Evolution of the Arctic Council Agenda: From Environmental Protection to the Effects of Climate Change

Tuuli Kuusama

Profound changes are taking place in the Arctic, and a central driver is climate change. It is rapidly occurring in the Arctic, melting sea ice and reshaping the social and political environment into a landscape of new challenges and opportunities. As a result, the Arctic Council, the region's preeminent high-level forum, is evolving and reassessing its focus.

According to an agenda-setting perspective, the hierarchy of different issues on political agendas varies over time. Agenda-setting is a political process where stakeholders compete for the attention of decision-makers and media. Agenda-setting explains how growing public awareness helps elevate issues to the top of the political agenda. The Arctic Council is an environmental regime and an international regional institution which provides added value by producing information about significant environmental challenges. The evolution of the Arctic Council can be mostly explained by its growing understanding about the state of the Arctic environment and the most salient phenomena facing the region. This development can be analyzed in Arctic Council deliverables. The primary sources for these include the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) and Arctic Council ministerial meeting Declarations (1991-2019) and selected scientific reports produced by the Arctic Council Working Groups. In this article I analyze how environmental questions were adopted into Arctic politics, concentrating on how climate change was incorporated into the agenda of the Arctic Council.

Introduction

Since the beginning of institutionalized Arctic environmental protection, the understanding of the main threats to the Arctic environment has changed tremendously. Arctic environmental cooperation started with transboundary long-range pollution and stability building in the early 1990s. Scientific monitoring gradually led to a better understanding of the state of the Arctic environment. The growing awareness of climate changes has entailed implications for international environmental regimes, including the Arctic Council.

Institutionalized Arctic environmental cooperation manifested in full in 1991 when the eight Arctic states adopted the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, or AEPS, in Rovaniemi, Finland

Tuuli Kuusama has an M.Soc.Sci. from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lapland, Finland.

(AEPS, 1991). From its inception, the cooperation focused on protecting the Arctic environment, increasing knowledge of anthropogenic pollution (in particular oil, acidification, persistent organic contaminants, radioactivity, noise and heavy metals), monitoring the state of the Arctic environment, assessing threats to the Arctic environment, and advocating on those issues in other international fora. A special feature of Arctic environmental collaboration has been the active involvement of Arctic Indigenous peoples as non-voting Permanent Participants and the recognition of their traditional knowledge.

The AEPS played a central role as a regional regime while raising national and international awareness of transboundary environmental problems. The Arctic Council has continued the work and done the same for climate issues. The AEPS was subsumed under the Arctic Council upon its creation in 1996. The Arctic Council was established by the Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council, which is better known as the Ottawa Declaration (1996). It was founded to advocate for the resolution of environmental challenges, while promoting sustainable development. What is important in the context of this article, is that the Ottawa Declaration (1996) does not mention climate change. What turned out to be important for Arctic environmental cooperation, however, was that the Arctic Council reserved for itself the possibility to "regularly review the priorities" (ibid: 4).

The Arctic Council is a high level forum for promoting cooperation "on common Arctic issues, especially on sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic" (ibid: 2). High-level forums enhance interaction and knowledge dissemination by highlighting common standings to recognized problems. Noticeably, decisions are taken by consensus of the Arctic States (Ottawa Declaration, 1996: 3). The Arctic Council subsumed the programs of the AEPS. Substantive work of the Arctic Council is conducted in six Working Groups.[1] They cover subjects from marine protection and emergency preparedness to environmental monitoring, biodiversity, and sustainable development. There is no specific Working Group for climate issues. Widely respected scientific assessments produced by the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) Working Group have substantially affected the understanding of major environmental threats in the Arctic.

In this article, I develop an institutional analysis of Arctic environmental cooperation and describe how the focus has changed over the years from long-range transboundary pollutants to climate change. This article examines how the Arctic Council recognized an emerging issue, climate change, and renewed itself to meet this ongoing and escalating challenge in the circumpolar north.

In describing how climate change was incorporated into the Arctic Council's agenda, I apply a Downsian issue-attention cycle analysis. My core question is about how well the Downsian issue-attention cycle model fits with the regime development of the Arctic Council's work related to climate change: Does it have any explanatory value? The development of Arctic climate policy is worth exploring, because the Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet. I am interested in how a high-level forum becomes aware of the problem, promotes climate issues and in the meantime reacts to the fluctuating national climate stances of its member states. While trying to concentrate on how the Arctic Council responds to climate change, I will not explore political processes leading to the founding of the AEPS and the Arctic Council.

This article builds on my Master's thesis (Kuusama, 2018) published in Finnish, where I formulate a stage-model of the institutional development of Arctic environmental cooperation focusing on

climate change. Drawing from my observations, I argue that the institutional development of Arctic environmental cooperation, especially climate awareness, can be divided in stages. Further building on that previous research, I add in this article a fifth stage to the analysis in order to cover the development through the latest ministerial meeting, which was held in Rovaniemi in May 2019.

Arctic environmental politics

This section introduces the concept of environmental regime and briefly seeks to contextualize how environmental questions were taken into Arctic politics. Arctic politics is characterized by several themes: highlighting environmental cooperation, Arctic governance, geopolitics, maritime access, resource potential and Indigenous peoples' involvement, to name a few. The Arctic region was originally framed around environmental security questions instead of military security or trade (Exner-Pirot, 2013: 122).

The Arctic Council is an environmental regime which produces, for example, added value by producing information of significant environmental challenges. There are several definitions for regimes, including Keohane's description: "Regimes are institutions with explicit rules, agreed upon by governments, that pertain to particular sets of issues in international relations" (Hasenclever et al., 1997: 12).

