

When Words Matter: The Concept of “Sustainable Development” Derailed with Words like “Economy”, “Social” & “Environment”¹

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Dedicated to Finn Lynge (1933 – 2014) in memory of many good discussions on the concept of “sustainable development”.

The words used control the discussion, which means that something important can be forgotten. The discussion of Sustainable Development was derailed using the words “economy”, “social” and “environment”. This also applies to Arctic societal development. The article is based on the definition of the Brundtland Commission and shows that the understanding of the sustainability concept consisting of three dimensions: an economic, a social and an environmental, as it was usually defined in the years after the UN Conference in 1992, originating in the 1990s implementation discussions in the UK. The Earth Charter was an initiative that wanted to bring the concept of sustainable development back to the right track so that all elements of the Brundtland Commission's definition were included.

The discussion in Greenland has been focused on the exploitation of the living marine resources, which is reflected in the way the concept is translated into Greenlandic. At the same time, there has been an awareness in Greenland that the cultural dimension is part of the discourse, although the national implementation of sustainable development initiatives still mostly is economically motivated. The Arctic Council's Fairbanks Declaration (2017), paragraph 13 states that “the Arctic Council in promoting sustainable development through the harmonization of its three pillars in an integrated way: economic development, social development and environmental protection”. The struggle for recognition of the cultural dimension as an integral part of sustainable development thus remains important in an arctic context. Focusing on the main points of the Finnish Presidency's Arctic Council Program for the period 2017 - 2019, it can be concluded, that the struggle to expand the understanding and definition of ‘sustainable development’ to include the cultural dimension and thus go beyond “economy”, “social” and “environment” continues. It is important to use the right words.

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Introduction

“Economy”, “social” and “environment” are the words that most often have captured the discussion on sustainable development. Politicians and NGOs, to a large degree, use these words when they want to discuss whether a particular initiative contributes to sustainable development.

But life is more than economy, social issues and the environment. The focus of this article is to reveal part of the story of what went wrong and what significance it had for Greenlandic and some of the Arctic discussion, and how this for example is reflected in the reports and declarations from the Arctic Council.

Since the first international conference on environment and development in Stockholm in 1972 and the publication of the book “The Limits to Growth”² (Meadows et al., 1972), the question of (the relationship between) the environment and the increase in consumption of resources has been on the agenda nationally and internationally. In the 1980’s, the World Commission on Environment and Development was set up by the UN, and under Gro Harlem Brundtland’s chairmanship, published the report “Our Common Future”³ (WCED) in 1987. The report presented a definition of sustainable development which subsequently became widely accepted.

The Brundtland report explains sustainable development as follows:

Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs⁴(WCED, 1987).

“The Limits to Growth” was seen by many as a doomsday prophecy, which focused on the danger of a catastrophic future. The Brundtland Commission’s definition was therefore well received by all because it showed a positive way forward, as, to a large extent, the contradictions inherent within the definition were overlooked. Some have claimed however, that Brundtland’s formulation sought to “square the circle” of the environment problem in order to gather the consensus of the UN commission.

On the other hand, the “Our Common Future” report comes with the following, often overlooked, recommendation: “We recommend that the General Assembly commit itself to preparing a universal Declaration and later a Convention on environmental protection and sustainable development”⁵(WCED, 1987).

The report emphasized that this declaration should prescribe new norms for governmental and inter-governmental behaviour which are necessary for the preservation of livelihoods and life on our planet”⁶ (ibid). This recommendation was seen by some groups as a call for the global community to develop an “Earth Charter”, which countries should adhere to in their future national and international development (Rockefeller, 2000).

The recommendation resulted in “The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development” which the Rio conference followed up with “Agenda 21 – a comprehensive blueprint for the global actions to affect the transition to sustainable development”⁷ (Earth Summit ‘92, 1992).

After Rio 1992, many countries began to work on finding ways to adapt national policy in ways that would enable changing the societal activities in alignment with the Brundtland commission's definition of sustainability. But the title of the Rio Declaration was in itself a contribution to focus on the environment.

A Concept is “Shaped to Fit”

In an article about the possibilities of ever finding a meaningful definition of sustainable development, Susan Owens⁸ (Owens, 2003) writes that a central problem occurs when market economists and neoliberalists refuse to acknowledge the difference between “need” and “demand” and thereby avoid discussion about preference, i.e., that some choices are better and more constructive for sustainable development in a society than others.

