

THE ARCTIC IN 25 YEARS

Proceedings of the First Annual International Youth Symposium

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The Arctic in 25 Years

Hosted by the Wilson Center’s Polar Institute, in partnership with Arctic Frontiers, Arctic Council Permanent Participant Youth (supported by the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat) and Arctic Youth Ambassadors, the First Annual International Youth Symposium gathered emerging Arctic leaders to inform and influence potential Arctic policy for the next generation. Panelists represented all eight Arctic states, as well as Indigenous Peoples who live there. Based on the research they conducted, policies they coordinated, as well as traditional lifestyles and subsistence missions they’ve led, youth leaders discussed the Arctic they envision for the future and the actions needed to achieve it. Common threads among the panelists encouraged:

- The necessity of free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples when considering development in the Arctic region;
- Intentional relationship-building and bottom-up policy approaches to produce successful solutions to Arctic challenges; and
- Leveraging power from institutions to communities so that research, policy and decision-making are created by and for peoples who have been marginalized.

The Polar Institute is pleased to summarize each speaker’s presentation in these proceedings.

Readers may click on speakers’ names to watch their presentations.

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DAY 1

Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Dr. Mike Sfraga, Director, Polar Institute, Wilson Center, said it is appropriate to hear expertise, perspectives, insights and aspirations of a representative group of Arctic youth in advance of the 12th Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council. He remarked that the Arctic Council has become the most consequential organization for international dialogue, research and cooperation in the Arctic region, and that the young panelists of this symposium would be the next leaders of the Council.

Dr. Ellen Inga Turi, Chair of the Board, Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, said the Arctic Council has shown a willingness and ability to include Arctic Indigenous Peoples in the decision-making processes about Arctic issues since its establishment. In the next 25 years, she anticipates that Arctic Indigenous representation will remain and be strengthened with the help of the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat and Arctic youth.

Dr. Mike Sfraga



Dr. Ellen Inga Turi



Arctic Council Permanent Participant Youth



Michaela Stith, Program Assistant, Polar Institute, Wilson Center, said that the Indigenous organizations with Permanent Participant status in the Arctic Council have developed six joint declarations at their Arctic Leaders' Summits, the first of which occurred 5 years before the Arctic Council's formation. The 6th Arctic Leaders' Summit (convened December 2019 in Rovaniemi, Finland) was the very first to invite Permanent Participant youth representatives. Ms. Stith asked the panelists about the topics emphasized in 1st Arctic Youth Leaders' Summit declaration and the benefits of circumpolar collaboration between Indigenous youth.



Enni Similä, Project Coordinator, The Saami Council, said that Saami life depends on connection with the land and Arctic environmental change has affected Saami ways of life. As climate change draws new investment to the region, she said Indigenous people should have the ability to take part in decision-making and planning processes at an early stage, as well as reserve the right to say no to new developments in their homelands.



Deenaalee Hodgdon, Youth Representative, Arctic Athabaskan Council, said knowledge is interwoven in Indigenous languages. She discussed the use of various forms and methods to teach Indigenous languages, such as immersion programs and audio recordings in the form of podcasts. Podcasts were also highlighted as the way to engage youth in the Arctic Council, allowing them to emphasize stories they want to bring to the forefront, to their communities and to policy/academic arenas.



Crystal Martin-Lapenskie, President, National Inuit Youth Council, noted that Indigenous Peoples' cultural safety must be a lens urgently applied to Arctic policy. She highlighted the importance of the Rovaniemi 2019 meeting, as it allowed participants to build connections with other Indigenous leaders, to emphasize common challenges across the Arctic, and to actively include youth in initiatives to improve engagement on and understanding of Arctic issues.



Joshua Vo, Inuit Circumpolar Council Emerging Leader, concurred with other panelists about common themes: the importance of youth engagement and revitalization of Indigenous languages. He said Indigenous peoples' ability to be heard, express concerns about policy and industrial development, and have actions taken on those concerns must continue.



