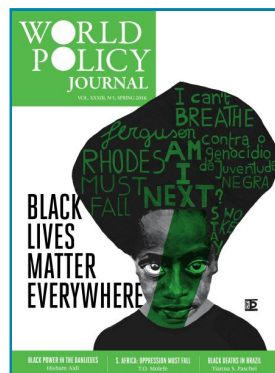


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A "One Arctic" Agenda

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By Ashley Chappo

Last week, the One Arctic Workshop was held at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. co-hosted by Trent University, the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, and the World Policy Institute's Arctic in Context initiative. The conference was unprecedented in that it was the first workshop to explore the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council from the perspective of the "One Arctic" agenda.

Since 2015, when the United States assumed leadership of the Arctic Council for the second time since the council's founding in 1996, the theme of the U.S. chairmanship has focused on building a more unified Arctic, with "shared opportunities, challenges, and responsibilities." To this end, the United States has outlined four cornerstones for international cooperation: 1) the safety, security, and stewardship of the Arctic Ocean; 2) improved economic and living conditions for Arctic communities; 3) addressing the impacts of climate change; and 4) raising awareness of Arctic issues.

But, proponents and critics of the chosen "One Arctic" theme had their voices heard during this joint workshop when it came to the proper direction for the future of the Arctic Council. Opinions were flying and important conversations took place, with the hope that the conference will spark new collaborations and generate fresh ideas.

There was one overriding question that served as the foundation for the two-day conference: What does "One Arctic" mean from the point of view of the U.S. agenda and for the future of the region?

Arctic experts, academics, policymakers, and representatives from indigenous

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communities weighed in with a diversity of viewpoints about the practicality of the theme and its larger implications for the work of the Arctic Council.



With workshop panels covering topics like “One Arctic,” global climate, Arctic economic futures, and the role of indigenous and sub-national actors, there was plenty of room for informed dissent, for or against the council’s current governance direction.

Julia Gourley, the U.S. Senior Arctic Official, argued in defense of the concept, saying that the theme “One Arctic” was chosen specifically to convey the reality that the Arctic is a region of peace and cooperation, not a region deteriorating into conflict, as sometimes presented by media.

“There are many dimensions to the Arctic,” said Gourley. “But it’s still one single, cohesive region. It’s a region at peace with cooperation. The Arctic Council continues to be the place where we come together to cooperate and protect this vital region of the world.”

But others like Doug Nord, a visiting professor at Umeå University in Sweden, noted that not all countries will buy into the theme of “One Arctic.” “There is still a belief among some of ‘many Arctics, many perspectives,’” he said. He added that there are limitations to the chairmanship of the Arctic Council and the forum’s influence, including the dilemma of representing the Arctic with all of its diverse interests.

Joël Plouffe, co-managing editor of Arctic Yearbook said in a Twitter [chat](#) held by World Policy that topics like Arctic development show the impossibility of “One Arctic,” with development in the region depending on location and needs. “Division in Arctic,” he said, “is not new and is needed.”

Others panelists like Drue Pearce from Crowell and Moring LLP, an international law firm with an office in Anchorage, argued more generally about the drawbacks to the Arctic Council, saying that the forum’s original purpose of protecting the environment, evidenced by the passage of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991, is no longer sufficient. Instead, she insisted, the council needs to focus on other important factors like the human dimension. “What is the Arctic Council actually doing for people in the Arctic?” she asked. “This role is not adequate.”

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During the conference, participants were fortunate to hear from key figures on international Arctic policy, like Susan Harper, Canada's Senior Arctic Official and chair of the Arctic Council from 2014-2015. During her leadership, Canada focused on the theme "Development for the People of the North," with an emphasis on the over 4 million people in the world who call the Arctic home.

Recognizing and highlighting Canada's achievements during its two-year term, including the development of the Arctic Economic Council, Harper said Canada has no problem seeing itself as part of "One Arctic" as outlined by the U.S. Chairmanship. She pointed to the need to work together and emphasized that the U.S. theme and programs are complementary to Canada's chairmanship agenda. In particular, she highlighted the fact that government plays an important role in setting standards in the region.

But there was no clear consensus at the conference that there is "One Arctic." The idea resonated at least when it comes to shared security objectives and hope for multinational cooperation. Participants for the most part agreed that the Arctic Council should aspire for unity while also accounting for diversity. University of Washington's Nadine Fabbi, conference co-chair, opened the workshop by reminding the participants that the "One Arctic" theme was inspired by the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), which has used the theme "One Arctic, One Future" at more than one general meeting. "This theme," Fabbi noted, "weaves together how we understand the Arctic in the larger realm of international relations." World Policy's Erica Dingman suggested at the conclusion of the opening panel of the conference that we should aim to achieve the ICC's idea of "One Arctic, one future, but without losing sight of the local."



Several Arctic nations, including the Nordic states and Russia, were represented in the workshop conversations, as were a range of other

communities such as the Arctic Council's Permanent Participants, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals from the private sector, but it was the voice of the indigenous and sub-national representatives in the crowd that struck a resounding chord across the panels.

