 'our kind of people', an interviewee at ease in both worlds remarks. But once they attend, they see the benefits: 'they come back like from a foreign trip', feeling excited and energized. It is not an accident that the commentary in *Science* on 'the science of schmoozing' (Kintisch, 2015) was written about Arctic science networks. The specificity of Arctic issues necessitates and enables transprofessional connections.

It is in part because Arctic networks are highly dispersed that in-person interaction gains in importance. The Arctic in a circumpolar region across twenty-four time zones: an international meeting held virtually may well involve someone logging in at 4 a.m. their time. That someone is more likely to be an indigenous person rather than a high-ranking civil servant in a national capital. This is why, one such civil servant notes, in-person interaction is especially important in the Arctic: if the actors involved are serious about indigenous perspectives, they need to engage with these perspectives in greater texture than is possible online. At the principal Arctic meetings, such as the Arctic Circle Assemblies, many of the indigenous participants wear their traditional clothing: that visual signaling is an integral part of Arctic interaction and is valued as such by the other participants.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, when many activities have been slow to move back to in-person formats, Arctic networking is a notable for its emphasis on such formats. I briefly cite two examples. The Arctic Circle Assembly of 2021 is my first example. The Assembly, a three-day conference plus its associated receptions and fieldtrips, was first held in 2013, but had become the key international gathering of Arctic expertise by the time of the pandemic. The 2020 conference was cancelled. In 2021, as the Delta variant was fueling much uncertainty about travel, the event's organizers decided to keep that year's meeting in person. Over 1,400 people attended from 50 countries, for an almost entirely in-person and maskless meeting (thanks to continuous testing) (Arctic Circle, 2021).<sup>5</sup> This at a time when international travel was discouraged by many public institutions. The effect of those few days of interaction on policy processes cannot be quantified, but the effort taken, by the organizers and the attendees alike, needs to be noted. When I hear, from multiple people, that Arctic Circle meetings are 'very special', they mean the opportunity at these meetings to encounter people they would not meet elsewhere. They also mean a certain vibe, one in which no one country or profession dominates. At one level, the meeting is a 'circumpolar speed-dating event': almost crassly image-conscious and 'North American' in its upbeat tonality. At another level, it is an 'extremely useful' place to see and be seen, hear and be heard, perceive the dots and connect them. The scene is relatively open and fluid in part thanks to the ease of in-person interaction.<sup>6</sup>

The Calotte Academy of 2022 is my second example. The Academy has long been a key venue of familiarizing annual cohorts of 20-30 professionals, often junior ones, with Arctic issues. From its origins in the 1990s, it has been a transnational and transprofessional affair, designed to connect individuals from different countries and academic fields in North Calotte region of northern Scandinavia every June. Logistically, the Academy involves the 20-30 participants spending a week together, travelling on a bus in the North Calotte region and learning about that place, other Arctic places, and each other's research. Because place and interaction are central to its rationale, the Academy describes itself as 'a travelling symposium' and a 'school of Arctic dialogue' (see Heininen and Huotari, 2021). Post-pandemic, the dilemma about format faced the organizers of that event as well: to be or not to be in-person (the Shakespearean phrasing was used by an interviewee about the Arctic Circle Assembly 2021). The Academy was held in person in June 2022: it involved one week and more than 1,700 kilometres of travel as usual. The risks of the venture were not only to the (mostly) young professionals on the bus: the risks were also to the inhabitants, often older, of the remote region. Reflecting on that choice some months later, Lassi Heininen (2023), the long-term convener of the Academy, said: 'We go there: we see, we hear, we smell, we taste'. Some short months later, the effects of socialization were clear: the spirited network of young professionals who had met at the Academy was well in sight at the Arctic Circle Assembly in October that year. The Academy creates knowledge about the Arctic and it also, and as importantly, socializes professionals into Arctic networks. It builds the *esprit de corps* on which Arctic networks rely.

