

Developing a Framework for the Analysis of Arctic Indigenous Institutions in a Rapidly Transforming Region

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Over the past decades, the Arctic has gone through a period of transformation. These changes particularly impact the everyday life of its Indigenous inhabitants due to their location in high-risk environments, vulnerability and dependency on environmental conditions. Although these communities are used to adapt to changing circumstances, the governance in times of transformative changes differs because of the complexity of change. Furthermore, the Arctic is affected by (post-) colonial and global dynamics through international agreements addressing Indigenous rights, sustainable development and climate change framed as international norms. However, global arrangements have to be rooted in regional contexts, which puts political institutions at these levels in a central position. Sustainable development studies consider inclusive institutions as key for achieving global commons. In order to overcome gaps in our understanding of policy approaches regarding sustainable development in the Arctic, this paper addresses the key role of Indigenous institutions. Against this backdrop, the paper proposes a framework on the nexus of Indigenous peoples and sustainable development by focusing on the governance of transnational political Indigenous institutions. Following sustainable development studies, this framework adds to the field of inclusive governance the relevance of political identity and Indigenous knowledges as complementing factors for the analysis of Arctic Indigenous institutions. The developed framework is exemplarily applied to two institutions, the Inuit Circumpolar Council and the Saami Council, to allow initial insights into its applicability. The framework could further act as a theoretical basis for in-depth analyses and support the derivation of testable hypotheses on the (inter)relation of transformative changes and the governance of Indigenous institutions.

Translating global dynamics to regional circumstances

The Arctic region displays certain unique characteristics and circumstances: Although the Arctic is part of different industrialised countries, the region can be categorised as a developing area based on its socio-economic data and overarching challenges.^{2,3} The region is characterised by a great cultural diversity, differing socio-economic conditions, varying degrees of remoteness and vulnerability to climate change (SDWG, 2017). Framed as one circumpolar/transnational region, the Arctic can be differentiated into different sub-regions: the European Arctic (Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland), the North American Arctic (Alaska (US), Canada) and the Asian

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Arctic (Russia). Indigenous peoples⁴ used to live in the Arctic before their territories were divided by nation-states through (internal) colonisation processes, which led to power asymmetries between colonisers and Indigenous peoples. Today, 500,000 people of the four million inhabitants who are living in the Arctic identify as Indigenous peoples (Arctic Council Secretariat, 2020).⁵ Over the past decades, the region has gone through a period of transformative changes in the ecological, economic, geopolitical, social and political dimensions. Shaping phenomena of these changes are primarily environmental and climate change, intensified resource extraction, (post-) colonialism⁶ as well as processes of region-building and political re-empowerment. These aspects of transformative changes in particular impact the everyday life of its Indigenous inhabitants due to their location in high-risk environments, vulnerability, and dependency on environmental conditions.⁷ Their livelihoods are jeopardised due to rapid weather changes, thin ice conditions, and an overall disappearing sea ice. These phenomena affect their traditional way of life, which includes activities such as hunting, fishing, and herding (Figueroa, 2011: 232ff.). Those changes have implications for the economic, social, and cultural situation as well as for the well-being and health of the Arctic population (Rautio et al., 2014). Consequently, Arctic Indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable to these external changes and threats. Although those communities had to adapt to changing circumstances in the Arctic since time immemorial, the governance today differs because of the intensity, rapidity and complexity of change.

At the same time, the Indigenous population is going through a period of legal re-empowerment in the Arctic context, which shaped the governance structures in the region and strengthened their self-determination (Poelzer & Wilson, 2014: 185ff.; Wilson, 2020: 27). Indigenous communities are part of processes of institutional devolution and re-empowerment that have led to the emergence of new Indigenous institutions and power shifts to other governance levels. In comparison to other regions, the governance of the Arctic displays a long tradition of transnationality, policies addressing sustainable development as well as of including local and Indigenous stakeholders (Wehrmann, 2020).

In regard to the international level, the Arctic became part of global dynamics through new awareness and agreements addressing Indigenous rights, sustainable development and climate change as international norms voiced by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Climate Agreement. The challenges, which are addressed by these accords, are highly relevant for Indigenous peoples (Magni, 2017) and for Arctic peoples specifically (SDWG, 2017: 3). These global arrangements, however, have to be rooted in regional contexts, which puts institutions at these levels in a central position. In general, sustainable development studies consider inclusive institutions as key for achieving global commons (TWI 2050, 2018). Indigenous peoples belong to non-dominant groups and still need to advocate for their rights at different policy levels. One of these rights is, for instance, to establish and lead Indigenous institutions further promoting their rights and unifying Indigenous voices.

