

# Social sustainability in/and the Barents energyscape: Conceptual platforms for tracing the elusive social

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# Background / Context

- Climate change not the only force shaping Arctic socioeconomic landscapes
- Energy extraction activities moving further North
  - Mutually reinforcing developments
  - Mutually reinforcing consequences?
- Concern over (socio)economic, environmental  
-> focus to the sidelined social!

# The sustainability debate

- Brundtland definition (WCED 1987)
  - critiques: anthropocentrism, neoliberal bias, impossible to operationalize, three pillar structure artificial...
- Sustainable development  $\neq$  sustainability
- 'Decoupling' sustainable and development
  - as a good thing (Sneddon 2000)
  - as a bad thing (Hjerpe and Linnér 2009)

# The 'social' in the 'sustainable'

- Widely recognized as "vague", "fuzzy", "fluid", "difficult to analyze, comprehend, define" ...
- Attempts to arrange the "chaotic" concept and literature under
  - Pre-eminent policy concepts: equity, participation, awareness, cohesion (Murphy 2012)
  - Development / bridge / maintenance sustainability (Vallance et al 2011)
  - Substantive / procedural (Del Río & Burguillo 2008)

# Re(de)fining the social

- Still: social often not / only vaguely defined
  - Dictionary definitions: social limited to interactions of humans and institutions
- Alternative views: lived social worlds always "more-than-human", boundaries artificial
  - Nature/biotics (Youatt 2007, Hiedanpää et al 2012)
  - Objects, technologies, materialities / abiotics (ANT, Psaridikou & Szerszynski 2012)

# Tracing the elusive social?

- No universal definitions of the social
  - Dependent on context / situation
  - Mosaics of human and 'nonhuman' entities
  - Divergent views even within the same situation
- “This context-specificity forces the crucial questions: what exactly is being sustained, at what scale, by and for whom, and using what institutional mechanisms?” (Sneddon 2000)

# Thank you!

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