

Shaping Changing Circumpolar Agendas: The Identification and Significance of “Emerging Issues” Addressed in the Arctic Council

Dorothea Wehrmann

In the past twenty years, the Arctic Council has become the most important international forum for policy making in the Arctic. Another success ascribed to the intergovernmental forum is the inclusion of emerging issues in its work. With regard to the overall circumpolar agenda, Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall observed a representational shift and argued that recently issues related to business are increasingly prioritized. The purpose of this article is two-fold: It first examines in how far the agenda of the Arctic Council has shifted similarly. It further addresses the identification of “emerging issues” more generally to discuss how concerns related to business have been introduced in the Arctic Council in the first place. In this regard, the article focuses on priorities set by member states during their chairmanships as member states are widely perceived as agenda-shapers in the Arctic Council and touches on three central questions: What priorities were set under the different Arctic Council chairmanships in the past? Why were these priorities regarded as important in their respective programs? And how were these priorities reviewed in the Arctic Council? To address these questions, this article looks predominantly at official Chairmanship programs, the contextualization of issues related to business and their discussion in Ministerial meetings. In the conclusion, this article offers an assessment of whether or not the Arctic Council is moving from being a forum enforcing environmental cooperation to becoming a “business forum” and discusses the wider implications of shifting agendas in the Arctic Council.

Introduction

Celebrating its 20th anniversary this year and looking back, the Arctic Council is able to point to many accomplishments that range from the intensifying and increasing cooperation between actors from and beyond the Arctic region to landmark scientific reports produced under its auspices. Most importantly: Despite the popular depiction of a region prone to international conflicts, in the past twenty years no military conflict has arisen in the Arctic and the Arctic Council member states reaffirmed just recently their “commitment to maintain peace, stability and constructive cooperation in the Arctic” (Iqaluit Declaration, 2015). In times of rapid global (and particularly of climate) change political visions for the future of the Arctic region are very distinct. But despite the heterogeneous and sometimes opposing positions among the numerous actors involved in the Arctic Council, the Arctic Council has managed to even increase the

number of actors participating in what has become the “primary forum” for policy making in the Arctic region (Kerry, 2015; Lackenbauer & Manicom, 2015: 517; Spence, 2015: 4).

This particular importance often ascribed to the Arctic Council today is also a result of a process of change that has shaped the intergovernmental forum in the past twenty years: as the numerous subsidiary bodies exemplify, since its formation in 1996 the Arctic Council has diversified with regard to its institutional structures. And particularly in recent years the Arctic Council has changed from “the small, relatively informal Arctic Council “family”” (Spence, 2015: 3) to an increasingly formalized forum focusing also on efficiency and effectiveness. Moreover, the Arctic Council increased the number of topics addressed in its work and as Kankaanpää and Young (2012: 1) pointed out it has particularly “achieved considerable success in identifying emerging issues.”

Taking Kankaanpää’ and Young’s evaluation as a point of departure, this article explores the “emerging issues” identified and the specific significance ascribed to such topics in the Arctic Council. This article thus seeks to contribute to a better understanding of processes of change that take place within the Arctic Council “black box” (Spence, 2015: 4). At the same time it does not aim to neglect regional and global processes as the Arctic Council obviously does not operate “in a vacuum” (Berger, 2015: 13, Smieszek and Kankaanpää, 2015: 12). In this regard and considering the general circumpolar agenda, Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall, for instance, observed “a significant representational shift from the 1990s and early 2000s” (2016: 188), arguing that instead of conservational concerns recently issues related to business are increasingly prioritized.¹ With regard to the Arctic Council, this observation is perhaps most notably exemplified by the establishment of the Arctic Economic Council at the end of Canada’s second Arctic Council chairmanship. But how did this shift proceed in the Arctic Council? How was it initiated and why? Numerous scholars pointed out that especially Arctic Council member states obtain a strong agenda-setting role in the Arctic Council, which they exert particularly during their chairmanships. Moreover, it was found that during these rotating two-year term chairmanships, the Arctic Council member states have the opportunity to shape (to some extent) the work of the Arctic Council according to specific concerns and priorities as outlined in their respective programs. These official programs need to match with and most often support national interests. It thus needs to be acknowledged that also geopolitical reasoning influences the framing of “emerging issues” (Berger, 2015: 75; English, 2013: 295; Nord, 2016: 41, Smieszek & Kankaanpää, 2015: 11; Spence, 2015: 4).