It is typical for regimes to be dynamic and get stronger over time. The Arctic Council reforms its goals depending on the best available cumulative information and informs national policy-makers. Regimes renew themselves to fulfill the requirements of their environment (Young, 1997). In the Arctic context, climate change and cumulative environmental information have been relevant challenges for environmental regimes.

Young's (1999) concept of a generative regime turns out to be useful in the Arctic setting. One of the central generative tasks is to catalyze new common practices to areas where there have not been any (ibid.). The key to the Arctic Council's success is said to lay in its generative role (Escudé, 2016: 69). It has shaped common norms and values and a framework for mutual interaction "even for the most reluctant to cooperate" (ibid: 69). This observation is especially crucial in this climate context.

The special value, or the cognitive niche of the Arctic Council, are scientific assessments produced by its Working Groups. The Arctic Council is an effective policy-shaper as a provider of new knowledge which stems from monitoring and co-producing knowledge, science and policy. The Arctic Council "serves as a knowledge broker and global advocate for Arctic topics" (Arctic Council: Climate, n.d.). The Arctic Council has been a "cognitive forerunner" in environmental policy, and especially in the case of POPs and climate change, which pose significant risks to Arctic inhabitants (Nilsson, 2012b: 191). Some of the assessments, especially the jointly produced Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) (2004), have enabled the Arctic Council to disseminate a strong environmental and climate message to international fora.

The Arctic Council and its predecessor, the AEPS, are each products of the context in which they were founded. The thaw of East-West tensions in the early 1990s paved the way for strengthened regional cooperation. The period after the end of the Cold War was ripe for environmental awakening on a global scale, paving opportunities distinct from those only about traditional military security issues (Brigham et al, 2016: 15; Koivurova & Graczyk, 2014). Arctic environmental protection, inspired by the Soviet leader Gorbachev's Murmansk speech, provided

a common ground for functional cooperation and stability building. This was the starting point for the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, the AEPS, signed by the eight Arctic states in Rovaniemi in 1991.

The Arctic region is a sink of long-range transboundary air and water pollution which leads to environmental degradation. Arctic Indigenous peoples who live in close connection with nature were the first ones to be concerned about environmental changes. The Arctic environmental problems are linked with transboundary pollution from southern latitudes originating from human activities and radioactivity from the Cold War legacy and nuclear power plants. Local residents ultimately pushed the Arctic states to recognize these environmental challenges and identify solutions. At first, environmental cooperation was identified as a low political field and thus, suitable for multi-lateral cooperation. This changed when the environmental issues became interpreted politically as more significant, and environmental degradation was raised to a high political level and included in the foreign policy agendas of the Arctic states (Heininen, 2013).

The Arctic Council adopted a new salient message from the effects of climate change, when it was realized that the Arctic will warm twice as much as the rest of the planet. Resulting from the ACIA process, the image of the Arctic and dynamics of the Arctic politics changed (ACIA, 2004; Koivurova & Graczyk, 2014). The region previously framed as a vulnerable frontier transformed into a vivid, politically and economically viable area (AEPS, 1991; Koivurova & Graczyk, 2014). Much of the reassessing of the Arctic Council's focus is, thus, explained by increased understanding about the state of the Arctic environment, which is attributable to AMAP's assessments.

Methodological choices

This article mainly follows a document analysis method. I use an agenda setting perspective (see Pralle, 2009) and Downsian issue-attention cycle (Gupta & Jenkins-Smith, 2015) as a loose conceptual model for the analysis.

Document analysis gives an insight into an institution by examining documents it has produced (Bowen, 2009). This analysis is based on organizational documents such as ministerial declarations, which are official institutional deliverables. The primary sources used for this document analysis include the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) and Arctic Council Ministerial Declarations (1991-2019) and some selected scientific reports produced by the Arctic Council Working Groups. Reports of Senior Arctic Officials to ministers or Working Group deliverables such as thematic scientific reports are not included.

The institutional development of the AEPS and the Arctic Council can be researched by analyzing processes at the highest ranking decision-making level, i.e. ministerial meetings. A testimony of the Arctic Council's growing climate awareness is traceable in ministerial declarations. This is the reason I concentrate on the ministerial declarations in order to trace the development of the Arctic Council's climate policy. A section in every Ministerial Declaration from Inari (2002) to Fairbanks (2017) is dedicated to climate change. (Although in the 2015 Iqaluit Declaration the subtitle did not include the exact word of climate change.) This represents the fact that the findings of the ACIA and the predicted impacts of climate change in the Arctic have served as a "game changer" for the Arctic Council (see Friedrich, 2016: 173).

The top Arctic government officials gather biannually to a ministerial meeting to review the

progress of the Arctic Council. The Arctic states are nowadays represented by foreign ministers and the tone is usually described as collegial stressing common Arctic interests (Chater, 2019). The decisions are made by consensus, and the ministerial meeting provides a joint declaration. Declarations are not legally binding, but they reflect the spirit and intent of the Arctic states supported by Permanent Participants and contain recommendations to Senior Arctic Officials.

Theoretical framework

I am interested in how different actors choose their primary focus and how it changes over time. According to the agenda-setting perspective, the hierarchy of different issues on the political agenda varies over time. Agenda-setting is a political process where issues compete for the attention of decision-makers and media. The core of agenda-setting is that growing public awareness helps elevate issues to the top of the political agenda (Pralle, 2009). This happens even in the Arctic Council and its growing climate consciousness, as I will demonstrate.

