The 7th NRF Proceedings "Climate Change in Northern Territories: Sharing Experiences, Exploring New Methods, and Assessing Socio-Economic Impacts"

Open Assembly / Conference in Akureyri, Iceland

August 22-23, 2013

"From Sharing Experiences on Societal Impacts of Climate Change in Northern Territories to Exploring New Methods and Human Responses"

INTRODUCTION

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Climate change is one of the major triggers behind the current multi-dimensional change in the post-Cold War Arctic. Change is inevitable, global and rapid, and it comes with uncertainty. It is real and must be taken seriously, but not with a one-sided or simplistic approach. Moreover there are a few other triggers, such as neoliberalism, the globalized world economy / globalization, and the strategic importance of energy security. Together these have lead to a discovery - a 'new' ocean, the Arctic Ocean (without sea ice).

Climate change has been a popular global research theme of the science community for some time now. Indeed, there is plenty of data and scenarios as well as on-going discussions about climate change and its impacts e.g., the meetings by UNFCCC, IPCC and the Arctic Council. Here the Arctic region is used as an important laboratory for climate studies, as well as a workshop for studies on the environment and climate, as the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment Report of 2004 clearly demonstrated. The post-Cold War Arctic is a much 'politicized' space by both regional and non-regional actors with their varying aims and goals, as well as different identities and backgrounds. There are also different streams of 'globalization' and implementation of the interplay between science and politics. There is much scientific knowledge and expertise but it is neither interdisciplinary nor holistic. The old ways of thinking and acting are still used – mostly due to political inability – but they are not practical for "real-world problem-solving" of these issues.

Global climate change is such an issue. There is a scarcity of real dialogue and a lack of patience to (re)think. There is also a lack of broader, open and participatory fora for issue-oriented dialogue across sectors and between science, politics and business. What might be needed for greater implementation is: more research, knowledge, background information, additional meetings and more discussion among experts? Do we need to have technocrats in charge, or hire consultants? Or is it lack of patience to listen and create an interactive discussion that will provide a greater understanding and capability to apply research results and knowledge?

It is largely agreed that there is an urgent need to undertake more in depth interdisciplinary research on climate / climate change *per se* and its relations with the environment. In addition, there is a need to have more discussions on the subject in different political contexts, so that climate change can be linked to other relevant issues, such as energy, security, clean technology,

geoeconomics including the fiscal and economic system and the entire governance structure. The aim is to have an issue-oriented, multi-dimensional dialogue across disciplines, (different) knowledge(s) and sectors of both a society and the global community. This dialogue would also include discussions between science, politics and business, between the state / political and economic élites and the civil society / activists. Finally, there is a need for fresh thinking and bold new ideas when trying to solve these real-world global problems and avoid new ones, and assist decision-makers in applying new (scientific) knowledge for policy-making. To develop and test new methods for adaptation to climate change and its environmental, as well as socio-economic impacts is one of these real world issues that need to be addressed.

The Northern Research Forum (NRF) held discussions on climate change and its physical and socio-economic impacts both generally and in the Arctic context. These discussions have also been linked to the uncertainty among indigenous peoples and other Northern residents, and its security aspects have also been discussed in theory. By the 6th NRF Open Assembly, which took place on the 3-6 of September 2011 in Hveragerði, Iceland, the theme was "Our Ice Dependent World" we (re)defined climate change in a constructive manner. It was considered a global phenomenon influencing humankind and all the regions depending on ice and snow per se, or the water from glaciers (see The 6th NRF Proceedings – www.nrf.is). The open assembly addressed the three 'poles' of the globe by gathering experts on the Arctic, the Antarctic and the Himalayan region to discuss 'ice' and analyze the importance of 'ice' for human existence and biodiversity. The ultimate question was, if we can imagine a world without ice. The answer was crystal clear, we cannot!

By the 2011 Open Assembly, the NRF demonstrated its global approach, which had already begun during the 4th NRF Open Assembly (in October 2006 in Oulu and Tornio, Finland and Haparanda and Luleå, Sweden) with fresh and innovative ideas on 'Tech-knowledgy' and its new applications for the 'borderless' North (see The Borderless North 2008 – www.nrf.is).