Against this backdrop and on the one hand, this article explores in how far Dodds’ and Nuttall’s observation also applies to agenda-setting in the Arctic Council and thus examines whether or not in the past twenty years business-concerns have been increasingly prioritized in the Arctic Council. On the other hand, this article addresses the identification of “emerging issues” more generally to discuss how new concerns (such as those relating to business) have been introduced in the Arctic Council in the first place. In this regard, Berger, Smieszek and Kankaanpää have already provided evidence that (at least some) Arctic Council member states shaped the agenda according to national interests during their respective Chairmanship tenures. Against this backdrop and to tackle both foci, this article pays particular attention to the introduction and to the contextualization of “emerging issues” by Arctic Council chairs and explores the discussion of these topics in Arctic Council Ministerial meetings.

Accordingly, this article proceeds as follows: it first provides an overview of the institutional structure of the Arctic Council in order to qualify the role and significance of Arctic Council chairmanships. Second and focusing explicitly on agenda-setting in the Arctic Council, this article compares the different priorities introduced by Arctic Council member states in their chairmanship programs. It explores the priority the business focus has received in the Arctic Council in comparison to other and still very relevant issues such as pollution, climate change and sustainable development. Also the reception of priorities relating to the “emerging” business focus as expressed during Ministerial meetings is reviewed. At last, the article discusses the wider implications of shifting agendas in the Arctic Council and assesses whether or not the Arctic Council is moving from being a forum enforcing environmental cooperation to becoming a “business forum”.

Agenda-Shapers in the Arctic Council: The Role and Significance of Arctic Council Chairmanships

The Arctic Council is a consensus-based intergovernmental forum composed of eight member States, six Permanent Participants (indigenous peoples’ organizations from the Arctic) and twelve non-Arctic states, twenty intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary and non-governmental organizations with Observer status. While the member States are the only actors with voting rights, Permanent Participants have full consultation rights. The agenda is set at biennial Ministerial meetings and the work of the Council’s subsidiary bodies is reviewed at biannually Senior Arctic Official (SAO) meetings. Despite the hierarchical institutional structure of the Arctic Council, the “real work” (Spence, 2015: 4) of the Council is conducted following the bottom-up approach: All research activities, negotiations of agreements and strategies are conducted by six permanent Working Groups as well as by Task Forces and Expert Groups that are established on an ad hoc basis. The work of the Council is also steered through interactions with other state and non-state actors within the Arctic Council (Permanent Participants, Observers, and invited experts). In order to assess how the agenda of the Arctic Council is set, this paper focuses particularly on member states, which have the greatest say in the Council due to their exclusive voting rights and because their positions are further bound to national agendas. More precisely, this analysis addresses the chairmanships, the rotating leadership of the Arctic Council conducted by member States for the duration of two years, which so far has not received much attention neither in literature focusing on the Arctic region nor on international relations (IR).

According to the revised Rules of Procedure (Arctic Council, 2015) each of the eight member States obtains the leadership role of the Arctic Council from the conclusion of a Ministerial meeting to the conclusion of the next Ministerial meeting. During this tenure, the respective member State is responsible for:

- coordinating arrangements for the next Ministerial meeting (and may place limits on the size of all delegations for the meeting after consultation with Permanent Participants and other member States),
- facilitating the preparations for Ministerial and SAO-meetings and circulating the draft-agenda for the next Ministerial meeting (after consultation with Permanent Participants and other member States)
- preparing meeting reports and minutes that need to be approved by the relevant officials of each member State

- designating the Chairperson for the Ministerial meeting and providing the Chairperson for SAO-meetings [both are subject to the concurrence of the member states as the SAO-chair is “perhaps the most important actor” (Nord, 2016: 42) that oversees the day-to-day affairs and also maintains control over the director of the Arctic Council Secretariat],
- receiving and circulating applications for Observer status to other member States and Permanent Participants.