Agenda-setting and the varying prominence of policy issues can be visualized as a Downsian issue-attention cycle. It describes a cyclical process in which a policy issue gains and loses public interest over time. Public attention reflects the relative priority of a specific issue compared to other issues. Governmental attention, in turn, reflects that the issue is proportionally more discussed. The prominence of an issue grows when it shifts from a pre-problem stage to the next stage of alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm. However, the attention begins to diminish when the costs of significant progress are realized, followed finally by a gradual decline of public interest into the post-problem stage (Gupta & Jenkins-Smith, 2015).

The stages are relatively predictable. In the first stage, the problem exists but is not widely recognized as a salient issue. In the second stage, the policy problem gains mass attention resulting from a big event which sparks the recognition of an urgent matter. In this stage, the policy-makers are forced to look for solutions for the problem. In the following stages, the costs of solving the societal problem cause frustration and the public loses interest. Finally, in the post-problem stage the policy issue loses its political priority. However, the political issue has already affected the institution and left open the door to potentially reawaken the issue quite easily (Gupta & Jenkins-Smith, 2015).

Next, I will explore how the Arctic Council has responded to climate change. Inspired by the Downsian issue-attention cycle, I have developed a 5-stage model of the growing climate awareness of the Arctic Council. The breaks in time periods coincide with ministerial meetings.

I: Pre-problem stage: Climate change is a global environmental problem

When Finland suggested transboundary cooperation to other Arctic States in the beginning of the 1990s, the environment was perceived as a common denominator belonging to the field of low politics (Nilsson, 2012a: 179). In the AEPS founding document (1991: 7), the Arctic states committed to international cooperation to ensure protection of the environment and sustainable development across the Arctic region. At that point the Arctic region was described as vulnerable and "highly sensitive to pollution" (ibid: 6, 12).

The focus of Arctic environmental cooperation was on transboundary human-induced long-range contaminants (see AMAP, 1997; AEPS, 1991). The concrete action composed of activities for the "[a]ssessment of potential environmental impacts of development activities," as well as "the threats

to the Arctic environment," including scientific research (AEPS, 1991: 2). The AEPS listed six specific pollution issues which required attention: persistent organic pollutants (POPs), oil, heavy metals, noise, radioactivity and acidification (ibid: 12). All of them are transboundary by nature except for noise. It is worth noting that climate change was missing from the initial priorities of the AEPS as Arctic environmental cooperation kicked off.

There were already some clear signs in the AEPS that climate change may become a significant environmental factor for the future of the Arctic and that it was important for AMAP to remain aware of international research:

> Two of the most significant threats to the present Arctic environment may come from climate change, induced by global warming and the effects of stratospheric depletion. Programs to detect and determine the causes and effects of climate change and ozone depletion are to a large extent being developed by other international groupings and in other for a.
>
> It is important for AMAP to be aware of these programs and to develop links with them from an Arctic perspective in order to encourage and facilitate an Arctic component in climate programs (AEPS: 1991: 30-31).

In the beginning of the Arctic environmental cooperation, climate change was first classified as a problem best suited for global environmental governance. The Rovaniemi Declaration (AEPS 1991: 12), the founding document of the AEPS, stated: "Other environmental problems including the depletion of the ozone layer and global warming were not addressed because they were already being considered in other fora." The first stage of Arctic environmental cooperation in the early 1990s thus aligns with the pre-problem stage of the Downsian issue-attention cycle: the existence of the problem of climate change was just beginning to be recognized.

The built-in intention and ability of the AEPS to adjust the initial priorities of the working groups proved later to be important for Arctic climate governance (AEPS, 1991: 32). It was already recognized early on that the Arctic is "influenced and in some cases threatened by factors occurring also outside" the region (ibid: 7). The Arctic ecosystems similarly affect global climate (ibid: 10).

II: Specific Arctic interest on climate monitoring (1993-1997)

The second stage of the five-stage model aligns with the period of 1993 to 1997, when the AEPS sought concrete steps for future cooperation. A central difference in the second stage compared to the first one is that climate change was now identified as salient for the Arctic region, spawning a call for more specific Arctic monitoring. This was supported by a distinguished global climate change study: The IPCC's special report on the regional impacts of climate change confirms that the Arctic is "very vulnerable to projected climate change and its impacts" (IPCC, 1997: 8).

In the Nuuk Declaration (1993: 6), one of the initial Working Groups, AMAP, was requested to "regularly review" results of global cooperation on climate change. AMAP's duty was to identify potential gaps and provide Arctic-related perspective on the global agenda. It was mutually synergistic to coordinate Arctic and global monitoring efforts in logistically difficult areas.

Climate change was included in the first Arctic Council Ministerial Declaration (Iqaluit Declaration, 1998: 4), when the working groups CAFF and AMAP introduced their intention to prepare an overview on changes to ecosystems. In the beginning, effects of climate change were

solely linked with general topics of Arctic ecosystems and biodiversity. The first comprehensive State of the Arctic Environment Report on Arctic Pollution Issues (AMAP, 1997: 169) reveals "climate change is likely to be more pronounced in the Arctic than in other areas of the world."

III: Arctic climate awakening (2000-2005)

In the third stage, the dramatic effects of climate change were realized and general awareness began to rise through the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) process. This aligns with the stage of the alarmed discovery of the Downsian issue-attention cycle (see Gupta & Jenkins-Smith, 2015). The third stage of the five-stage model covers the period from the Barrow Ministerial Meeting (2000) when the ACIA project was launched to the publication of the findings in Reykjavik in 2004. The ACIA process has been thoroughly analyzed by Nilsson (2007).

The ACIA (2005) is the world's most comprehensive regional climatic and ultraviolet radiation assessment to date. It describes the ongoing climate change and its consequences in the Arctic region and its global effects: inter alia global sea level rise, reduced sea ice, vegetation zones and animal species' distribution shifts, economic and cultural impacts to Indigenous communities and challenges to infrastructure (ACIA, 2004: 10-11; ACIA, 2005).