Over the course of the many discussions a learning process emerged, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the connections between economy, society and environment. Owens describes what happened in the UK in the 1990's when the government was politically forced to operationalise the concept of sustainability. It became necessary:

to capture it to ensure that growth and development remain at the core. Thus, from around the mid-1990's onwards, we see a vigorous re-insertion of the economic dimension of sustainability, followed by inclusion of social consideration, alongside environmental protection. The UK Government was now at pains to stress that “achieving all these objectives at the same time is what sustainable development is about⁹ (Owens, 2003).

Ultimately, the discussions resulted in the British government's redefining of the Brundtland commission's concept of sustainability, so that; “*relationships between economy, society and environment*” became “*economic dimension of sustainability*”, which includes: “*social consideration alongside environmental protection*”. The main point here is that the word “*society*” has now become “*social consideration*”. Thereby, the cultural dimension of society, which is so important for the people of that society, disappears and society's inhabitants become mere social elements. This development took place in a legitimate search for indicators that could indicate whether a given policy led to sustainable development, but the search also had the effect that the discussion to a large extent was somewhat derailed.

In subsequent discussions about sustainable development, it has become standard that the concept has an economic, a social and an environmental dimension. From there on the three words had set the standard for how sustainability should be discussed and planned for.

A Concept Sticks

The result of this British discussions lodged itself in the international dialogue where it became the norm that sustainable development had three pillars; economy, social and environment! And it also became part of the official UN language use.

This is exemplified by the introduction to the resolution from The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002:

Reaffirming the need to ensure a balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development¹⁰ (UN, 2002).

It is not only in the introduction that this way of thinking about sustainability occurs. It also features as the heading of section IV of the main document of the conference, entitled; “*IV Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development*”¹¹(UN, 2002).

In the 10 years leading up to the 20th anniversary in Rio de Janeiro, the 3 pillars become so well established in the discourse that they feature in the first section of the meeting’s final document:

1. We, the heads of State and Government and high-level representatives, having met at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20-22 June 1992, with full participation of civil society, renew our commitment to sustainable development, and to ensure the promotion of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations¹² (UN, 2002).

Grassroots Strike Back – Civil Society’s Rebellion Against a Misinterpretation of the Brundtland Commission’s Sustainability Concept

Internationally, discussions developed after Rio de Janeiro 1992 about what sustainability was, and whether the result from Rio fulfilled the expectations for the formulation of an Earth Charter that had arisen on the basis of the Brundtland Commission’s recommendations.

For the various groups around the globe who were interested in sustainable development, it could be ascertained that, although the discussion about an “Earth Charter” had been part of the preparations for Rio 1992, it was evidently not the time for such a charter. As the declaration from Rio de Janeiro contained just 22 principles and the task developing an earth charter including the ethical and moral deliberations from the Brundtland Commission was still not solved.

This unsolved task inspired the general secretary of the summit in Rio 1992, Maurice Strong, and Mikhail Gorbachev, each of whom founded environmental organisations, Earth Council and Green Cross International respectively, joining forces in a civil society initiative to shape an earth charter. An independent Earth Charter Commission¹³ (Earth Charter, 2000) was formed in 1994. Several years’ dialogue between many cultures about the common goals and values which civil society laid out as elements of an Earth Charter followed. In 2000, the results of the commission’s work, Earth Charter, were presented at a meeting in The Netherlands by the commission’s chairman, Steven Rockefeller. The commission behind the Earth Charter views the results as “an ethical framework for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century”¹⁴(*ibid.*).

At its launch in 2000, the commission’s chairman expressed this in the following manner: “The Earth Charter vision reflects the conviction that caring for people and caring for Earth are two interdependent dimensions of one task. We cannot care for people in a world with collapsing ecosystems, and we cannot care for Earth in a world with widespread poverty, injustice, economic inequity, and violent conflict”¹⁵ (*idem.*).

The Earth Charter movement shows that people with deep knowledge of the UN process and of the discussions about sustainable development at a global level, concluded that the ethical and cultural issues which need to be considered while applying the Brundtland Commission’s

sustainability concept to practical politics, do not feature clearly enough in the documentation of Rio 1992. Therefore, the Earth Charter was necessary.

Representatives of the civil society of the Arctic and of Greenland's Home-Rule had also noted that focus on the 3 pillars left out the ethical and thereby the important cultural elements, which are of great significance for people's lives and, not least, the ways in which they relate to nature and its living resources.

Discussions within IUCN, while Finn Lyngø¹⁶ represented Greenland's Home-Rule, raised awareness of Maurice Strong's and Mikail Gorbechev's initiative, and it was agreed that the former cabinet member Henriette Rasmussen¹⁷ should be "the voice of the Arctic" in the Earth Charter commission, which was responsible for the final shaping of the Earth Charter.