Studies focusing on the Arctic Council chairmanship often applied Jonas Tallberg’s studies on formal leadership in international cooperation. In this regard Smieszek and Kankaanpää (2015), for instance, examined the role and tasks assigned to the rotating chairs of the Arctic Council, while Berger (2015) related to Tallberg’s works to outline how Norway and Canada projected their Arctic national agendas when holding the chairmanship position. Both studies conclude that Tallberg’s theoretical framework in which the chair is understood as an *agenda-shaper* has explanatory power for the case of the Arctic Council. They argue that during their chairmanships Arctic Council member States obtain a special agenda-setting position: they are able to raise awareness on certain issues, to structure the agenda in accordance with their national interests, and to exclude unfavorable issues from the agenda or to position them at last, which then are more likely to remain unaddressed due to often experienced time constraints (Berger, 2015: V; Smieszek & Kankaanpää, 2015: 2-3). Especially with regard to the introduction of national priorities, also Nord (2016: 43) found that by “setting forth the chairmanship program at the outset of their leadership term, the host country can communicate quite effectively with matters it wishes the Arctic Council to focus upon and which it would prefer to give less attention”. Smieszek and Kankaanpää (2015: 3) describe this as a “‘window of opportunity’ to shift the agenda and distribution of gains in pursuit of their national interests”.

Against this backdrop, the following section sheds light on the content of official chairmanship programs, the reasoning introduced in the respective programs of the different Arctic Council member states as well as to the reception of outlined priorities during Ministerial meetings. This is done to assess the specific dynamics related to the identification of the arguably “emerging” business focus. While Tallberg’s approach is based on rational choice institutionalism; through shedding light on the contexts, in which the promoted topics are embedded, the following analysis takes a rather constructivist and global perspective that also considers how “emerging issues” are purposely related to events and discourses with global significance.

Agenda-Setting in the Arctic Council: Identifying “Emerging Issues” in Chairmanship Programs (1996-2015)

The Arctic Council celebrates its 20th anniversary after having entered the second round of chairmanships in 2013 and the forum is currently chaired by the United States, which launched its second chairmanship in 2016. Against the background sketched out above and to examine whether or not business issues are increasingly addressed in the Arctic Council, the next sections review the past chairmanship programs of the Arctic Council following three central questions:

1. What were the priorities set under the different Arctic Council chairmanships in the past?
2. Why were these priorities regarded as important in the respective programs?
3. And how were these priorities reviewed in the Arctic Council?

In the chairmanship programs and respective brochures under analysis, priorities are either directly introduced as such (e.g. in the case of Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark), are topics

“emphasized” or “work initiated” during chairmanships (e.g. U.S. Chairmanship programs), declared commitments, focus or objectives of chairmanships (e.g. Canada, Denmark, Iceland).