These examples concern two specific events, but the 'huge' role of socialization in Arctic networks—the descriptor is a quote from an interview about very different settings—comes up in many of my interactions.<sup>7</sup> Beyond any one event, the long-term value of in-person interaction lies in fostering socially textured quasi-diplomatic knowledge that fosters consensus-building and compromise. No neat line can be drawn from the format of meetings to policy outcomes, but neither should we assume that no causal relation exists. Context matters. It is in context that connections are made and decisions are reached: the structuring of the context is an integral part

of these connections and decisions. The relatively open feel of the Arctic Circle Assembly and similar meetings—a feel that I would call transnational and transprofessional—does affect how people think and speak. The effect is observed by regular attendees and is also discernible to me. It is not an effect that can be measured, but it can be observed. The analytical task is not about measuring outcomes but about noticing the milieu of professional trust in Arctic networks. Diplomats rotate in and out of Arctic settings; the quasi-diplomatic and sociable atmosphere of the social field remains.

### **The Arcticians: the specific intellectuals of circumpolar governance**

The Arctic is home to about four million people in eight states. Some of these people are members of indigenous groups with centuries-old presence in the region, whereas others are relative newcomers whose family history in the region goes back decades or less. In part because of the specificity of Arctic issues, both groups have close connections to other Arctic countries. This section accentuates a group which presence in the Arctic is professional: the scientists, diplomats and other civil servants, businesspeople, and civil society actors with long-term professional ties to the region. These individuals may or may not live in the Arctic, but their professional expertise is closely linked to the Arctic.

These are the professionals whom I tentatively call Arcticians: the individuals who wield specialized expertise on Arctic socio-ecological processes. I borrow the idea though not the term from Jessica O'Reilly's (2017) work on Antarctic science. As that continent has no permanent population, O'Reilly notes, scientists are its only people. She calls them Antarcticians and she foregrounds their key role in crafting governance regimes for the continent. A similar analytical device is useful in the Arctic. In that region, too, governance relies on specialized technical expertise that cannot be imported from more southern latitudes but requires the synthesis of specifically Arctic expertise from multiple fields. In the Arctic, an interviewee stresses, 'it's all about synthesis': effectiveness requires not only the knowledge of any one field but also the capacity to synthesize claims from multiple fields. It is the expertise in synthesis that is the currency of Arctic governance. That expertise is not only technical—in science, diplomacy, business, and so on: it is also social. At an Arctic event, the discussion is not one in which scientists and policy-makers discuss matters from their own silos: it is, rather, one on which both parties leave 'their' silos and 'their' jargon (and thus their comfort zone) to communicate in a more open social space.

I recognize the risks of borrowing a term from a region with no permanent inhabitants and adapting it to one with deeply rooted local cultures. The Arcticians are professionals of the Arctic: some of them live in the region but others do not. The term has downsides, but it also has upsides: it enables us to look at a professional field without getting caught up in national and professional affiliations. To speak of Arcticians is to speak of a transnational and transprofessional social field rather than individuals.<sup>8</sup>

The Arcticians' knowledge of the region is specialized, but this does not make it narrow. To the contrary: they have often spent considerable time in the region, including in different Arctic countries, and they know their counterparts in these countries well. Their professional identity is in part regional. It is situated at the relatively stable crossroads of national, transnational and international levels on the one hand and of political, regulatory, business, and academic spaces on the other, and it works through a certain 'unnoticed cognitive coordination and resource-pooling' (Vauchez, 2008, 138 emphasis added; Vauchez, 2011, 344). The interdisciplinary, inter-field or, in

sociological terms, interstitial, networks of Arctic-specific scientific, legal, commercial, indigenous expertise have some autonomy from the capitals of big states (Kuus, 2023b). There is a feedback loop between a certain professional autonomy and the in-person interaction on which it rests.

In Arctic networks, one needs to wear multiple hats and interact across national and professional boundaries. Outside intergovernmental settings, too, civil society and academic networks are highly international. The first step in creating a strong academic project, an Arctic scientist notes, is not to start crafting the project but to build trust with the local communities and with scientists from other countries. It is a learning phase before the doing phase. If that learning phase is cut, the quality of the science suffers. Even in diplomacy, a profession based on building connections, practitioners comment on how extensively they need to work with people outside their ministry. It is this interstitial character—this multiplicity of inter-field and inter-setting knowledges—that accentuates the importance of in-person interaction. Silos thrive in virtual space; it's the synthetic and inter-field communication that requites in-person interaction.