Our understanding of the governance and policy approaches regarding sustainable development of Indigenous institutions remains empirically and theoretically underdeveloped (Shadian, 2010). To overcome these gaps and to integrate⁸ Indigenous approaches into the sustainable development discourse, this paper addresses the key role of transnational political Indigenous institutions in the region. Against this backdrop, the paper proposes a framework on the nexus of Indigenous

peoples and sustainable development in the Arctic by focusing on transnational political Indigenous institutions.⁹ This framework includes elements of the concepts of inclusive governance, political identity and Indigenous knowledges. Hence, the paper aims at contributing to research on transnational political Indigenous institutions as key actors for governing in times of transformative changes and for achieving global commons. The research design envisages a deductive approach that frames transformative changes as the *independent variable* and the governance of transnational Arctic Indigenous institutions as the *dependent variable*. The developed framework will exemplarily be applied to two transnational institutions, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) and the Saami Council. Thus, the paper allows first conclusions on the applicability of the framework. The framework should further act as a theoretical basis for future in-depth analyses and support deriving testable hypotheses on the (inter)relation of transformative change and governance.

In order to gain new insights into the governance and policy approaches of Arctic Indigenous institutions in times of transformative changes, the paper takes on a governance lens. This governance perspective allows for shifting from central steering to interaction. Due to different changes and issues in various areas, the governance in times of transformative changes is challenging: On the one hand, governance needs to address long-term effects and uncertainties of change; on the other hand, political actions have to be flexible and adaptable to new emerging circumstances.

By focusing on transnational political Arctic Indigenous institutions as non-state actors “our understanding of transnational interactions in a region that is increasingly cooperatively governed” can be deepened (Parente, 2013: 451). To operationalise Indigenous governance in the Arctic context, the paper aims at contextualising how transnational political Indigenous institutions are governing in times of transformative changes. These new insights are relevant because they can contribute to a more profound understanding of how Indigenous institutions develop policies towards sustainable development in a rapidly transforming region. Moreover, the findings can be referred to other regional contexts and the sustainable development discourse in general by addressing Indigeneity and critically reflecting on existing frameworks, narratives as well as paradigms. Furthermore, this approach allows applying global insights to the Arctic region and integrating Arctic research into a broader social sciences’ context.

The paper begins with the development of the framework through elaborating how the different dimensions of transformative changes affect Indigenous people and political institutions in the Arctic. This subchapter is guiding to the role of inclusive institutions for the achievement of sustainable development. The framework further adds political identity and Indigenous knowledges as complementing elements for the governance of Indigenous institutions. Further, the applicability of the framework is tested. Finally, the paper closes with the conclusion.

Framework

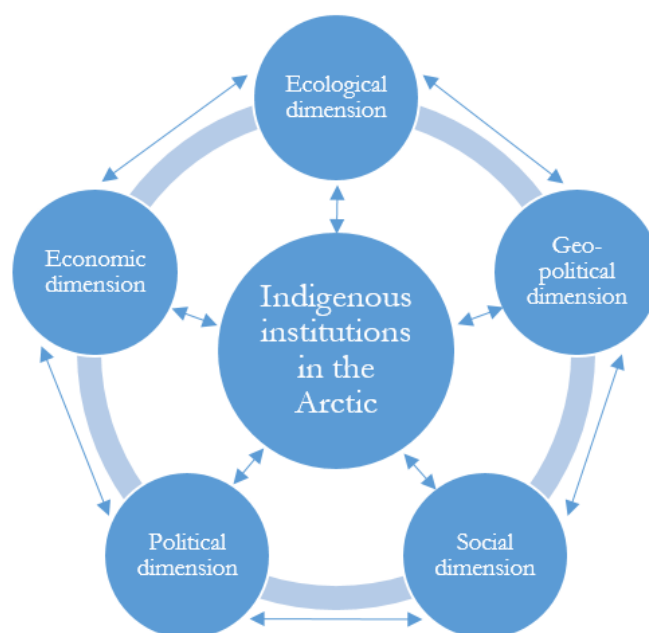
The paper develops a framework for analysing the nexus of Indigenous institutions and sustainable development in the Arctic framed as a rapidly transforming region. Focusing on transnational political Indigenous institutions in the Arctic, the framework aims at supporting the analysis of the institutions’ policy-making and governance towards sustainable development at different policy levels. In the Arctic, transformative changes (*independent variable*) in all their different dimensions

are impacting Indigenous institutions, their governance and policy approaches towards sustainable development (*dependent variable*).