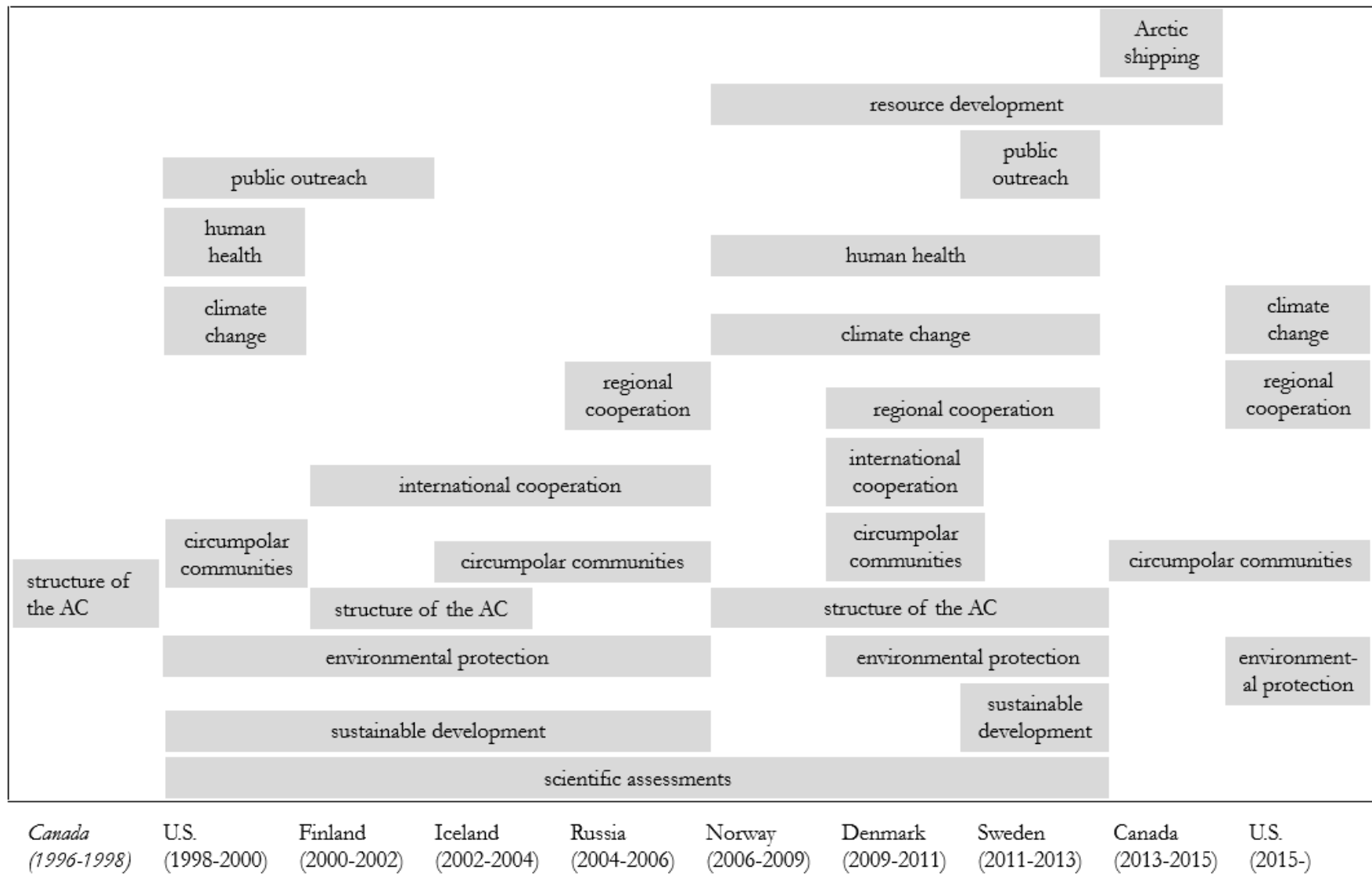


Table 1: Topics prominently addressed in Chairmanship Programs

As the following overview shows, numerous topics prioritized in the last ten chairmanship programs were either also prominently addressed by the succeeding chair(s) or picked up again at a later point and thus demonstrate continuity in Arctic Council agenda-setting: particularly issues related to environmental protection (7 times outlined as a priority), scientific assessments (7), the structure of the Arctic Council (6), circumpolar communities (6), climate change (5), and sustainable development (5) were framed as priorities during past chairmanships.²