In 2013 it was time to change the approach and broaden the agenda: The Arctic is neither, and cannot be, only a laboratory of research on impacts of climate change, nor are its inhabitants guinea pigs for scientific research. The post-Cold War Arctic is a "knowledge-based region" and a model of stability-building. Thus, the Arctic inhabitants would like to be taken - and actually they already are active participants in research activities.

The philosophy behind this interpretation - and this is also an NRF principle - is that 'science' means to make, or produce, 'knowledge' for humankind. Science is more than labs, it is people, it is the environment, it is a dialogue and even more, it is an attitude. Science is a common heritage of humankind and cannot be isolated from the rest of society. To this end, the scientific community could redefine and use the Arctic region as a workshop, where both the interplay between science and politics and that of scientific research and traditional (environmental) knowledge are applied.

The Open Assembly / Conference "Climate Change in Northern Territories", organized together by the NRF and ESPON/ENECON was held in Akureyri, Iceland in August 22-23, 2013. The aim was to share experiences on climate change and its impacts (based on the existing data and knowledge and computer models) within the Arctic region and the rest of the globe. To explore new methods and methodologies for assessing socio-economic impacts of climate change, not only in the Arctic, but also in Bangladesh, Sahara, tiny atolls in the Pacific and other areas of the developing world. And finally to examine methods and share knowledge on adaptation (to climate change) locally and regionally.

All together at the 7th NRF Open Assembly / Conference, there were 106 participants from 14 countries. There were a number of applications with interesting and informative abstracts mostly from Northern Europe, the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region, Russia and North America. Forty-four were accepted for presentations in parallel sessions, ten were accepted from Young Researchers.

Based on the NRF model this open assembly is one of the new global stages designed for open and democratic dialogue, and encourages fresh thinking and new ideas by well-educated and leading minds. More interdisciplinary analysis and synthesis of real global issues is needed. We need in-depth dialogue with an interdisciplinary approach across different sectors (of a society), and among young and senior scholars, between science, politics and business and finally between a state and a civil society.

At the Open Assembly / Conference in Akureyri, Iceland in August 2013 the ten selected NRF Young Researchers provided fresh thinking and new ideas that are reflected in the NRF Proceedings and include scientific articles dealing with the conference's main theme, as well as the session reports and the key points of interest from the conference. As such, the Young Researchers made important and impressive contributions to the 7th NRF Proceedings.

At its best the NRF Open Assemblies have managed to create dialogue, where the participants are open-minded toward a discussion that is not a battle". They are more committed to 'inclusivity', engage in each other's debates, focus on issues and embrace the open-ended nature of the dialogue that are all part of the five rules of dialogue for a firm commitment outlined by Kornprobst (2009). When applying these rules to NRF Open Assemblies the role of the NRF Young Researchers has been stimulating and irreplaceable. As a result, there are two more rules for a real dialogue based on the NRF Open Assemblies: an open and democratic dialogue comes with patience and mutual respect, and both 'interdisciplinarity' and 'intersectorality' are applied.

Since its establishment in 1999 the Northern Research Forum has shown that an open dialogue can be intellectually attractive and cumulative. For example, the establishment of a process to select an international group of the NRF Young Researchers has been very successful in guaranteeing a high-quality of young participants that shoulder double-responsibility during each Open Assembly. The first Arctic Yearbook published by the Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security was launched in November 2012. The first Arctic Circle, which took place in October 2013 in Reykjavik, Iceland, is built on the foundation of the NRF Open Assemblies. This comprehensive approach and combination of rethinking, theorization and implementation is something that established academic and political institutions could appreciate, support and apply if they wish to.

All this has been done to assist decision-makers in applying scientific knowledge to policy-making, particularly when it comes to climate change and its impacts. Indeed, these issues are too serious to be left solely to the policy-makers, or even the political elites, or businesses. Conscientious citizens are, as they should be, actively involved in the decision making process as subjects, not as objects. Based on the abstracts, presentations, and the entire dialogue of this conference the participants are without doubt among these citizens. This is much appreciated and it is my pleasure to thank all the participants of the special NRF-ESPON/ENECON conference for providing their valuable contributions to exploring new methods and human responses to climate change in Northern Territories.