Transformative changes in the Arctic

By analysing transformative changes in the Arctic more specifically, this paper identifies ecological, economic, geopolitical, social and political dimensions (see figure 1). Within these various dimensions of change, different impacts on Indigenous peoples and political institutions can be examined. Moreover, all dimensions are interlinked, which is underlined by the different arrows and connections (figure 1). Transformative changes in the Arctic in all their dimensions affect Indigenous peoples, their way of life as well as their vulnerability to external threats and influences. Policy approaches aiming at achieving sustainable development are considered to reduce these vulnerabilities, which highlights the relevance of political institutions in the context of the implementation of policies towards sustainable development.

Figure 1. Dimensions of transformative changes in the Arctic and their impact on Indigenous institutions



Source: Author

Considering the ecological dimension, the Arctic and its inhabitants are especially vulnerable to climate change impacts (IPCC, 2014 & 2018). In the Arctic, the average temperatures are increasing twice as fast as elsewhere in the world. Phenomena such as disappearing sea ice, the thawing of permafrost, the release of pollutants and the effects of rising sea levels thus occur intensively (ibid). At the same time, the warming Arctic functions as an accelerator to global warming itself. Those changes in the ecological dimension are severe and affect the everyday life in the Arctic. For instance, the disappearing sea ice, the coastal erosion and the thawing of permafrost can cause infrastructure problems by impairing ice roads, bridges and housing. Moreover, Arctic animals change their migratory routes due to warmer temperatures, which is challenging traditional hunting, fishing and trapping activities. Besides the availability of traditional wildlife and fish, also the health condition of animals worsens due to environmental change (Andrachuk & Pearce, 2010: 68). Hence, the mobility, traditional food and physical safety of Indigenous peoples in the Arctic are at risk. Indigenous institutions can raise awareness to the

specific vulnerability of Indigenous peoples in the Arctic to climate and environmental change. Furthermore, they can showcase Indigenous solutions on adaptation and mitigation at different policy levels to strengthen the acceptance of Indigenous knowledges and practices in the field of sustainable development.

The economic dimension shows strong intersections with the ecological one. Record ice retreats and the changing climate facilitate the exploitation of natural resources, the emergence of new shipping routes, increasing industrialised fishing and the establishment of (mass) tourism in the Arctic. Economic development in the Arctic changes at a great scale due to complex effects. These changes also influence the life of Indigenous peoples because of new labour possibilities, external labour migration to their communities and environmental damage (Heleniak, 2016). Rising industrial activity and migration to new urban centres further describe the trend of urbanisation in the Arctic (Kenny, 2017). The economic dimension also demonstrates interlinkages with the geopolitical dimension of change in the Arctic. In the region, unclear sea borders meet with increasing economic opportunities. Because of newly evolving economic possibilities, many actors became interested in Arctic issues. For instance, many states – Arctic and non-Arctic – have developed Arctic strategies, in which they define their priorities in the region. Two main events regarding the geopolitical significance of the Arctic exemplify the argument of global effects shaping the Arctic. The Russian flag planting beneath the North Pole in 2007 and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 have had far-reaching geopolitical consequences for the Arctic region in particular (Bergh & Klimenko, 2016). As Russia is one main Arctic player, its political actions could directly relate to the Arctic region. Many actors are increasingly interested in the Arctic and want to be part of decision-making processes, which can undermine the political voice and self-determination of Indigenous communities. As Indigenous peoples, some communities are already lacking in strong political representation and the free possibility to decide about their development based on their own systems due to, *inter alia*, long lasting effects of colonisation (Greaves, 2016; Kosko, 2013). Other Indigenous groups and communities, however, display strong political representation, which underlines the diversity in terms of political standing, resources and re-empowerment. The rising number of actors interested in the Arctic can challenge their already fragile (political) status even more (Wilson, 2020: 37). However, this awareness raising might also have positive effects for Indigenous peoples, because Indigenous' issues in the Arctic attract more international attention. Indigenous institutions can address these new economic opportunities and at the same time align them with traditional economic activities. Further, Indigenous institutions can utilise the increased attention for Arctic issues to mainstream Indigenous concerns and issues at different levels of governance, for instance against the background of competing interests of environmental protection vs. economic development.

Concerning transnational and regional cooperation, the Arctic displays increasing collaboration since the end of the Cold War, which also separated Indigenous peoples in the East and the West. Two prominent examples are the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Arctic Council. The BAEC was established in 1993 and represents Europe's largest area for interregional cooperation, including territories of northern Russia, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. The Arctic Council was founded in 1996 to foster circumpolar transnational cooperation in the areas of environment, biodiversity, ocean and Arctic peoples. In this intergovernmental forum, transnational Indigenous institutions are represented as Permanent Participants alongside states.