The Brundtland Report led to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, but as it has been indicated above, part of the international discussions in the 1990s, tried to get all the elements in the Brundtland definition back on track and fight back against the derailment that had taken place.

The Arctic and the Culture in Which One Lives

The debate about sustainability in the Arctic has been taking place both in Greenland and in the international dialogue on nature and pollution that began after Gorbachev's Murmansk speech on the 1st of October 1987.¹⁸

Finland had long had major problems with the pollution that came from the Russian blast furnaces that extracted nickel in the Murmansk area. Finland saw the environmental section in Gorbachev's speech¹⁹, as an invitation from the Russian side for cooperation on environmental issues in the Arctic. Finland's diplomatic efforts in 1989 - 1991 were called "The Finnish Initiative" or "the Rovaniemi Process" in the Arctic.

As a result, in 1991 the eight Arctic countries signed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in Rovaniemi. This environmental strategy became the foundation on which the Arctic Council was built in 1996.

Denmark has responsibility for Greenland's foreign policy. As environmental issues are also a part of Greenland's own fields of responsibilities, the Greenland representatives played an important role in the Kingdom of Denmark's delegation during the negotiations. In a Greenlandic context, the environment is intimately connected to 'nature' because of the Greenlanders' utilization of the natural resources which has been the ultimate precondition for the existence of Inuit in both Greenland and other parts of the Arctic. Living off the land and the sea is the foundation of the Inuit culture.

A Greenlandic requirement in the negotiations on AEPS was therefore that the NGOs Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Sami Council and the Russian Indigenous Peoples' Organization (RAIPON), all had a seat at the negotiating table with the right to participate in negotiations at all agenda points. For Greenland, it was important that the hunters' and fishermen's culture could be an integral part of the discussions on environmental issues concerning the nature that was and is Inuit's livelihood.

With the formation of the Arctic Council in 1996, the circle of “permanent participants” was expanded to a total of 6 NGOs.²⁰ In this way, Greenland hunting culture was involved in international discussions in the Arctic on environmental issues. One might say that this part of the cultural dimension was included in the discussion on Sustainable Development in the Arctic from the very beginning.

Exploitation of Greenland’s living resources has for many years been a part of the discussion about sustainability in Greenland. There has also been an international discussion about what Inuit and Greenlanders ought and ought not to do in this regard. In the late 1970’s, whaling attracted great interest from so-called environmental activists²¹ (Lyng F., 2013), and later, attention was turned towards seal hunting²² (Lyng F., 1992).

In 2003 the transcripts of ten radio lectures about sustainable development, broadcast in both Danish and Greenlandic, on Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa/KNR (Greenland’s Radio) were published. These were given in connection with the so called Tulugaq campaign²³ (Tulugaq, 2003), which had been initiated by the government. Nine of the lectures were given by H.C Petersen²⁴ (H.C. Petersen et al., 2003) and one by Finn Lyng on the subject of whaling.

The first lecture, entitled “The legacy of the ancestors”, was introduced with a section about cultural heritage. H.C. Petersen expressed, among other things, the following:

We have understood that if we are to live in and preserve our country, it must continue to be possible to make our living from it. We must also have a clear understanding that it is only possible to secure for our descendants the possibility to remain living in this country if we use its resources in an orderly manner, which is to say, that we make it clear to ourselves that there are limits to how much we can exploit this country’s resources, its animals, birds and fish²⁵ (H.C. Petersen et al., 2003)

In a shortened form, H.C. Petersen later said; “*Certain doctrines were imprinted from childhood, for example,*” “*You can take the animal you need (i.e. kill it). But not the animal you don’t need*”²⁶ (2003). As was stated later in the same lecture, such an intention about wanting to behave in a particular way is an ethical way of thinking, and it is interesting that the question of how one behaves in certain situations is something that occupies all cultures in one way or another.

The thinking behind the modern sustainability concept is essentially the idea that the securing of immediate needs must not destroy the possibility for future generations to fulfil their needs. In his book “Platons Gåde. Den levende Skrift” Ivar Gjørup, in reference to the Fourth Book of Plato’s REPUBLIC, writes that; “*Entrepreneurship is driven by our needs. Each one of us endeavours to master oneself. Some manage to do so, others do not, others learn to do so eventually. They are clever enough to understand that we cannot satisfy our own needs endlessly as it leads to abuse and misery*”²⁷ (2016). The problem with the concept of sustainability is thus not new. The idea has deep cultural roots!