Under these very general and also selective terms³ the respective member States subsumed different aspects: the protection of Arctic environment (including climate change) and sustainable development, for instance, were topics of concern that recurred as designated priorities. At the same time, these topics were also often addressed when placing specific emphasis on other topics in chairmanship programs (such as scientific assessments, international and regional cooperation, resource development and circumpolar communities). This already indicates that environmental protection and sustainable development have remained the main pillars for cooperation in the Arctic Council. An assumption that can further be substantiated when comparing the content of the Ottawa-Declaration on the establishment of the Arctic Council (1996) and the most recent Iqaluit Declaration (2015): in both documents, the Arctic Council member states affirm right at the beginning their “commitment to sustainable development in the Arctic region” and “to the protection of the Arctic environment” (Ottawa Declaration, 1996 and Iqaluit Declaration, 2015), both times referring to sustainable development prior to environmental protection.

Does this mean the agenda of the Arctic Council has not changed over the past ten distinct chairmanships? – no: although similar concerns have recurred prominently on Arctic Council chairmanship agendas, the following examples show that their meanings (and relations) have changed. While initially environmental protection mostly related to the elimination of contaminants (cf. Iceland’s chairmanship program), more recently environmental protection relates to Arctic biodiversity and ocean safety (cf. second chairmanship program of the U.S.). Sustainable development, on the other hand, has always included an (indirect) link to the so-called business focus: the terms of reference of the Sustainable Development Working Group, for instance, outline an enhancement and improvement of the economies and economic conditions of Arctic communities as main purposes (SDWG, 2015). In chairmanship programs, the affixes of sustainable development, however, have changed over time: The Swedish Chairmanship program, for instance, spoke of “environmentally sustainable development” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2011), the Russian Chairmanship program argued for “sustainable development of the Arctic indigenous peoples”, which was then related to the pollution impact on the Arctic indigenous peoples and their health, their traditional lifestyle under contemporary market conditions, and the demand to preserve their ethnic identity and cultural and historic heritage (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2004). Such understanding partly corresponds to Canada’s second Chairmanship program that prioritized “sustainable circumpolar communities” envisioning economic development of the North. The Finnish Chairmanship program, however, dropped the prefix sustainable and put emphasis on the promotion of “economic and social development” (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2000).

Aside from the different meanings ascribed to chairmanship priorities subsumed under broad umbrella-terms such as “environmental protection” and “sustainable development” and in general, these distinctions also hint at other “external” reasons and to a framing intended to

enforce national interests during Arctic Council chairmanships. In this regard, also Smieszek and Kankaanpää (2015: 10) outlined:

“As states construct institutions to advance their goals and support their interests, those institutions become a part of a broader matrix of national and foreign policies of their members, oftentimes influences as much by changes at the domestic level as in the external environment.”

Berger proved this relation to national interests more explicitly in the cases of Norway and Canada. She finds that both countries managed to “secure national interest[s]” (2015: 53) during their chairmanships: in the Norwegian case, the interest of “expansion” was achieved through negotiating successfully an umbrella-program for the three successive Scandinavian chairmanships (2006-2013) during which the permanent Arctic Council Secretariat was established in Tromsø, which “strengthened Norway’s position as an Arctic state” (Berger, 2015: 75). The Canadian Chairmanship, on the other hand, succeeded in establishing the Arctic Economic Council, “the centerpiece” of Canada’s efforts that build on the promise to bring “new trade, business and resource development opportunities in the Far North” (Nord, 2016: 31), a priority that was “closely tied to the country’s domestic policy priorities and interests” (Spence, 2015: 4). Berger’s findings clearly substantiate the agenda-shaping role ascribed to the Arctic Council chairmanship. But in following Smieszek’s and Kankaanpää’s reference to the “external environment”, also the broader contextualization of designated priorities needs to be considered when aiming to identify and to explain the emergence of new issues in the work of the Arctic Council. Or said differently: the extraordinary significance of the chairmanship-role alone does not explain the continuity of priorities addressed in chairmanship programs.

How was the “New Business Focus” Introduced and Reviewed in the Arctic Council?