The goal of the ACIA, as defined by the Barrow Declaration (2002: 2), was to "evaluate and synthesize knowledge on climate variability and change and increased ultraviolet radiation, and support policy-making processes and the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change." The assessment included sections on topics of general Arctic interest, such as human health, social and economic impacts with respective policy recommendations (ibid). One key finding was that "[c]limate change, together with other stressors such as ultraviolet radiation, presents a range of challenges for human health, culture and well-being of Arctic residents, including Indigenous peoples and communities, as well as risks to Arctic species and ecosystems" (ACIA Policy Document, 2004: 4).

In the Inari Declaration (2002), the main focus of the Arctic Council still centered on longstanding themes: pollutants, biodiversity conservation and human conditions in the Arctic, but this would soon change. The preliminary findings of the ACIA process had already become available, and the Inari Declaration made this clear by introducing the idea that the Arctic is an "early warning of global climate changes" (ibid: 4).

The Reykjavik Ministerial Meeting two years later served as a further turning point for the environmental and climate work of the Arctic Council. In the Reykjavik Declaration (2004: 4), the original themes of biodiversity conservation and actions against pollutants were mentioned, but they were tied in with cross-cutting climate issues to "Recognize the special features of the Arctic environment as an indicator of global environmental impacts, such as climate change and long-range transboundary pollution." In this ministerial meeting the Arctic Council welcomed with appreciation the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA, 2004) and 'note[d] with concern' the documented climate impacts which were already felt in the Arctic region. The climate emphasis was so overpowering that the simultaneously published Arctic Human Development Report (2004) was overshadowed by the ACIA (2004) (see Brigham et al, 2016: 16).

The results of the ACIA (2004: 10-11) are comprised of ten key findings:

1. Arctic climate is now warming rapidly and much larger changes are projected.

2. Arctic warming and its consequences have worldwide implications.
3. Arctic vegetation zones are very likely to shift, causing wide-ranging impacts.
4. Animal species' diversity, ranges, and distribution will change.
5. Many coastal communities and facilities face increasing exposure to storms.
6. Reduced sea ice is very likely to increase marine transport and access to resources.
7. Thawing ground will disrupt transportation, buildings, and other infrastructure.
8. Indigenous communities are facing major economic and cultural impacts.
9. Elevated ultraviolet radiation levels will affect people, plants, and animals.
10. Multiple influences interact to cause impacts to people and ecosystems.

The "Arctic in change" metaphor was introduced by the ACIA process (Koivurova, 2010: 149). The key message of the ACIA (2004) was that the climate is inevitably changing and these changes were intensely experienced in the Arctic, presenting profound challenges to the Arctic ecosystems, inhabitants, infrastructure and livelihoods (ACIA, 2004). The ACIA argued that climate change would challenge the circumstances typical for the Arctic as we know them. Global warming is expected to accelerate over this century, contributing to severe ecological, social and economic changes; some of these are already felt in the Arctic. Whether particular changes are perceived as positive opportunities or negative challenges depends on stakeholders' interests. Impacts of climate changes addressed in the Arctic are partly caused by greenhouse gas emissions whose origins are outside of the Arctic region. In the same way, the changes in the Arctic reverberate back globally. Thus, the Arctic is of special global importance and can provide an early indication of future societal and environmental challenges (ibid: 8-10). A true wake-up call was the observation that the "Arctic average temperature has risen at almost twice the rate as the rest of the world in the past few decades" (ibid: 8).

The ACIA process is renowned for its detailed work with three-hundred scientists participating in its research processes. The results of the ACIA are compiled in different documents: a plain language 140-page synthesis report Impacts of a Warming Arctic (ACIA, 2004), a negotiated ACIA Policy Document (2004) and comprehensive 1020-page scientific Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA, 2005). In the ACIA Policy Document (2004) the Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) presented their recommendations. They covered mitigation, adaptation, research, monitoring and outreach activities. Based on the findings of the ACIA, the need to reorganize the work of the Arctic Council was evident (ibid). Climate change, among other stressors, presented several challenges to Arctic ecosystems and communities. The ACIA's findings also linked the Arctic to the global climate system, leading to the understanding that taking effective policy measures was a common responsibility (see Reykjavik Declaration, 2004).

A direct consequence of the ACIA recommendations and growing climate awareness was increased visibility of the Arctic Council at international fora (see e.g. Reykjavik Declaration, 2004: 1; Salekhard Declaration, 2006: 1). The Arctic Council embraced a more active role in other international fora by disseminating the ACIA deliverables in order to advance cooperation and to address environmental, social and cultural implications of climate change. The role of the Arctic as an international partner was highlighted already in the Inari Declaration (2002: 4-5). This is

attributable to the preliminary results which had underlined the linkages between Arctic and global processes on climate. Politically, even institutional interplay with other fora and "intensified need for global and regional action" was addressed (ibid.). This emphasis continued in the subsequent Reykjavik (2004) and Salekhard (2006) Declarations.

IV: "Climate Change as Game Changer"[2] (2006-2017)

The fourth stage took place between 2006 and 2017, when the Arctic Council fully incorporated impacts of climate change into its work. The Downsian issue-attention cycle describes the skyrocketing prominence of an issue as euphoric enthusiasm (Gupta & Jenkins-Smith, 2015). This description corresponds with the Arctic climate buzz after the releasing of the ACIA (Steinberg et al., 2014: 4). In line with the Downsian issue-attention cycle, several prominent events drew attention to the Arctic in the beginning of the new millennium. They included, for example, the record lowest Arctic sea ice minimum (2007), a Russian flag planting on the seabed beneath the North Pole (2007), and assessments of undiscovered Arctic oil and gas reserves (2008) (ibid).