On the Application of the Concept of Sustainability by Greenland Authorities

In 2008, a short report was developed by the administration of Greenland’s Home Rule, the purpose of which was to describe the work being done on sustainability and globalisation in Greenland. The report shows that the sustainability concept was at no point applied consistently by the changing political coalitions of Greenland governments. It was the same situation when the issue was simplified by applying the three dimensions stated above.

The case is further complicated by their focusing on “*sustainable exploitation*” rather than “*sustainable development*”. Added to this is how, in different situations, different Greenlandic expressions are used for the concept of “*sustainable exploitation*”. The report provides five different Greenlandic expressions for “*sustainable exploitations*” when used in particular contexts, as shown in the table below. The concept was and still is an important part of the discussion concerning the use of living resources²⁸ (Nielsen, 2008).

| Sustainable Exploitation | |
|---|--|
| <i>Various translations to Greenlandic (from Danish) which have been used</i> | <i>Translated back to Danish (and then to English)</i> |
| Nungusaataanngitsumik atorneqarnissaq | The continued use of something in such a way that it doesn't run out. |
| Piujuartitsinissamik tunngaveqarluni Iluaquteqarneq | To make use of something in such a way that it remains at one's disposal. |
| Imminut nammassinnaasoq | Which has to carry (take responsibility for) itself. |
| Piujuartitsisumik iluaquteqarniarneq | To make use of something in such a way that it will always be at one's disposal. |
| Nungusaataanngitsumik | To use something in such a way that it doesn't run out. |

In 2016, a new linguistic formulation arrived. This occurred in connection with Naalakkersuisoq for Finances presentation of Naalakkersuisuts. Sustainability and Growth plan²⁹ (Department 2016). Here, the following designations were used³⁰ (ibid):

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Piujuartitsineq | Sustainability |
|-----------------|----------------|

Since the Nordic Prime Ministers, in connection with the Nordic Council's session in 1998, adopted a declaration on “A Sustainable North”, Greenland has been active in the shaping of subsequent Nordic strategies, the purpose of which has been to operationalise the Nordic government leaders' declaration.

The various linguistic designs of the sustainability concept in the reports pinpoints what in a Greenlandic culture is not just important but fundamental, namely the exploitation of the living resources of nature.

As stated in the previous section, this approach has been central to Finn Lyngé's responses to the hunters' right to kill and eat marine mammals and sell for example sealskin in order to become part of the modern society's monetary economy.³¹

Very easily, one can thus see how culture is used to defend the maintenance of a group of people's personal economy. Fishermen and hunters – and thus the hunting culture – are dependent on being able to sell their catches on the market in order to acquire other things necessary to live in a modern Arctic society. A culture survives through the wise use of economic, social and environmental elements.

As mentioned, Greenland was instrumental in getting ICC on board from the very beginning of the AEPS process. At the AEPS 2nd ministerial meeting in Nuuk, Greenland in 1993, the ICC specifically expressed the desire to discuss what is known as “Indigenous Peoples Knowledge” as a way of knowing in line with the knowledge gained through conventional research based on, for example, biological measurements in nature. Iceland offered a seminar on the subject and Denmark funded the report.³²

It was at the same meeting in Nuuk that the eight Arctic countries agreed to establish a “task force” to discuss issues of social and cultural conditions.³³ This task force was later the inspiration for the formation of the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), which was established as part of the Arctic Council in 1996.

The most recent Nordic strategy is entitled “A good life in a sustainable North – Nordic strategy for sustainable development” (Ett gott liv i ett hållbart Norden – Nordisk strategi för hållbar utveckling), and was adopted by the Ministers for Cooperation in the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2013.

As stated in the introduction, the concept of “sustainable development” lost an important dimension when it became the norm to characterise the concept as development which was based on three pillars; the economic, social and environmental dimensions. The aspect, which concerns people’s culture was left out when “society” became “social” in everyday talk about the issue.

From the outset of its international cooperation, Greenland’s Home-Rule, and later Self-Government, has argued that the UN, and moreover, organisations internationally, should work for the rights of the Indigenous peoples, more specifically, the right to preserve their own culture and identity. A noteworthy point in this endeavour was the establishment of the Permanent Forum of the UN in 2000. It has also been the Greenlandic government, Naalakkersuisut’s, policy that culture should be included on equal footing with the three stated dimensions when discussions dealt with the following-up of Brundtland’s “Our Common Future”. In Naalakkersuisut’s case, this happened at “Rio+20”, which was the world community’s marking of the 20th anniversary of the United Nations’ adoption of the declaration on sustainable development from 1992. At that time, Greenland found out it had entered the discussions in Rio de Janeiro too late to influence language usage on that point. Instead, Greenland focused its political efforts on avoiding losing ground on the theme of “Indigenous Peoples”.