Being part of the Arctic Council, and negotiating and drafting declarations, strengthened the overall political voice of and unity between Arctic Indigenous peoples.¹⁰

With regard to the broader Indigenous rights' discourse, the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations General Assembly, 2008) by the General Assembly represents a significant momentum of the Indigenous rights movement. It represents over 25 years of negotiations and lobbying of Indigenous groups (Morgan, 2016: 1). The UNDRIP-process was also one of Indigenous political re-empowerment due to the shared experience of encounters with colonising powers and national governments (Coates & Holyroyd, 2014: 6). Therefore, UNDRIP became a relevant point of reference for the global Indigenous community in its fight for equal rights and self-determination in the nation-state context.¹¹ Overall, the declaration also played an important role in reinforcing the general negotiation position of Indigenous peoples in the Arctic at different policy levels (ibid; Rodon, 2014). Together with region-building processes in the Arctic and the regaining of self-determination, the achievements on the global level positively affected Arctic Indigenous peoples and empowered their political institutions. With UNDRIP, Indigenous people can now refer to an official declaration of the UN aiming at strengthening Indigenous rights globally.¹²

Furthermore, concepts of sustainable development and climate change action became part of global processes. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement are two central events of 2015 that symbolise a new era of international, national and regional initiatives on sustainable development and climate action. Since the Arctic is one of the most affected geographic areas by climate change, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement are of special interest to the region, too. The year 2015 has raised the general awareness of climate and environmental challenges all over the world and also in the Arctic, in particular due to its significance for the global climate (SDWG, 2017: 3). In addition, by focusing on Indigenous peoples, the SDGs provide a global framework for leaving no one behind and by that also an improved tool to work on Indigenous and minority issues. Especially due to the commitment made by the 2030 Agenda to reduce inequalities and marginalisation, Indigenous peoples' issues gained more political attention (United Nations, 2020b).¹³ These dynamics also impact Arctic Indigenous institutions and their governance, because they can use the *Leave No One Behind* (LNOB) paradigm by linking the global and the regional level to address Indigenous issues.

On the social level, Indigenous peoples are facing effects of globalisation, (post-) colonisation and modernisation that are impacting their traditional way of life, the sharing and transferring of culture, traditional knowledges and land skills, as well as their languages (Andrachuk & Pearce, 2010: 68). Colonisation and modernisation interfered with the transfer of knowledges, led to power asymmetries and undermined Indigenous agency. Additionally, Arctic Indigenous peoples are confronted with drastic changes in their everyday life, for instance, the transition from a (semi) nomadic lifestyle to permanent housing, new technologies such as snowmobiles, and resource development (ibid: 64). Another relevant trend on the social level is urbanisation in the Arctic, which created new urban centres, urban Indigenous identities and lifestyles (Kenny, 2017; Nyseth & Pedersen, 2014; Patrick & Budach, 2014). Concerning the field of health and well-being, in many Arctic regions Indigenous peoples cannot benefit from the same standard of health care compared to the majority populations (Rautio et al., 2014). Moreover, effects of global warming affect the

health and well-being of Arctic Indigenous peoples. For instance, the Inuit have a relatively high incidence of lung cancer due to, *inter alia*, high concentrations of toxic substances coming from the transmission of black carbon, trans-boundary pollutants and persistent organic pollutants to the Arctic (ibid: 306f.; Koivurova et al., 2012: 364). Another social phenomenon are the high rates of suicide among young Inuit, e.g. in the territory of Nunavut, Canada (Rautio et al., 2014: 309f.). The health and social well-being of Indigenous people stand for complex chains of effects in the area of economic, social, cultural, political and environmental factors (ibid: 310), which reinforce the interwoven relations between the different dimensions of transformative changes. Indigenous institutions can support addressing these interrelations through a deeper understanding of the regional context and Indigenous issues framed in a broader setting.