As a result of the ACIA (2004), the Arctic states became more aware of new economic opportunities and easier marine access resulting from global warming in the Arctic region. The loss of sea ice opens new opportunities for economic development, whereas several challenges are placed upon Arctic ecosystems, cultures and sustainable livelihoods. The ACIA (2004: 13) projected the nearly total loss of sea ice in summer "for late this century." It is evident that the Arctic Council was preparing for increased human activity in the Arctic in such forms as oil and gas development, commercial shipping and tourism. As a consequence, the Arctic Council identified itself as the leader "on Arctic challenges and opportunities," which became a new, repeating locution in the declarations (Tromsø Declaration, 2009: 1; Kiruna Declaration, 2013: 1). The notion is tied with "the extensive reduction of Arctic sea ice coverage and thickness," which is associated with increased marine access (Tromsø Declaration, 2009: 2).

At the same time, the need to enhance emergency preparedness increased (Chater, 2015: 83). Along with economic visions, the Arctic Council placed new emphasis on emergency prevention preparedness and response and assessment on oil and gas anticipating increasing marine activity and access to natural resources (AMAP, 2007; ACIA, 2004; see Reykjavik Declaration, 2004: 4). Even an Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (PAME, 2009) was published. The Arctic Council "recognize[s] the development of safe and environmentally secure marine transportation and subsea pipeline development in the Arctic region as a priority issue closely linked to climate change, technological advance and resource use" (Salekhard Declaration, 2006: 7). Even the first two legally binding agreements negotiated under the auspices of the Arctic Council dealt with search and rescue and marine oil pollution preparedness and response (Arctic Council: International cooperation, n.d.).

In the Tromsø Declaration (2009: 1) the Arctic Council underlined "human induced global climate change as one of the greatest challenges facing the Arctic." However, the original priority issues, namely transboundary pollutants including heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants, "continue to be a major concern" (ibid: 2).

The Nuuk Declaration (2011) condensed the spirit of the above-mentioned metaphor of "the Arctic in change." The Arctic Council explicitly wanted to stabilize its view on the rapidly changing circumstances and prevailing values while, at the same time, global interest in Arctic involvement

was exploding. The increased attention to the Arctic Council underscored the need to strengthen its capacity to address new challenges and opportunities. The Arctic Council launched several new conceptual tools in Nuuk. The ministers decided to establish a standing secretariat and a task force to implement the strengthening of activities. New recommendations for the role and criteria of observers were adopted (ibid, 2011: 1-2). The first legally binding agreement concerning cooperation in aeronautical and maritime search and rescue in the Arctic was negotiated under the Arctic Council (SAR Agreement, 2011). The Nuuk Ministerial Meeting supported substantial global carbon dioxide reductions and urged all parties to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to meet the goal of keeping the global average temperature rise under two degrees Celsius relative to pre-industrial times (Nuuk Declaration, 2011: 4). This is an example of institutional interplay and how the institutions support each other and share common goals. The Arctic Council welcomed the assessment of the Arctic cryosphere (AMAP, 2011) which provided evidence on accelerated changes. The Arctic Council emphasized their "leadership to minimize the human and environmental impacts of climate change" and repeated the importance of resilience and reducing short-lived climate forcers (Nuuk Declaration, 2011: 3).

The Kiruna Ministerial Meeting in 2013 marked a shift towards a more global community of Arctic-interested parties. The enlargement of Asian observer countries, including China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea and Singapore, was noticeable. The Kiruna Declaration (2013: 3) highlighted that climate change in the Arctic has "repercussions around the world." Thus, the ministers used the momentum and included a reference to major Arctic and Arctic-minded emitter countries urging them all to commit to common climate efforts (ibid).

The Arctic Council published in Kiruna the Vision for the Arctic (Arctic Council, 2013) which addresses a need to ensure that the Arctic voice is globally heard. Among other priorities, the Vision emphasizes a safe, prosperous and peaceful Arctic. The safety dimension covers environmental and civil security with growing emphasis on marine safety. Prosperity of the Arctic covers both human well-being and sustainable development with economic potential. The peaceful Arctic includes the heart of all the efforts of the Arctic Council: a stable and cooperative region is the requirement for all development.

The Iqaluit Declaration (2015: 4-5), signed in April 2015, marked a strong statement for global and national action to fight climate change, including its referring to the Paris Climate Change Conference in November-December 2015. The importance of resilience and adaptation to climate change were stressed for the sake of Arctic communities (ibid: 8). The economic emphasis strengthened as the Arctic Economic Council was established (ibid: 5). The role of the Arctic Council as an environmentally aware standard setter was strengthened; the ministerial meeting endorsed Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines (PAME, 2014) and the Guide to Oil Spill Response in Snow and Ice Conditions in the Arctic (EPPR, 2015) in line with the anticipated increase in activity in the marine area. However, politically, the biggest achievement of the Iqaluit Ministerial Meeting was its proof that the Arctic Council could still thrive in spite of the tensions in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis.

Still, at least in one central way, not much changed in relation to the Arctic Council taking a role in addressing the major cause of climate change, i.e. greenhouse gas emissions where the Arctic states are among major culprits. This is logical, firstly, because several Arctic states have major investments and stakes in the oil and gas sector. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the

Arctic Council works based on consensus, and emission regulation belongs to national decision-making processes.