In May 2016, Greenland’s Self-Government worked on applying the sustainability concept in connection with the published Sustainability and Growth plan for Greenland. It is interesting to note here that sustainability becomes one of five guiding principles.

The Sustainability and Growth Plan’s Five Guiding Principles:

- **Sustainability**
- Increased **self-sufficiency**
- Good and stable frameworks for **private investments**
- **Holistic** and effective problem solving
- An **attractive place** to grow up and live in as part of a community³⁴ (Department, 2016)

In its broader presentation, one can see that sustainability is bound to the management of nature's resources, which in this article is a part of the environmental component of the sustainability concept.

One can surmise that the application of the concept in ways that include the cultural dimension is not something being worked on in all parts of the Greenlandic administration up to now. Looking at a Greenland context, and focusing on the three words "economy", "social" and "environment" it is easy to get the impression that "economy" is the most significant underlying factor for the principle mentioned above.

The Sustainability and Growth plan is the first attempt in Greenland to develop a document which, viewed ideally, should encompass all parts of the sustainability concept. It will be interesting to see whether the work that is underway, and which stems from the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), leads to including the cultural dimension and thus ensuring that culture also 'finds its place'. This can then become a substantial contribution to the discussion about moral and ethical questions, which humanity in general must ask itself if the planet in the far future is supposed to include humans at all. The planet will probably remain in its place in the solar system. In this context it can be pointed out that Earth Charter was a proposal of how these considerations might be included in the thinking about sustainability.

The Original Starting Point: Is There a Way Back?

As stated above, there are good historical and factual reasons for including 'culture' as a fourth pillar or dimension, if a dividing up of the Brundtland Commission's concept "sustainable development" is wished for. The concept thereby becomes broader, its implementation more practicable, and the concept's inner logic and more holistic approach easier to understand and preserve. This logic, however, both includes and highlights the contradictions, which demand that political decisions be taken to implement sustainability in day-to-day politics.

The historical development of the concept, which we have witnessed on a global level, has been mirrored by the Nordic dialogue at the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council. The Nordic Council of Ministers created its first regional sustainability strategy in 2001 entitled "New Course for the North". It also states here that sustainable development contains "three interdependent dimensions: an economic, a social and an environmental dimension"³⁵ (Nordisk Ministerråd, 2001).

At the most recent revision of the Nordic strategy for sustainable development in 2013, it was the Greenland government's policy that culture should be discussed on equal footing with the three pillars. This was not exactly the case, but the Greenland government contributed with the formulation of the following text, which features in the introduction to the latest strategy:

There are three interdependent dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, the social and the ecological. One of these dimensions must not undermine the conditions for development in the others. Culture is also very important for the Nordic values. Culture concerns, for example, choice of lifestyle, consumption patterns, relationship to the environment and acceptance of the processes of change in society. Consequently, it is important to include cultural issues in the work on sustainable development.³⁶ (ANP, 2013).

In the Autumn of 2017, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council adopted a regional follow-up document for the UN Sustainable Development Goals, called Generation

2030. With this document it can be argued that now, also the Nordic framework has departed from “the three pillars way of thinking”, in preference to a more holistic approach.

As mentioned, the sustainability concept is included in the Self-Government’s current work with a Sustainability and Growth plan, which had its point of departure in the UN’s 2030 SDG agenda and in the Nordic plan of action, Generation 2030. The Greenland plan has the potential for further development, so that, if it is politically desirable, a future update can present an actual strategy for “The sustainable arctic welfare society”. It can be argued that this will require a government in Greenland that will prioritize other than economic growth. In this connection, it should be recalled that economic growth in Greenland is particularly motivated by the desire to create the foundation for the independent Republic of Greenland.

The full understanding of Brundtland’s sustainability concept is something that most people and their politicians still have to work with. Or, one might argue, that this is ‘a gift’ that is unopened on most politicians’ tables in the Arctic – as it is in the rest of the world.

The work carried out in concretising the sustainability concept in the UN framework continued after the 20-year anniversary in 2012, and several years of negotiating led to the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The resolution: **Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**³⁷ (UN, 2015) was passed, and it is now this document that sets the framework for the regional, national and international execution of the General Assembly’s decisions.