Arcticians are the professionals whom the historian of ideas Michel Foucault might call specific intellectuals. Most intellectual work today, he says, occurs not in the modality of the universal, but within specific sectors and at the precise points where particular tasks situate the professionals charged with these tasks: the hospital, the university, or the civil service (Foucault, 1984: 68). Unlike the universal intellectual who aspires to speak for everyone, the specific intellectual intervenes in the sector of life with which they are practically involved: hospitals, research institutes, nuclear power, arms control. Their knowledge is not something they simply ‘apply’ to the problems and conflicts with which they engage at work. Rather, these problems and conflicts are conceptualized in part on the basis of their knowledge. ‘One may even say,’ Foucault writes, ‘that the role of the specific intellectual must become more and more important in proportion to the political responsibilities which he is obliged willy-nilly to accept, as a nuclear scientist, computer expert, pharmacologist, etc.’ (Foucault, 1984: 69; see also Kuus, 2021).

The Arcticians are the specific intellectuals of Arctic governance. Their influence is so pronounced in part because Arctic networks are specialized and small: individuals know each other well. Most Arctic countries are small states: even few individuals can have considerable impact there. In large countries like United States or Russia as well, Arctic regions are far from capital cities. This context facilitates and indeed requires the formation of transnational and transprofessional networks. In Arctic networks, one needs to understand the ‘micro-atmospheres’ of meetings and this involves understanding long-term professional relationships.

## Conclusion: the speed of trust

It was at a transnational and transprofessional Arctic event—the Arctic Circle Japan Forum in March 2023—that I heard the point that, in retrospect, seems obvious. Business in the Arctic, Mads Frederiksen, Executive Director of the Arctic Economic Council, says at a business-oriented session there, moves ‘with the speed of trust’ (Frederiksen, 2023). The effort in this briefing note is to unpack the processes through which trust is created and maintained. Understanding the social lives of Arctic expertise is necessary if we are to learn from Arctic experiences during the pandemic and ensure that this learning informs future analysis and action (see also Spence, Exner-Pirot, and Petrov, 2023).

For the Arctic, the social texture of Arctic expertise is an important resource. That social texture enables the kinds of multilateral and transnational regulatory processes that we ultimately need in the Arctic. The quasi-diplomatic feel of Arctic networks is maintained not only by diplomats: it is also cultivated by scientists, indigenous leaders, and businesspeople. All of them need to shift out of the center of their comfort zone and this helps them to listen better. At Arctic events, the diplomatically framed signaling from the stage—the references to common challenges, long-terms interests, or, in the case of indigenous groups, their emphasis on the ‘very long term’—is crucially enabled by interactions off stage.

I recognize the dangers of romanticizing Arctic networks. In that field, too, as in every social field, there is no shortage of national, professional, and personal rivalries and turf wars. As in every social system, proximity can enable cooperation, but it can also breed insularity. The relative openness of Arctic networks is aided by the strong influence of Nordic countries, with their high levels of social trust: it is a contingent achievement rather than a fixed outcome. In- person interaction is but one facet of Arctic interaction: my claim here is simply that it is a facet worth noticing, valuing, and studying.

The social lives of expertise deserve careful consideration especially in this time of conflict and tension, when complexity and compromise are marginalized by soundbites. Diplomacy tends to get sidelined in the world of soundbites, a diplomat noted to me some years ago, because compromise-building disrupts the national grand narrative. Compromise-building does not thrive in the space of video recordings: it thrives in the realm of human interaction. The energy of the room is not quantifiable, but this does not make it unimportant. ‘Diplomacy works best when people can get together’, another diplomat commented some short months ago. Insofar as Arctic networks have been resilient, I suggest, it is in part because of the space and time afforded to professional expertise and professional interaction at Arctic events. We have something to learn from this.