V: Time of uncertainty (2017-present)

If the Arctic Council has thus far acted as an active climate messenger for international environmental governance, a chilly wind of change started to approach Arctic environmental cooperation in the late 2010s. The challenges were around the corner when Donald Trump was inaugurated as the President of the United States in January 2017. President Trump has long openly undermined the Paris climate agreement and multilateral cooperation on these issues (see Koivurova, 2019). Paris agreement had been the first universal and legally binding climate change agreement (UNFCCC).

The Arctic Council celebrated its 20th anniversary in Fairbanks in 2017 and reaffirmed its "commitment to maintain peace, stability, and constructive cooperation" (Fairbanks Declaration, 2017: 1). The Fairbanks Declaration (2017) included sections of Arctic Ocean safety, security and stewardship; impacts of climate change; improving economic and living conditions and strengthening the Arctic Council. However, the first signs of what was to come were already visible in this meeting in May 2017.

There had been signs that the Trump administration was trying to weaken phrasing of the Fairbanks Declaration in advance of the meeting, particularly regarding climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Sevunts, 2019). Finally, then United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson along with other foreign ministers of the Arctic States signed a declaration which expresses support for international institutional interplay and the objectives of the Paris Agreement. The Fairbanks Declaration (2017: 1) was endorsed including the words: "[n]oting the entry into force of the Paris Agreement on climate change and its implementation, and reiterating the need for global action to reduce both long-lived greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants." The subsequent section on climate change goes further on resilience, adaptation and mitigation of climate change (ibid.: 5). The ministers even welcomed the updated assessment on Snow, Water, Ice and Permafrost in the Arctic (Fairbanks Declaration, 2017: 6; AMAP, 2017). Ultimately, the outcome of the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting was that both the United States and Russia signaled their interest in continuing cooperation within the Arctic Council, which was, in the short term, an apparent success. However, less than three weeks later, on June 1st 2017, President Trump made the decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement because of the perceived unfair economic disadvantages to the United States (White House, 2017).

President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement started a distinct new stage of the Arctic climate collaboration. That was a strong manifest against the core of the work of the Arctic Council from one of its founding members. However, this is understandable, if a state has significant national political interests at stake. National, in this case American, stances on climate change has shifted over the years depending on each presidential administration. Nevertheless, climate collaboration became more complicated, or even paralyzed, in the consensus-based Arctic Council.

Diverging national opinions on climate change catapulted the Arctic Council to a new phase during the Rovaniemi Ministerial Meeting in 2019. In the Arctic context, Rovaniemi was previously known for its collaborative Arctic spirit (Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit, n.d.; Koivurova, 2019). This

metaphor refers to the history of Arctic environmental cooperation and the signing of the AEPS in Rovaniemi about thirty years earlier. The latest ministerial meeting is thus far the only one without a ministerial declaration. This is the result of the fundamental disagreement over climate change between the other Arctic states and the Trump administration which denied it.

When it was clear that the United States would not accept the draft ministerial declaration mentioning climate change, it was time for a diplomatic maneuver as the decisions of the Arctic Council are taken by consensus. The Arctic states concluded the ministerial meeting with a short Rovaniemi Joint Ministerial Statement (2019) without any mention of climate. However, the spirit of the majority of the Arctic Council was innovatively delivered by the Rovaniemi Statement by the Chair (2019). This implied that the Arctic Council was not ready to completely reverse course and water down their decades-long, growing efforts to steward the discussion about climate change as a common challenge.

The one-page Rovaniemi Joint Ministerial Statement (2019) included general statements of the common set of values and the significance of Permanent Participants. Structurally, the Rovaniemi Statement by the Chair (2019) is what one used to get in ministerial declarations. There is some duplication between these two statements. However, it is evident where the shoe pinches, when one pays attention to the contents of the documents. The Chair, then Finnish Foreign Minister Timo Soini, refers to "the meeting" when speaking about the points which all ministers consensually agreed on and states "a majority of us" when referring to the more contradictory climate issues. Ultimately, the Statement by the Chair addresses climate change in several points, mentioning by name the Paris Agreement and the need "to limit the impacts of climate change in Arctic communities" (ibid: 9). The message of the Chair of the Arctic Council was that "[a] majority of us regarded climate change as a fundamental challenge facing the Arctic and acknowledged the urgent need to take mitigation and adaptation actions and to strengthen resilience" (ibid: 7). The ministerial meeting noted the interconnectedness of the planet, how faraway activities and changes may have substantial effects in the Arctic region leading to social, economic and environmental effects (ibid).

The Downsian issue-attention cycle suggests a development towards "realizing costs of significant progress," "gradual decline of public interest," and finally, the "post-problem stage" (Gupta & Jenkins-Smith, 2015). In the Arctic climate context, it is not the case of decline of public interest: Climate change is an omnipresent, cross-cutting issue. A better explanation would be extremely differing national interests, which affect international cooperation.

Analyses

The Downsian issue-attention cycle works reasonably well for developments of the Arctic Council's work related to climate change during the first four stages, but it fails to provide relevant insights in the fifth stage. This is due to the fact that climate change is an omnipresent phenomenon, and the current public interest is not gradually declining, as suggested by the Downsian cycle. Rather, here it is most obviously a case of opposing national interests, with high political stakes. Thus, the Downsian issue-attention cycle does not reflect the best possible way to analyze an issue with several parties with conflicting interests.

Another possible weakness of this Downsian issue-attention cycle may lay in the fact that it is retroactively easier to differentiate and choose relevant time periods matching each Downsian

stage. The time frames for each stage are created by the author and are thus subjective. "Pre-problem stage," "alarmed discovery," and "euphoric enthusiasm" were relatively easy to identify. Still, I noted that the limits were somewhat blurred. However, milestones such as the publishing of the ACIA in 2004 and the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement were obviously clear.