The cultural element is included in many places in UN’s 2030 SDGs, and it is also the main element of goal 16, which includes striving to: *“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and; build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”*³⁸ (ibid).

If subsequent discussions continue to regard the application of the sustainability concept in terms of “pillars”, then as a minimum these must be extended to include a cultural pillar, which contains the ethical questions which were taken into consideration through Earth Charter. It can be further argued that ‘culture’ has from the start been a central part of the concept. The circumstances under which it fell out of ordinary language usage after the British discussions about how ‘Our Common Future’ was to be implemented, shows how far-reaching and influential the effects can be when a globally used concept is interpreted and developed in a world language.

This is particularly important in a Greenland/Arctic context where the struggle for cultural rights in general, and the rights of Indigenous peoples in particular is a fundamental part of, for example, the Greenland Self-Government’s understanding of itself. However, the continuing regional cooperation in the Arctic is still not without its problems, particularly when addressing the sustainability issue. Whereas the regional cooperation in the Nordic Council of Ministers made the decision in Autumn of 2017 and adopted Generation 2030, there are still unresolved issues in relation to the understanding of sustainable development in the Arctic Council.

If the Arctic Council is to be attributed a significant role in the general development of societies in the Arctic, one must look critically at how the Council’s ministerial declarations are shaped around the area we are discussing here.³⁹

The latest ministerial declaration is from the 10th Arctic Council's meeting of Ministers in Fairbanks in 2017⁴⁰ (Arctic Council, 2017). Over a range of points, the concept "sustainable development" is used, such as in the third section of the introduction; "Reaffirming our commitment to the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic, to sustainable development and to the protection of the Arctic environment."

It is noteworthy that it is deemed necessary to mention the protection of the Arctic environment as well as 'sustainable development', which otherwise traditionally encompasses the environment. The seventh section of the introduction states:

Noting with concern that the Arctic is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average, resulting in widespread social, environmental, and economic impacts in the Arctic and worldwide, and the pressing and increasing need for mitigation and adaptation actions and to strengthen resilience.

This is a return to the classic three-part concept, but this is hardly because it is thought that the residents' culture won't be affected by the stated warming, just as adaptation and resilience to the changes clearly have specific cultural conditions and implications. Coming to the last of the sections in the preamble, it is as if there is a glimmer of hope prior to recognition that culture is included in the discourse surrounding sustainability, in that it states; "Reaffirming the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the need for their realisation by 2030."

But this hope is short lived. The actual declaration is divided into sections, the second of which has the heading "IMPROVING ECONOMIC AND LIVING CONDITIONS". And the following point 13 states: "13. Reaffirm the role of the Arctic Council in promoting sustainable development through harmonizing its three core pillars in an integrated way: economic development, social development and environmental protection"⁴¹ (Arctic Council, 2017).

Not only are the three pillars reiterated, but are also viewed as the realization of sustainable development "through harmonizing its three core pillars". You don't need to be a fortune teller to predict that there will be a pressing need to apply the ethical and cultural considerations, as laid out in Earth Charter, when this policy is carried out in the Arctic.

When it concerns the Arctic Council, Greenland's formal position differs from that it holds in, for example, in the Nordic cooperation, where countries sit under their own flag during discussions in the Nordic Council of Ministers. In the Arctic Council, Greenland is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark's delegation. From a Greenlandic perspective, it could be claimed that the Arctic Council has established "the rights of Arctic indigenous peoples", with this "s", which gave rise to an American footnote in the AEPS Minister declaration from Inuvik back in 1995, and thereby has gained some ground in the struggle for recognition of culture as being important for a society's development.

It seems fair to conclude that the Arctic Council has not yet taken the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals into consideration on an operational level but will Finland accomplish that?⁴²

From the start AEPS was the result of a highly professional diplomatic effort from Finland, so the question is what to expect from the current Arctic Council leadership. From the outset, Finland announced the following 10 areas⁴³ which should be prioritized:

- Paris Climate Agreement
- UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development
- The economic perspectives
- Environmental protection
- Connectivity
- Meteorology
- Education
- The Environment and Climate
- The Seas
- The People

One might ask about the understanding of the concept of sustainability that lies behind this list of priority topics. The UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is mentioned as an independent point, but if one re-reads the UN 2030 goals, including the sub-sets of the individual goals, it is obvious that the other prioritized AC-areas are also included in the UN 2030 goals.