This reasoning leads to the questions “why are priorities regarded as being important in chairmanship programs?” and “how are these priorities reviewed in the Arctic Council?”. As a detailed analysis of all thematic shifts in past chairmanship programs is beyond the scope of this article, in the following particularly the “emergence” of the so-called business focus is traced. In this regard attention is paid to priorities subsumed under “sustainable development” in chairmanship programs, which, as has been explained before, is one of the two main pillars for cooperation in the Arctic Council and (with the establishment of the Sustainable Development Working Group in 1998) is a term that has further been linked to economic factors. Particularly the presentation and discussion of chairmanship programs at Ministerial meetings is explored at which the future direction of the Arctic Council is set and which is regarded as being “the chief decision-making body for the organization” (Nord, 2016: 51-52).

In the first decade of the Arctic Council, “sustainable development” was much discussed in view of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Directly referring to the agreements negotiated at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Russian Chairmanship program for instance declared the Arctic Council to be “the main mechanism for implementing the principles of sustainable development” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2004: 1). At the same time the program promoted a “more balanced”, a broader approach to sustainable development, which included the social and economic line of Arctic cooperation. Later in the program, this particular framing served as a stepping stone to justify the major priority that the

development of circumpolar transport infrastructure received in Russia's Chairmanship program: As an example for social and economic cooperation, linking to a very national priority of Russia, it was further stated that the "goal is to form in the future the national Russian transport water way – the Northern Sea Route – as a Euro-Asian sea transport corridor integrated into the world transport system" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2004: 2).

The introduction of an explicit "business focus", however, at least dates back to the Scandinavian chairmanships, during which the Rules of Procedure were revised, the permanent Arctic Council Secretariat was established and a new focus was perceived to be set "on including business and industry in the Council and the welcoming of new Observer states" (Gundersen on behalf of the Aleut International Association, 2013). But how did this focus emerge? Already in Denmark's chairmanship program "the present dynamics of a changing Arctic" were stressed (The Kingdom of Denmark, 2009) that particularly related to the Russian flag planted on the seabed under the North Pole in 2007, which had caused a "worldwide media frenzy and created a surge in international interest in the Arctic" (Smieszek & Kankaanpää, 2015: 11). In this regard, Denmark took upon the question of the role of Observers in the Arctic Council as the former Arctic Council Rules of Procedure had not contained detailed provisions and argued in favor of including more Observers in the work of the Arctic Council:

"Observers and ad hoc observers are assets, and the Arctic Council should look for ways to further involve those that are ready to cooperate under the premise that the primary role of the Arctic Council is to promote sustainable development for the Peoples of the Arctic and the Arctic States" (The Kingdom of Denmark, 2009).

In the ensuing Swedish Chairmanship the role of "outside actors" was enhanced when Sweden related to the increasing interest of "outside actors" and identified Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a priority in its work. Describing the Arctic as a region "heavily affected by ongoing climate change, technological development and increasing commercial activities" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2011: 1), Sweden's chairmanship program argued for "environmentally sustainable development of the Arctic" to secure positive economic development ("the core issue for the population of the Arctic") and envisioned cooperation with the business community to discuss "how various industries can act for sustainable economic development in the region" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2011: 5). During its chairmanship, Sweden initiated interactions with the private sector to strengthen the Sustainable Development Working Group "a priority task for the Swedish Chairmanship" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2011: 4). This collaboration was perceived positively by the member states who agreed in the Kiruna Declaration to establish a task force dedicated to the creation of a circumpolar business forum (Duyck, 2015: 31). The new business focus was, however, also perceived skeptically by those to whom this cooperation was said to serve. The representative of the Saami Council, for instance, stated:

"We also welcome the initiatives regarding corporate social responsibility while we are somewhat concerned about the increased focus on business and industrial development – we have to be very careful in order to conduct the cooperation with the business the right way, also for the indigenous peoples and our economies and respecting the indigenous peoples' human rights" (Javo, 2013).