The Downsian issue-attention cycle continues with "realizing costs of significant progress," "gradual decline of public interest," and finally, the "post-problem stage" (Gupta & Jenkins-Smith, 2015). Climate change has lost, for practical reasons, its top priority, and new issues are raising and taking its role on the Arctic Council's agenda. One of the trending issues is economic activities. However, the Arctic Council has never had only one priority, but more cross-cutting themes such as environmental protection and sustainable development. Climate collaboration work will be possible in the Arctic Council as part of other practical and science-based cross-cutting projects. This idea is in line with Down's issue-attention cycle, which recognizes the possibility to reawaken an issue which has once lost its priority.

Concluding note

The general consciousness of climate change as a salient issue has gradually risen. A central role in this process was the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2005) and its synthesis report (ACIA, 2004). This forced policymakers to understand that the future of the Arctic will fundamentally be different. After the publication of the ACIA, the Arctic was interpreted as an early warning of global climate change, and the Arctic Council realized its significant implications for its work.

Daily Arctic cooperation is currently being challenged not only by disagreement on climate issues, but also by COVID-19. The pandemic virus challenges well-established international frameworks even at the practical level: travelling, meeting colleagues face to face, and field trips to the medically and socioeconomically vulnerable Arctic region can no longer be taken for granted. When the current, most severe and acute political and public interest no longer rests on COVID-19, there will be a need to reassess the new landscape of challenges and opportunities for continued climate cooperation.

Arctic cooperation has been a story of scientific scrutiny and gradually increasing understanding. Perhaps the new common denominator lies in opening economic opportunities that are connected with dramatically changing Arctic circumstances driven by climate change. It will certainly remain challenging to foster climate stewardship in the near term. This all leaves some central questions open: how dedicated is the United States to the work of the Arctic Council in general? How can the Arctic states rebuild the confidence they need to succeed? However, the geographic proximity and the need for mutual understanding are here to stay. It might be the spark to maintain constructive Arctic cooperation, although the challenges from Rovaniemi will reverberate in the years ahead.

Notes

1. The current Arctic Council Working Groups are Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP), Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response

(EPPR), Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) and Sustainable Development Working Group (Arctic Council: Working Groups).

2. The subtitle is originally by Friedrich (2016: 173).

References

ACIA. (2004). Impacts of a Warming Arctic: Arctic Climate Impact Assessment. ACIA Overview Report. Cambridge University Press. https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/impacts-of-a-warming-arctic-2004/786

ACIA. (2005). Arctic Climate Impact Assessment. Cambridge University Press. https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/arctic-arctic-climate-impact-assessment/796

ACIA Policy Document. (2004). Issued by the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik in November 2004. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/bitstream/handle/11374/715/ACIAPolicyDocument.pdf.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

AEPS (1991). Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. Meeting in June 1991 in Rovaniemi, Finland. http://library.arcticportal.org/1542/1/artic_environment.pdf

AHDR (2004). (Arctic Human Development Report). Stefansson Arctic Institute. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/51

AMAP. (1997). *Arctic Pollution Issues: A State of the Arctic Environment Report.* Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme. https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/arctic-pollution-issues-a-state-of-the-arctic-environment-report/67

AMAP. (2007). Arctic Oil and Gas 2007. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme. https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/arctic-oil-and-gas-2007/71

AMAP. (2017). Snow, Water, Ice and Permafrost in the Arctic. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme. https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/snow-water-ice-and-permafrost-in-the-arctic-swipa-2017/1610

AMAP. (2011). Snow, Water, Ice and Permafrost in the Arctic (SWIPA): Climate Change and the Cryosphere. https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/snow-water-ice-and-permafrost-in-the-arctic-swipa-climate-change-and-the-cryosphere/743

PAME. (2009). Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment 2009 Report. Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment. https://www.pame.is/images/03_Projects/AMSA/AMSA_2009_report/AMSA_2009_Report_2nd_print.pdf

Arctic Council. *Arctic Council.* (n.d.) https://arctic-council.org/en/

Arctic Council. *Climate.* (n.d.) https://arctic-council.org/en/explore/topics/climate/

Arctic Council. *International cooperation.* (n.d.) https://arctic-council.org/en/explore/work/cooperation/

Arctic Council. *Working Groups.* (n.d.) https://arctic-council.org/en/about/working-groups/

Arctic Council. (2013). *Vision for the Arctic.* Future vision for the Arctic decided upon by the Arctic States together with the six permanent Arctic Indigenous Peoples' Organizations within the Arctic Council in May 2013 in Kiruna, Sweden. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/287

Barrow Declaration (2000). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in October 2000 in Barrow, Alaska. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/87

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal* 9(2), 27−40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Brigham, L., Exner-Pirot H., Heininen L., & Plouffe, J. (2016). The Arctic Council: Twenty Years of Policy Shaping. In L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot, & J. Plouffe (Eds.), *The Arctic Yearbook 2016*. (pp. 14-20). Northern Research Forum. https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2016/2016-preface

Chater, A. (2015). Explaining the Evolution of the Arctic Council. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Western Ontario]. *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 3230. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/3230

Chater, A. (2019, May 15). Takeaways from the 11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Rovaniemi. *The Polar Connection*. http://polarconnection.org/arctic-council-ministerial-rovaniemi/

EPPR. (2015). Guide to Oil Spill Response in Snow and Ice Conditions in the Arctic. Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/403

Escudé, C. (2016). The Strength of Flexibility: The Arctic Council in the Arctic Norm-Setting Process. In L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot, & J. Plouffe (Eds.), *The Arctic Yearbook 2016*. (pp. 62-74). Northern Research Forum. https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2016/Scholarly_Papers/2.Escude.pdf

