

Young Researcher Report – Open Assembly Panel: Humanity, Communities, Minds, Perceptions and Knowledge on Ice.

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Presentations by NRF Young Researchers:

- Keshav Prasad Paudel (University of Bergen, Norway / Nepal)
- Yongjia Song (University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA / China)
- Jessica Vaughan (University of Alberta, Canada)
- Audur Ingólfssdóttir (University of Iceland & University of Lapland, Finland)
- Margret Cela (University of Lapland, Finland / Iceland)

Summary of Discussion: The discussion that followed the five presentations by Young Researchers was primarily concerned with issues of how to respond to changes in the Arctic environment. Currently, the post-Cold War cooperation between Arctic nations appears to provide a footing for a peaceful resolution to any potential conflicts or tensions. However, this cooperation cannot be guaranteed to remain indefinitely. As such, issues related to security were of concern.

It was noted that discussions about security implicitly raise the issue of who or what is perceived as a threat. That is, if Arctic security is defined as a military or strategic issue, then the question which follows is: who are the “good” and who are the “bad” guys? Put into more specific terms, who should participate in decision making in the Arctic? Should it be the five nation-states with coastlines in the Arctic, the states that comprise the Arctic council, or all nation-states? What role should indigenous peoples have? While these questions generate different opinions and positions, it was argued that to construct a creative dialogue and promote peace it is necessary to follow international laws and agreements. It was further argued that nation-states have the moral and ethical imperative to listen to the voices of those who are not participating directly in the decision-making process. The needs of Arctic communities and the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination might, in some circumstances, be in opposition to the positions of nation-states and their need to retain control of decision-making processes.

While the above concerns are related to treating Arctic security as a military or strategic issue, it was noted that a different set of concerns arise if “threats” are perceived not as specific states or other political actors, but as larger threats to all of humanity. Regarding threat in this way might influence how we decide who has a role in speaking to the issue of how to decide what kind of security is important. The very way in which “security” is interpreted has political consequences.

The interpretation of security as an issue of military strategy issue and not of human security is one important issue; another is the issue of framing climate change as an opportunity for private profit, and as a global versus local issue. The question was asked: what kind of responses are encouraged and what kind of responses are discouraged if climate change is seen as something that can be best responded to through the market place? Another question arose of whether, because the impacts of climate change are often felt most intensely at a local level, it is more helpful to respond to climate change as a local rather than global issue. This is related to the question of whether effort should go into ensuring that the people who are living closest to the impacts of climate change in the Arctic and the Himalayas have a large voice in deciding the best responses. While from the outside (i.e., non Arctic places) it might seem that climate change is a global issue, it could also be that for people living with localized impacts of climate change that the most important issues are the development of an economy that would provide jobs and economic security in a changing environment.

It was noted that climate change is historically unique in terms of its scope, its source in human activities, and the nature of the changes it will likely bring. As such, climate change can be interpreted as an issue that demands global cooperation that would unite humanity.