

## **Session X - Social Changes and Adaptation**

**Rapporteur: Noor Johnson, Brown University**

Panelists:

Garri Raagmaa, University of Tartu

Marguerite Marlin, NRF Young Researcher, McMaster University

Eva Halapi, University of Akureyri Research Centre

Anna Lilja Sigurvinsdóttir, University of Akureyri Research Centre

Panelists in this session addressed social changes and adaptation in a broad context that encompassed legal norms and frameworks, education and institutions, and public perception of climate change. While not all panelists framed their presentations in this way, they shared the perspective that institutions (legal, educational, political, and cultural) shape the way that change is perceived as well as the ability of different actors to proactively respond to change.

Garri Raagmaa's discussion of regional higher educational institutions in Estonia addressed the question of how to best structure educational opportunities to meet the specific needs of people and communities in northern territories. He suggested that regional higher educational institutions play an important role in knowledge transfer, knowledge creation, and cultural and community development and local identity. Raagmaa argued against centralization of higher education in major urban centres, suggesting that locating educational institutions in northern, rural regions can help address the loss of population out of these areas by introducing new ideas and technologies and by investing in workforce training. These institutions may also enhance local economies by supporting sustainable or green development models.

NRF Young Researcher Marguerite Marlin offered a presentation on the different legal frameworks and venues available for Arctic Indigenous peoples, arguing that global venues, such as the Arctic Council and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, offer a comparative advantage. She reviewed some of the differences among Arctic states in terms of the degree of recognition afforded Indigenous peoples and the kinds of legal arrangements that

support Indigenous autonomy within states. With globalization, Arctic states have an interest in pursuing resource projects to the detriment of Indigenous rights, but there have also been new opportunities for Indigenous peoples to be active in circumpolar venues such as the Arctic Council. On the whole, Marlin felt that these global venues were offering leverage to Indigenous peoples as a forum to articulate and gain recognition for their rights and their knowledge traditions.

Presentations by Eva Halapi and Anna Lilja Sigurvinsdóttir shared findings from two related studies on climate change perceptions and knowledge in Iceland. Halapi and colleagues administered a web-based survey of nearly 1500 young adults aimed at investigating the level of factual knowledge about climate change among young Icelanders, and whether or not knowledge correlated with their interest and ability to act. They found that while the majority (70%) saw themselves as knowledgeable about climate change issues, the level of factual knowledge varied quite a bit among respondents and was often built on misconceptions. There was also a notable gender difference, with male respondents scoring higher in terms of their level of factual knowledge. Higher knowledge levels also correlated with willingness to make lifestyle changes to address climate change.

A related study, presented by Sigurvinsdóttir, is in its early stages and will focus on awareness, perception, and attitudes on climate change among adults in Iceland. Early focus groups already pointed towards some potentially significant methodological findings, in that participants emphasized the need to use very simple terms and concepts, expressing discomfort with scientific terms that were too abstract and theoretical. They also emphasized that media portrayals of climate related risks left the feeling disempowered, and suggested that it was important for people to be acknowledged and rewarded for changes in behavior that would help mitigate climate change.

These presentations on public perception of climate change generated a number of questions and comments from the audience. Audience members were interested in the role of education and the school system on public awareness in Iceland, and suggested that educating children would lead to greater awareness and higher likelihood of personal action for parents, as well.