## Notes

1. The twenty Arctic-focused interviews and another half-dozen scheduled conversations (the distinction is explained below) ranged from twenty minutes to more than an hour and were conducted in 2022-2023 with individuals who hail from ten different countries. All interviews and conversations were in person, off the record, and non-attributable. All persons move in transnational quasi-diplomatic circles though most were not members of any diplomatic corps at the time of the interview. They are mid-career or senior-level professionals with extensive diplomatic, policy-making, or Arctic-related experience. Most have worked in multiple professional fields. Some interviews were conducted in private offices and conference rooms whereas others took place in restaurant or conference spaces. In general, if I did not request a formal interview and send the project description to the person in advance, I did not take formal notes and I treated the interaction as a conversation rather than an interview: I felt that reaching for a notebook in a situation in which the person had agreed to sit down with me on the basis of a coffee-break chat or a colleague’s recommendation an hour before would push the limits of trust. All unattributed quotes here are drawn from my notes rather than recordings and the same applies to attributed quotes derived from conference sessions: I use my notes from such sessions.

The Arctic-focused primary material rests on a longer study of diplomacy, including 170 non-attributable interviews with practitioners of diplomacy and related spheres since 2007. Protecting anonymity in the context where people know each other's professional histories as well as habits of speech goes beyond omitting personal names. I present all fieldwork material in ways that conceal the specific professional or national affiliations as well as other social markers of my interlocutors. This is done in part to ensure anonymity but also to avoid an overly nationality-based interpretation of the material. My object of analysis is a transnational social field and my interest is less in national views than in modes of work that transcend specifically national or professional viewpoints (see Kuus 2018 for a discussion of such methodological and ethical considerations).

2. The term 'state-governing expertise' is borrowed from Dezelay and Garth, 2011.
3. This does not reduce the value of Arctic Council settings. At an Arctic Council meeting, an interviewee explains, 'you are one of eight with a veto power'. An Arctic Circle event is a more nebulous setting with multiple networks of influence: it may not be as 'comfortable' for a diplomat.
4. The history of Arctic conferences, especially the Arctic Circle Assembly and the Arctic Frontiers meetings, has received some scholarly attention already, and I will not review that material here. See Steinveg, 2022 for a book-length study from political science and Kuus, 2023b for a more interdisciplinary analysis of the spaces of Arctic governance expertise.
5. See also the photographs of the meeting that are available on the Arctic Circle site.
6. That the Assembly always takes place in the architecturally stunning Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Centre in Reykjavik is 'genius', a regular attendee remarks: the Assembly is now associated with that beautiful space and the association supports the event in intangible ways.
7. Broader discussion of the use of in-person vs hybrid or virtual interaction in international governance processes is beyond the scope of this paper. Studies from neuroscience to psychology to organizational sociology show that virtual meetings tend to be less creative and more susceptible to groupthink, produce cognitive overload (which is worse for women), and undercut trust (e.g. Fauville et al., 2021; Schwartz et al., 2022; *The Economist*, 2021a; 2022). Remote work makes collaboration more 'static and siloed' (*The Economist*, 2021b; see also Kuus, 2023a). A neuroscience paper based on experiments done before the pandemic highlights substantial attenuation of inter-brain synchrony in virtual vs in-person interactions (Schwartz et al., 2022: 11). As one author of the study puts it, even in the best of circumstances of excellent technology and relaxed conversation between two partners who know each other well, virtual interaction leads to 'lower-quality and less authentic communication, compared to what our brain is used to (and) what it was made for' (Guillaume Dumas, quoted in Legault, 2023). The methodological implications of this to how scholars do fieldwork are likewise beyond the scope of this paper, but see Kuus, 2023c for a brief consideration of some such implications.
8. Diplomats fit the category uneasily: as professional networkers, they are well connected in Arctic circles when assigned to work on the region, but they rotate to different postings every 3-5 years. However, in part because several of the Arctic states are small Nordic

countries, the field of professional communication remains stable because members of the national professional class know each other. In Arctic networks, quasi-diplomatic expertise is not confined to diplomatic services.

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