Ivan Trofimov, Vice Chair, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North Youth Council, said those engaged in traditional livelihoods such as fishing, hunting and reindeer herding should receive support from the state for the development and continuation of their traditional livelihoods. Moreover, he urged that a plan of implementation should follow the 1st Arctic Youth Leaders' Summit Declaration, suggested it be regularly updated based on continued discussions, and advocated for the Permanent Participant Youth Network to become a professional movement.



Darling Anderson, Youth Representative, Aleut International Association, said that an understanding of Indigenous peoples' connection to their land and food is essential, and unnecessary oversight over Indigenous hunting practices should be limited. Moreover, economic sovereignty would ensure that food shipped to rural communities is accessible. She also noted that fluent Unangaꣳ speakers are aging, and there has been a push to prioritize funding and increase the amount for Indigenous language teachers.



Rena Squirrel, Project Coordinator, Gwich'in Council International, said community gardens and maintaining a traditional diet can improve food security, especially as food can be so expensive in the northern regions and fresh fruits and vegetables are almost nonexistent. Reflecting on her own experience reconnecting with Gwich'in language and roots, she noted that technology such as language apps and regular Zoom meetings for language learning can support teaching of Indigenous languages.

Infrastructure and Sustainable Development



Jack Durkee, Arctic Infrastructure Inventory Manager, Polar Institute, Wilson Center, moderated the panel, which focused on the growing interest in shipping, resource extraction and foreign investment resulting from climate change. He asked panelists about the principles and processes that might accompany the shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative one in the next 25 years.



Taylor Holshouser, Director of Business Development, Alaska Ocean Cluster, said technological innovation has a long tradition in the Arctic and will be key to solving challenges and taking advantage of new opportunities. To foster innovation, there is a need for adequate funding and critical infrastructure like roads, ports, education and broadband internet to communicate, travel and harness local talent.



Ruth Miller, Climate Justice Director, Alaska Just Transition Network, said just transition requires “remembering forward” Indigenous lifeways, cultural and sociopolitical structures, and values of reciprocity and sustainability. Crucial to just transition, she said, was not only learning how to engage sustainable development, but also how to disengage exploitative and extractive practices. In a regenerative economy, the baseline for any economic development would need to engage the free, prior and informed consent of impacted communities.



Artur Okotetto, Vice Chair, RAIPON Youth Council, said Indigenous youth learn how to unite the traditional knowledge of their elders with the conditions of the modern world; new technological solutions towards the development of the Arctic may allow for the preservation of the Indigenous peoples’ traditional lands and livelihoods. He noted that business enterprises should be responsible and liable for their actions in the Arctic region. For example, legislation could mandate that companies operating in northern territories must sit at the same table with the Indigenous peoples and discuss their development projects.



Ole-Anders Turi, Reindeer Herder, said industrial development and infrastructure has quickly reduced natural areas in Norway without consultation or dialogue with the Saami people. Reductions in reindeer herders' grazing lands limits herders' flexibility and ability to feed reindeer. He noted the Arctic Council as a model for cooperation that could be brought to national-level decision-making.



Chloe Scott, Research Associate, Clear Seas Centre for Responsible Marine Shipping, said being uncomfortable is key to having conversations about just transition, regarding her own organization's learning around Indigenous knowledge and empowerment within and beyond the scope of ocean science and governance. She said policymakers and governments should respectfully empower communities to drive and inform their work.



Panelist participate virtually from around the globe

DAY 2

Welcome and Introductory Remarks



Anu Fredrikson, Director, Arctic Frontiers, encouraged the panelists to inspire and inform the audience. She noted that youth have been an integral part of Arctic Frontiers' goals for knowledge-based growth and sustainable development of the region.



The Honorable Jim DeHart, U.S. Coordinator for the Arctic, Department of State, said there are many opportunities for youth to engage in Arctic affairs including economic development, security and defense, scientific research and serving Indigenous communities; the challenge is connecting those fields. He highlighted the role of the Arctic Council in regional cooperation, noting that the U.S. would like to see youth engagement grow to make the forum even more effective. Understanding the challenges posed by climate change, Mr. DeHart said the right kinds of investment can help solve the climate crisis and guard against the kinds of unsustainable investments that could damage Arctic communities.

