

Young Researcher Report - Open Assembly Panel: Opening Session – Part I

Damien Degeorges, Paris Descartes University, France

The important role of the Northern Research Forum – more than ten years after its first Open Assembly – and the University of the Arctic has been highlighted. The notion of “3rd Pole” emerges as a new concept and shows willingness from Asian countries to assert and legitimate their presences in polar regions.

According to Rector Stefán B. Sigurðsson, University of Akureyri (Iceland), research activities are needed and this requires international cooperation. It has been a key point of this opening session. Dr. Lassi Heininen, University of Lapland (Finland), underlined the role of the Northern Research Forum as a unique forum and an interface between science and politics. He described ice as a concept of global politics.

The concept of “3rd Pole”

According to Dr. Lassi Heininen, not only latitudes matters, but also altitudes and attitudes. The Arctic is seen as a region of stability and peace that brings a diversity of specialities (geology, politics, law, etc.). Dr. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, President of Iceland, noted that “the Arctic has moved from being almost peripheral in global concerns to now being centre stage”. He underlined, as the conference’s title, that the global community is dependent on ice, through the Arctic (Greenland), Antarctica and the 3rd Pole (Himalaya). It is also an ice depending world as the melting of ice is the greatest security threat for many countries, such as Bangladesh. According to President Grímsson, “the Arctic, together with Antarctica and the Himalayan region, has become the new intellectual frontier with respect to research, discoveries and active scholarly cooperation. A frontier which ten to fifteen years ago did not exist in the global intellectual community.”

Future challenges

The need of training young scholars has been underlined, notably by President Grímsson. Successful dialogue is based on scientific cooperation. A situation that has to continue.

Dr. Arthur Chilingarov, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for International Cooperation in the Arctic and Antarctic, focused his talk on the consequences of increasing climate change in the Arctic (Greenland Ice Sheet, etc.) as well as on the need for constructive dialogue between politicians, scientists, businessmen, indigenous people and interested parties. The Northern Research Forum is seen to be an important forum to gather those partners. Dr. Chilingarov highlighted the need for cooperation and mutual understanding when it comes to the Arctic.

Professor Yao Tandong, Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research (Chinese Academy of Science), presented glacier studies and talked notably about the accelerating retreat of glaciers. As an example, larger amplitudes have been measured: the last 30 years amplitude is equivalent to the last 200 years amplitude. Professor Yao Tandong called for more international cooperation in the Tibetan Plateau region and closer cooperation in the 1st (Arctic) and 3rd (Antarctic) Pole.

The case of Greenland

Kuupik Kleist, Premier of Greenland, raised a lot of attention from the audience. He underlined the fact that Greenland was experiencing climate change on first-hand. While media focus on polar bears, Kuupik Kleist stressed that the Arctic is also about people who have been living there for thousands of years. Due to climate change, there is a need to adapt, notably for hunters and fishermen. According to Kuupik Kleist, one way to adapt is to embrace new opportunities, in close cooperation with the people that should not be left outside as spectators in their own home. Greenland does not want to compromise with environmental risk but want to take the chance of new opportunities: that requires the highest environmental and technical standards. According to Kuupik Kleist, profits and environment can and must have to get hands-in-hand. Premier Kleist is open for dialogues

with constructive NGO's. That requires respectful cooperation and dialogue. Some of it could be under the Arctic Council umbrella. He finally highlighted the new Arctic policy of the Kingdom of Denmark.