The succeeding Canadian Chairmanship thus placed "responsible economic development" in the Arctic at the forefront of its priorities (Government of Canada, 2013). Under the chairmanship-

theme “Development for the people of the North”, the establishment of the Arctic Economic Council was designated as a main priority and subsumed under “responsible Arctic resource development”. The chairmanship program emphasized that businesses in the Arctic would “play a strong role in building a sustainable and economically vibrant future for the region” (Government of Canada, 2013). Although in the aftermath of its chairmanship, Canada was criticized for shifting the Arctic Council’s focus to domestic issues under its chairmanship, and for opening up the region to industry and big business (Exner-Pirot, 2015; Spence, 2015: 4), Canada actually followed the path initiated by the Scandinavian member states. The program, however, slightly shifted the emphasis formerly placed on the inclusion of the business community by the Scandinavian countries when aiming to foster “circumpolar economic development” instead of sustainable development and “to provide opportunities for business to engage with the Arctic Council “(Government of Canada, 2013).

While Canada’s Arctic Council policy and its chairmanship program is said to be grown “from domestic needs” (English, 2013: 295), the subsequent U.S. Chairmanship placed “notable silence on the need or relevance of integrating economic development, as a policy area that garners priority attention from the Arctic Council” (Spence, 2015:3). Instead, from a rather global perspective emphasis was put on climate change. Under the theme “One Arctic: Shared Opportunities, Challenges, and Responsibilities” the U.S. Chairmanship program highlighted the Arctic’s role in global ocean and climate systems, which the program outlined as the reason why “the Arctic Council seeks to educate and inform the public worldwide that the Arctic should matter to everyone” (U.S. Department of State, 2015). The program thus discontinued emphasizing an understanding of the Arctic as the last “resource frontier”. Different than the approach promoted under the Canadian Chairmanship, the U.S. also related sustainable development to its top-climate change priority when arguing:

“improving the lives of the Arctic indigenous peoples also means expanding access to clean, affordable, and renewable energy technologies (...) Clean energy is the solution to climate change. It also happens to be the world’s biggest market. It will make many people rich. Enormous numbers of jobs will be created” (Kerry, 2015).

This obvious shift of economic priorities was openly criticized by officials from the State of Alaska who had had a much greater say during the first Arctic Council leadership of the U.S. (Nord, 2016: 25), and the emphasis on climate change was perceived as a signal of the U.S. Government to underpin “its willingness to be a serious player in global climate change discussions” in view of the 2015 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change-conference in Paris (Spence, 2015: 1).

Conclusions

In the past twenty years of its existence, the Arctic Council has become the most important forum for policy making in the Arctic. Another success ascribed to the intergovernmental forum is the inclusion of emerging issues in its work. With regard to the overall circumpolar agenda, Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall observed a representational shift arguing that issues to business are increasingly prioritized instead of conservation. This article explored in how far this observation also applied to the agenda of the Arctic Council and more generally examined how “emerging issues” such as the business focus are introduced during Arctic Council chairmanships.

This article showed that a new business focus already emerged during the Scandinavian chairmanships in the Arctic Council. At that time, the growing interest of “outside actors” in Arctic affairs already led to discussions on the regulation of observers and on benefits related to sustainable economic development when cooperating with the business community. While the member states agreed to further encourage this cooperation and to negotiate the creation of a circumpolar business forum, skepticism was raised particularly by the people living in the North, to whom this forum was said to serve. The Canadian Chairmanship tried to meet this criticism when placing “responsible economic development” at the forefront of its chairmanship priorities, the establishment of the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) being the centerpiece in the Canadian program. In the succeeding U.S. Chairmanship program and after the formation of the AEC in 2014, this business focus was not prioritized anymore. Instead the U.S. put emphasis on global climate change and related sustainable development primarily to the development of renewable energy.