Climate Change and Biodiversity Action and Research



Larry Ibrahim Mohammed, PhD Fellow, UiT, moderated the panel. His questions emphasized the value of Indigenous knowledge systems in understanding changes in climate and biodiversity, while investigating the ways communities and researchers can work together via co-production of knowledge to reduce daily environmental risks and improve quality of life in the Arctic.



Dazawray Landrie-Parker, Instructor, Yukon University, said that Arctic Indigenous peoples want development, but that the historical trust deficit with developers and researchers will require a communication and engagement strategy that is rooted in early and often communication, information distribution based on community desires and open and transparent two-way information flow. To her, co-production of knowledge is about leveraging power so research is designed by for communities, particularly by and for marginalized peoples.



Haliehana Stepetin, PhD Candidate, UC Davis, said much of life in the Aleutian Islands relies on seasons, and that Aleut performances and processes occur throughout the year to honor reciprocal relationships with food sources and each other. Co-production of knowledge gives power to communities in methodological decision making and research design.



Pétur Háldorsson, Founder, Arctic Youth Network, presented the Icelandic Youth Environmentalist Association's Handbook for Environmental Advocacy as a conversation starter. With increased exposure to Indigenous knowledge frameworks, he discussed how to communicate the existence of different knowledge systems and position them on a peer-to-peer basis with science.



Jannelle Trowbridge, Arctic Youth Ambassador, said that monitoring and management decisions made without Indigenous peoples can result in uniformed and unsuccessful solutions. Instead, state agencies could build relationships with Indigenous people like those at the symposium who work to translate their knowledge systems into the language those institutions speak. She noted that meaningful engagement requires curiosity and openness to multiple ways of knowing, as well as funding and venues for youth to build relationships and connections.

Political Leadership and Governance



Marisol Maddox, Arctic Analyst, Polar Institute, Wilson Center, moderated the panel to identify the most important challenges Arctic nations will face in the future, and their actions to mitigate those challenges today.



Sam Schimmel, Arctic Youth Ambassador, says bottom-up policy approaches – systems of governance that are local in nature, tailor-built to a community, rooted in Indigenous knowledge and the community where they're being derived – will produce the most successful solutions, build a more engaged population, and provide hope and opportunity. He said the global pandemic highlighted the importance of broadband connectivity and, through social media and access to technology, resulted in coalition-building among Alaska Native people.



Katarina Kertysova, Global Fellow, Polar Institute, Wilson Center, discussed her engagement with and insights on the NATO 2030 Young Leaders Report. She said NATO 2030 is a forward-looking process acknowledging that policies will only work if the younger generation feels ownership and responsibility for their long-term implementation. She thinks climate change may be among the top issues of discussion for NATO's agenda and in its development of the new strategic concept.



Johannes Lundvoll, Youth Council of Lyngen, said the world is experiencing a democratic crisis for which solutions will require more meaningful opportunities for people to be involved in government beyond voting. He discussed engagement solutions in Norway, such as a mandated youth council in every municipality. While acknowledging that apps and technology present new ways to encourage discussion, he said social media algorithms and censorship create polarization and echo chambers that pose challenges to democracy.



Petter Lundström, Umeå University, said he expects that sustainable climate action will be achieved in the concurrence of four areas: the arrival of serious climate consequences, critical levels of awareness of these consequences, sufficient political mandate and power of action, and adequate strength of civil society and educational institutions to survive stronger political mandates. He introduced a well-rounded discussion on the role of social media in achieving democracy.



Seqininguaq Qitura Lyng Poulsen, Artist and Activist, said that many youth in Greenland are more engaged in climate activism than policy because the former recognizes the importance of Indigenous Peoples' culture and way of living, while the latter relies on colonial norms and institutions. In the next 25 years, they say that policymakers must begin to recognize the value of neurodiversity and traditional food practices, among other values neglected since European contact.

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