A proper application of the UN 2030 goals would require that the UN 2030 was part of the Declaration's headline, indicating in each of the priority areas which UN 2030 targets they are part of. The prospects for a consistent application of the classic concept of sustainability in the political declaration signed by ministers and reports designed by diplomats with input from scientists of the forthcoming Arctic Council's ministerial meeting in Finland in 2019 is not necessarily promising.

Another relevant question is: how will political decisions made in parliaments and governments affect the places where people live? If governments in the long run want to find out they need indicators that can be used for systematic measurements.

Each country, of course, has the opportunity to develop and apply its own indicators, but an example shows that countries and groups of countries rarely use resources to develop new indicators to get data because of a politic declaration.⁴⁴ They try to use whatever statistics they already have.⁴⁵

A promising example contradicting a skeptical expectation is EUROSTAT that has organized and developed its data and thus its statistical information according to the UN 2030 SDGs targets and indicators.

The Arctic Council has not yet defined specific indicators to measure and assess the different aspects of sustainable development. A number of projects such as the Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic, SLiCA (see e.g. Kruse et al., 2007 and Poppel, 2005), the Arctic Human Development Report I and II⁴⁶, and Arctic Social Indicators I and II.⁴⁷ It will therefore be the present article's suggestion that a statistical follow-up to the political declarations of the Arctic Council be structured according to the UN 2030 targets. Then one might be tempted to argue that 'sustainable development' is back on track.

Conclusion

This article substantiates the understanding that the Brundtland Report's sustainability concept was derailed shortly after the conference in Rio in 1992, when the concept had to be made operational through political implementation in the United Kingdom.

With the Earth Charter initiative, this interpretation and operationalisation came under pressure, and during the years following there has been a fight for Greenland to preserve the general acceptance of its hunting cultures' way of living.

Through the participation of the Arctic NGOs the cultural dimension was included in the AEPS and was further developed in the Arctic Council, where it has been a part of the discussions in SDWG. But this case also shows that the wording used to establish and carry out policy in the Arctic Council is still under influence of the “the 3 pillars” thinking. Even when it comes to the priorities set out by Finland in their chairmanship of the Arctic Council for the period 2017-19 the term “Sustainable Development” is mentioned as one of eight priorities and along with it, different dimensions.

A more consistent – and loyal to the UN’s application of the term “Sustainable Development” - would have the term in the headline, and as a service to the reader each of the priorities could have a badge with the number of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals to where it belongs. This would have shown the people of the Arctic what part of sustainable development in the Arctic would be the political focus under Finland’s chairmanship.

Despite an overall Arctic Council commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals – and the fact that all UN members (including the eight Arctic states) develop national SDGs – it will most likely be an ongoing struggle to broaden the understanding of sustainable development and include the cultural dimension as an important pillar.

Notes

1. A smaller part of this article was previously published in *Tidskriftet Grønland* juni 2017 [The Greenland Journal, June 2017] Acknowledgements to Birger Poppel for the idea of bringing my thoughts about sustainable development to an English speaking audience.
2. Meadows et al., 1972
3. WCED, 1987
4. WCED, 1987
5. WCED, 1987: 2 (Chapter 12 II section 5.2 A paragraph 86)
6. Vores fælles fremtid. 1987 FN – forbundet og mellemfolkeligt Samvirke,p.311[Our common future. World commission on Environment and development 1987]
7. Earth Summit '92. The Regency Press corporation, Gordon House, 6 Lissenden Gardens London NW5 ILX
8. Owens, 2003
9. Owens, 2003 p. 4-5
10. UN, 2002 p. 2
11. UN Doc A/conf.199/L.1 p.16
12. UN 2012. First paragraph