Based on the analysis of the last ten chairmanship programs introduced by the Arctic Council member states, this article outlined a continuity of numerous topics that connected to priorities set in previous chairmanships. Particularly environmental protection and sustainable development are addressed as constant pillars for cooperation. While the overall priorities outlined in the work of the Arctic Council have not changed, the meaning ascribed to them certainly has. Under the priority of sustainable development (a term that always included an economic dimension and thus a link to the business focus in the Arctic Council), member states subsumed for instance the development of an Arctic transport infrastructure, the strengthening of circumpolar communities and the cooperation with businesses, thus highlighting issues related to the social and the economic spheres in past chairmanship programs.

Further research is needed, however, to compare and to qualify the leadership exerted by Arctic Council chairmanships with bottom-up agenda-setting in Arctic Council working groups and task forces, which certainly also shape the work of the Arctic Council. As member states that chair working group are not designated by the chair of the Arctic Council but elected by the working groups themselves, it is particularly of interest to examine in how far working groups have been supportive to the agenda set in the chairmanship programs or to what degree they tried to bypass any priorities set in the respective programs. In this regard, and as has been argued elsewhere (Wehrmann, 2016), outcomes of the work conducted in working groups and task forces also depend on the constellation of actors, which is why special attention needs to be paid to the involvement of actor groups.

Furthermore, and as has also been shown in this article, the Arctic Council does not operate in a vacuum and shifting priorities are not solely encouraged by national priorities but also by events - such as the Russian flag-planting - and discourses with global significance. Particularly the sustainable development discourses in the 1990s and early 2000s were outlined as reference points in chairmanship programs, as well as respective events such as the UN Conference on Environment and Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In a similar vein also discourses on Corporate Social Responsibility, which arguably became a buzz-word in the mid-2000s, and also in view of the COP-21 Paris Climate Conference the more recent intensified focus on global climate change have been mirrored in chairmanship programs. Corresponding to Berger’s (2015) work, further research is needed that also examines to what

degree events and discourses conducted in the Arctic Council member states explain why business was prioritized in some chairmanship programs and not in others.

In sum, the continuity of priorities addressed in Arctic Council chairmanship programs that relate to environmental protection as well as the number of subsidiary bodies focusing on conservation still prove that the Arctic Council is primarily a forum enforcing cooperation with regard to environmental issues. Nevertheless, in the past decade a stronger focus on business-issues was certainly set by some member states. This focus has, however, not materialized in the formation of a new working group mandated to enhance business cooperation but in the establishment of the Arctic Economic Council, a body located outside the Arctic Council. After being two years in existence, it is too early to assess its significance for the work conducted by the Arctic Council and the future will show whether or not both Councils are related through a strong cooperative relationship that also influences the emergence of priorities set in the Arctic Council.⁴

Notes

1. Dodds and Nuttall (2016: 119) relate their observation to the diverse range of actors with stakes in the Arctic (“including mining and hydrocarbon businesses and Investors and non-Arctic states”) and the “intense interest in economic development possibilities” at conferences and industry events.
2. This summary is based on: Government of Canada (2013), Government of Norway (2006), Government Offices of Sweden (2011), Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2000), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2004), Pálsson (2003), The Kingdom of Denmark (2009), U.S. Department of State (2015), four U.S. chairmanship brochures relating to the U.S. Arctic Council Chairmanship 1998 – 2000 submitted by Julia L. Gourley, U.S. Senior Arctic Official (personal communication, June 2, 2016). No official program could be accessed that relates to Canada’s first Chairmanship (1996-1998). The documents introduced at the first Ministerial meeting reveal, however, that during the first Canadian Chairmanship the institutional structure of the AC was predominantly addressed.
3. The selectiveness of these terms is partly caused by the different meanings ascribed to these terms and by the missing specification for instance in chairmanship programs: Until the end of the first decade of the Arctic Council, the publication of detailed chairmanship documents was not a common practice and often an elaborated introduction of priorities was missing. Obviously and in more general terms, this selectiveness is, however, also advantageous for those who wish to frame controversial issues in a manner less open to attack.
4. Many thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their careful reading, critical comments and for their helpful suggestions that contributed to improving the final version of this article.

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