Exner-Pirot, H. (2013). What is the Arctic a case of? The Arctic as a regional environmental security complex and the implications for policy. *The Polar Journal*, 3(1), 120-135. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2013.766006

Fairbanks Declaration (2017). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in May 2017 in Fairbanks, Alaska. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/1910

Friedrich, D. (2016). Circumpolar Legislation on Pollutants: How Effective is Arctic Governance on Global Environmental Threats? In L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot, & J. Plouffe (Eds.), *The Arctic Yearbook 2016*.. Northern Research Forum, 170-185. https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2016/Scholarly_Papers/7.Friedrich.pdf

Gupta, K. & Jenkins-Smith, H. (2015). Anthony Downs, "Up and Down with Ecology: The 'Issue-Attention' Cycle". In Lodge, M., Page, E. C., & Balla, S. J. (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration. Oxford Handbooks Online. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199646135.013.34

Hasenclever, A., Mayer, P., & Rittberger, V. (1997). Theories of international regimes. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511521720

Heininen, L. (2013). "Politicization" of the Environment: Environmental Politics and Security in the Circumpolar North. In Zellen, B. S. (Ed.), *The fast-changing Arctic: rethinking Arctic security for a warmer world.* University of Calgary Press, 35-55.

Inari Declaration (2002). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in October 2002 in Inari, Finland. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/88

IPCC. (1997). The Regional Impacts of Climate Change: An Assessment of Vulnerability. Summary for Policymakers. A Special Report of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group II. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/region-en-2.pdf).

Iqaluit Declaration (1998). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in September 1998 in Iqaluit, Canada. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/86

Iqaluit Declaration (2015). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in April 2015 in Iqaluit, Canada. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/662

Kiruna Declaration (2013). The Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council in May 2013 in Kiruna, Sweden. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/93

Koivurova, T. (2010). Limits and possibilities of the Arctic Council in a rapidly changing scene of Arctic governance. *Polar Record*, 46(2), 146-156.

Koivurova, T. (2019, December 12). Is This the End of the Arctic Council and Arctic Governance As We Know It? *High North News.* https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/end-arctic-council-and-arctic-governance-we-know-it

Koivurova, T. & Graczyk, P. (2014). The Future of the Arctic Council: Navigating between Sovereignty and Security. In Murray, R. W. & Nuttall, A. D. (Eds.), *International Relations and the Arctic: Understanding Policy and Governance*, Cambria Press, 441-481

Kuusama, T. (2018). *Arktinen neuvosto ilmaston asialla: ympäristönsuojelusta ilmastonmuutoksen vaikutusten lähettiläälksi?* [Master's thesis, University of Lapland]. Lauda. https://lauda.ulapland.fi/handle/10024/63633

Nilsson, A. (2007). *A Changing Arctic Climate. Science and Policy in the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment.* [Doctoral dissertation, Linköping University]. http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A23295&dswid=-1657

Nilsson, A. (2012a). The Arctic Environment - From Low to High Politics. In L. Heininen (Ed.), *The Arctic Yearbook 2012*. Northern Research Forum, 179-193. https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2012/Scholarly_Papers/10.Nilsson.pdf

Nilsson, A. (2012b). Knowing the Arctic: The Arctic Council as a Cognitive Forerunner. In Axworthy, T.S. et al. (Eds.), The Arctic Council: Its place in the future of Arctic governance (pp. 190-219). Munk-Gordon Arctic Security Program.

Nuuk Declaration (2011). The Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council in May 2011 in Nuuk, Greenland. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/92

Ottawa Declaration (1996). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in September 1996 in Ottawa, Canada. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/85

PAME. (2009). Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment 2009 Report. Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment. https://www.pame.is/images/03_Projects/AMSA/AMSA_2009_report/AMSA_2009_Report_2nd_print.pdf

PAME. (2014). Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines. Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/418

Pralle, S. B. (2009) Agenda-setting and climate change. *Environmental Politics* 18:5, 781- 799. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09644010903157115

Reykjavik Declaration (2004). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in November 2004 in Reykjavik, Iceland. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/89

Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit. (n.d.). *Rovaniemi Process.* https://www.rovaniemiarcticspirit.fi/EN/Home/Our-Story#

Rovaniemi Joint Ministerial Statement (2019). Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in May 2019 in

Rovaniemi, Finland. https://arctic-council.org/images/PDF_attachments/Rovaniemi_Joint_Ministerial_Statement_2019_Signed.pdf

Rovaniemi Statement by the Chair (2019). Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Timo Soini. Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in May 2019 in Rovaniemi, Finland. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/2343

Salekhard Declaration (2006). The Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council in October 2006 in Salekhard, Russia. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/90

SAR Agreement (2011). Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/531

Sevunts, L. (2019, April 15). Arctic Council: Officials struggle to find climate language that U.S. can support. The Barents Observer. https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2019/04/arctic-council-officials-struggle-find-climate-language-us-can-support

Steinberg, P. E., Bruun, J. M., & Medby, I. A. (2014). Covering Kiruna: a natural experiment in Arctic awareness. *Polar Geography*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2014.978409

Tromsø Declaration (2009). The Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council in April 2009 in Tromsø, Norway. https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/91

UNFCCC. *The Paris Agreement.* https://nfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement.

White House. Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord. June 1, 2017. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-paris-climate-accord

Young, O. R. (1997). *Global Governance. Drawing Insights from the Environmental Experience.* MIT Press.

Young, O. R. (1999). *Governance in World Affairs.* Cornell University Press.