13. See <http://earthcharter.org/discover/the-earth-charter/>
14. From speech by Steven Rockefeller when The Earth Charter was formally launched in ceremonies at The Peace Palace in The Hague. 29 June 2000. www.earthcharter.org SR 6-29-00 p. 2
15. Ibid.
16. Finn Lyngé (1933 – 2014). Educated in philosophy and theology in Rome and USA, he was Nuuk's Catholic priest and a social worker. He was also Director of Greenland's radio and in 1979 was elected to the European Parliament until Greenland altered status to an OCT country in relation to the EU. He later became Greenland consultant in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He then became a member of Greenland's self-government commission from 2000 – 2003. He authored a range of articles and books on sustainable development, and particularly Greenlandic hunters' rights regarding the exploitation of sea-mammal resources in Greenland's coastal waters.
17. Henriette Rasmussen (1950 – 2017). Journalist and politician. Member of the Greenlandic parliament from 1991 -1995. Member of government responsible for social affairs and labour markets. From 1995-97, employed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva, responsible for indigenous peoples' rights. Member of Earth Charter Commission responsible for the Arctic.
18. Poppel, B., 2018, p. 314
19. For some background on the creation on the environmental part of the Gorbatjov speech, see Lyngé F (2013) p 174 -75.
20. Arctic Council, 2006
21. In 1981, when their anti-whaling campaign, which lacked any biological rationale in relation to Greenland, fell on political deaf ears, Greenpeace made a direct personal attack on the Danish representative for the international whaling commission. Lyngé 2013, p.213, note 103.
22. For deeper insight into this, see Lyngé F., 1990
23. Tulugaq: Handlingsplan for kampagnen om bæredygtig udnyttelse af levende ressourcer, Tusagassiivik, Landsstyrets sekretariat 2003. [Tulugaq: Plan of action for the campaign for sustainable exploitation of living resources, Tusagassiivik, Government secretariat 2003]
24. H. C. Petersen (1925 - 2015) was headmaster of Knud Rasmussenip Højskolia in Sisimiut from 1962 to 1975. He was active in working to promote awareness about Greenlandic culture and the development of its society, in the later years, particularly around the use of Greenland's resources and the relation to old cultural values.
25. Petersen H.C. & Lyngé F., 2003 p. 8
26. Petersen H.C. & Lyngé F., 2003 p. 14
27. Gjørup I., 2016, p. 290.
28. Nielsen P., 2008.
29. Power Point Presentation of 30th of May 2016. Department of Finance and Taxes.

30. “Piujuartitsineq” was the word used in the Power Point Presentation with the translation that showed here.
31. See Lynge F., 1992
32. “Arctic Environment. Report on The seminar On Integration of Indigenous Peoples Knowledge. Reykjavik – Iceland 20 - 23. September 1994
33. Poppel, B., 2018, p. 314
34. Slide 15 from Power Point Presentation, 30th of May 2016, see www.naalakkersuisut.gl.
35. ANP 2013: 728, p.5
36. ANP 2013: 728, p.5
37. UN 2015 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
38. Ibid.
39. For an in depth analysis of the declarations of the Arctic strategies in the participating countries see for example Poppel. B, 2018
40. Arctic Council, 2017.
41. Ibid.
42. Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). Working within the Arctic Council, this group is currently discussing sustainable development from an Arctic perspective. In this context, agreement about an operational application of the concept of sustainability is being sought. If the nations involved take the UN’s 2030 goals as their starting point, there would be a chance that culture gets a natural placing in future operationalizing of the sustainability concept in Arctic Council documents.
43. See https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/bitstream/handle/11374/2027/Finnish_Chairmanship_Program_Arctic_Council_2017-2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
44. From the first sustainability strategy in the Nordic Council of Ministers from 1996 up to the latest from 2013, the present writer was a representative of Greenland for the working group, who formulated the texts of the strategies. Following a political decision in the Nordic Council of Ministers, the first set of Nordic indicators was drawn up in relation to the Nordic strategy for sustainable development in 2006. There was a recognition in the working group that no country would spend money developing new indicators, so the task was to find the right part of the existing statistics, that could show something about the development of the goals, that the strategy included. Modern statistics in the Nordic countries are well developed. It was possible to find a number of relevant indicators, but it did not change the principle that the existing statistics was determinative for the feedback the politicians received on the strategy they had adopted. (Fokus på bæredygtig udvikling. Nordiske indikatorer 2006. Nord 2006:002 ISBN 92-893-1357-9 [*Focus on sustainable development. Nordic indicators 2006*])
45. The Survey of Living Conditions, SLiCA (www.arcticlivingconditions.org) was based on a questionnaire developed in partnerships between the research team and representatives from the indigenous peoples to reflect the welfare priorities of the indigenous peoples in the SLiCA survey regions (Inuit, Saami and the indigenous peoples of Chukotka and

the Kola Peninsula) (see e.g. Poppel, 2015). The first Data results were grouped according to the AHDR recommendations.

46. The Arctic Human Development Report, AHDR, concluded that a combination of the UN Human Development Indicators (HDI) focusing on 'longevity', 'education', and 'material success' should be supplemented by three dimensions of human development of special importance to indigenous peoples and other Arctic citizens: 'Controlling one's own destiny, Maintaining cultural identity and Living close to nature' (AHDR, 2004: 240).
47. The Arctic Social Indicators, ASI I (ASI I, 2010) and ASI II (ASI II, 2014) further elaborated, both methodologically and empirically, on the AHDR recommendations into indicators.

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