Rosemarie Kuptana, former chair of the ICC, spoke on the conference panel about global climate and sustainability, arguing that the land of ice and snow is the homeland of Inuit, for whom climate change is one of the biggest intrusions. Governments, she argued, need to pay attention to the human dimension and indigenous voices in the Arctic when it comes to making policy decisions. She shared a film with the audience about the direct human impacts of climate change in the Arctic region, demonstrating how drastically climate change affects food security and travel. She emphasized that the 155,000 Inuit people in the world need recognition and respect.



"The Inuit aren't stewards of the Arctic. We're not shepherds," she said. "The notion of stewardship was transferred by consultants. Inuit are hunters, fisherman, and whalers. The Inuit way of knowing is that human kind is an extension of a vast universe."

In the Arctic, the Inuit homeland is unbounded, with four artificial boundaries including Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Russia. Yet, despite this fact, the Inuit people are left out of important policy conversations and not respected, according to Kuptana. "States must invite Inuit as partners, not as adversaries," she said.

In a conversation following her panel, she added: "Indigenous should have a greater role in all of the working groups, be they technical, scientific or legal. As Inuit, we understand these very complex issues. The Arctic is a very complex region of the world, so we require all of these great minds to work together for the benefit of this one Arctic region."



Andy Kliskey from the University of Idaho agreed, emphasizing that people living in a place know and understand climate change as well as scientists, which is why he argued that the Arctic needs a network of community-based observing.

Jean-Francois Arteau, the founding partner of legal consulting firm Kesserwan Arteau, agreed: "The secret of the North is respect. Once you respect the Inuit, they will tell you exactly what they want," he said. "If you avoid the Inuit, like many mining companies have, it is a recipe for disaster." He even went as far as to say that in Nunavik, Canada, for example, people do better without the Arctic Council.

Trent University's Heather Nicol, conference co-chair and 2015-16 Canada Fulbright Chair in Arctic Studies at the University of Washington, chaired the Arctic Economic Futures panel. She remarked that it is surprising how much attention is paid to resource development and how little is thought about distributing sufficient funds to Permanent Participants for empowering sustainable development.



Jim Gamble, executive director of Aleut International Association, talked about his own work to develop a funding mechanism for a better Arctic. The Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council that represent the indigenous peoples—Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and Saami Council—tend to get lumped together, he noted, but have real differences.

Because the Arctic Council is an intergovernmental, consensus-based body, Permanent Participants can't vote. They are, after all, not national governments, but they can still exert robust influence with the Arctic states, according to Gamble. During the decision-making and policy-forming process, there are a lot of opportunities for Permanent Participants to express viewpoints and slow the process down.

"Challenges to building a better Arctic include raising money and equally supporting all six Permanent Participant organizations," Gamble said. This includes strengthening existing Arctic Council mechanisms and improving the relationship between Permanent Participants and their Arctic states.



Michael Perkinson from Guggenheim Partners pointed out that there are currently 600 infrastructure opportunities in the region valued at over \$500 billion, with investments being guided by the Arctic Investment Protocol. But it is clear at the moment that indigenous voices may get left out of decision-making regarding this vital development.

Senator Lesil McGuire from Alaska kicked off her panel on the role of sub-national actors with a discussion on how shaping the Arctic comes down to the local level, arguing for greater inclusion of sub-national actors like Alaska. "Global bodies need to listen to glean ideas and show local people respect," she said. In Alaska, the state government only began to implement Arctic policy in 2013 with the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission.

Craig Fleener, who is Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in and also from Alaska, offered another voice on the state's role as a sub-national actor in relation to the Arctic Council.

"Can we consider it 'One Arctic' when sub-nationals have no, or limited, official involvement in the Arctic Council?" he asked. "As a sub-national, Alaska continues to feel excluded from the Arctic Council, often taking a back seat on the U.S. delegation."



In his fiery panel talk, Fleener argued that the decisions, leadership, and direction of global bodies impacts sub-nationals the most. “Forcing outside ideals and principles on people without local knowledge is not good,” he said. “There is absolutely a way for global bodies to deal with the problems that they created: include more sub-nationals.”

Fleener pointed to energy as an example: “You can’t help us without understanding what drives us economically,” he said. For example, in Alaska, it costs \$1 per watt of energy, which means energy policy in Alaska is directly economically driven.

Yet, even though a few conference participants took the Arctic Council to task for some of its representational failures, revealing some cracks in the theme “One Arctic,” it was clear that unity and peace are global aspirations. There is no doubt that the Arctic is a complex region with diverse people and interests, but the only way to produce a better future is airing those differences in an open forum, inviting all voices to be heard. In this way, the conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. was unarguably a success because it brought together thought leaders for a vigorous debate with future policy implications.

One Arctic was co-chaired by Heather Nicol, Trent University; Whitney Lackenbauer, St. Jerome’s University; Nadine Fabbi, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington; Erica Dingman, World Policy Institute; and David Biette, Wilson Center.

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Ashley Chappo is an editorial assistant at World Policy Journal.

[Photos courtesy of Ashley Chappo]

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