Politically, devolution and decentralisation processes and those of political re-empowerment in recent decades have broadened the participatory power of Indigenous people in the Arctic (Poelzer & Wilson, 2014; Wilson, 2019). Many communities regained self-governance structures, autonomy and/or self-determination about key aspects of their life. In addition, they negotiated land settlement agreements that are managing land use and Indigenous ownership (Andrachuk & Pearce, 2010: 64). These processes are part of a greater region-building process that are about (re)strengthening an Indigenous identity. By stressing the east-west axis of an Arctic identity, which used to be challenged by the north-south axis established through colonisation and dynamics of nation-states (Rodon, 2014: 18), Arctic Indigenous people are referring to a circumpolar/transnational space.¹⁴ On the regional level, the establishment of the Saami Council in 1956 and the ICC in 1977 are relevant in terms of region-building processes and transnational institutions (ibid). The Saami Council and the ICC are not only non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but they refer to a transnational identity. Castree (2004: 156) defines this element of Indigeneity as “both a reaction to and an embrace of translocal connectivity.” These processes of collective political identity and institutional construction can be framed as a relocation of sovereignty in the Arctic context (Shadian, 2010). Indigenous institutions can build upon these region-building processes and integrate procedures and norms into their organisation that stress an Indigenous identity. Hence, they can further support self-determination of Indigenous communities.

The different dimensions of transformative changes in the Arctic display certain common features and interdependencies. Climate change as well as (post-) colonial dynamics seem to be a trigger or at least an accelerator of many of those changes (Ford et al., 2017; Greaves, 2016; Laruelle, 2019). The effects on Arctic Indigenous peoples and their institutions are complex and determine their vulnerability/adaptive capacity. As further elaborated in the next section, transnational political Indigenous institutions play a relevant role for governing in times of transformative changes and developing policy approaches towards sustainable development.

Indigenous institutions

To further elaborate the framework, a definition of the concept of Indigenous institutions is needed. In order to approach such a definition, it is necessary to firstly look at the term of governance as institutions are embedded in a greater framework of actors, logics and systems. Governance is described as the “entirety of regulations – that is, the processes by which norms, rules and programs are monitored, enforced and adapted, as well as the structures in which they work [to solve] a specific problem or [to provide] a common good” (Zürn, 2010: 80). Keohane

(1988: 383) describes institutions as “related complexes of rules and norms, identifiable in space and time.” By adding the transnational element, which plays a certain role in the Arctic framing, different types of actors (besides states) as well as different types of linkages between actors, across diverse national contexts become visible. Transnational institutions stand for common rules of action, shared cognitive frameworks and normative commitments (Morgan, 2005).

An Indigenous institution is established and led by Indigenous people who include Indigenous principles, norms, rules and procedures into their organisation, work and programmes. These institutions can be active in different areas of life, such as in the political, social, economic and/or ecologic sphere, as well as at different policy levels: local, regional, (trans) national and/or international. This paper aims at gaining new insights into the applicability of the developed framework by showcasing two transnational political institutions, the ICC and the Saami Council, and their activities framed as a governance measures to react to transformative changes. Technically, they are non-governmental organisations, which can be “analysed as part of civil society, yet many of them take on governance functions” (Blaser et al., 2004: 15). Moreover, their administrative structures can be linked to state structures as they depend on resources and in some cases also legal legitimacy (ibid).

Following the sustainable development discourse on the role of political institutions (Sachs et al, 2018), this paper stresses their key relevance for governing sustainable development. Although Indigenous peoples are used to adapt to changing circumstances and developed knowledge systems to respond to emerging challenges (Magni, 2017), the new quality, intensity and rapidity of changes in the Arctic today have widely influenced traditional adaptive capacities. The role of transnational political Indigenous institutions is thus noteworthy in this context, because they act as focal points through negotiating at different policy levels, governing changes and by that, linking the global and regional level. By focusing on transnational political Indigenous institutions at different governance levels, those institutions are framed as non-state actors “whose activities and identities often straddle and obfuscate national boundaries and public and private sphere” (Parente, 2013: 451). Hence, new forms of governance besides the traditional governance of states can be analysed.

Further, global arrangements are contextual factors influencing transnational political Indigenous institutions. Moreover, the global sustainable development discourse forms a decisive meta discourse for the Arctic region and the governance of change. In general, sustainable development studies consider inclusive institutions as key for achieving global commons, which is concretely addressed by SDG 10 (*Reduced Inequalities*) and SDG 16 (*Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*). In addition, sustainable transformation literature stresses the overall relevance of inclusive governance for the achievement of all other SDGs and global common goods (Messner & Scholz, 2018; TWI 2050, 2018: 6). More specifically, inclusive governance is considered as a condition to achieve the universal ambition of sustainable development to LNOB. The LNOB-paradigm is particularly relevant in the context of Indigenous peoples, because it provides a (political) framework that considers notably marginalised, vulnerable groups (United Nations, 2020b). Overall, SDG 10 and SDG 16 are comprehended as enablers for achieving all other SDGs (Sachs, 2015). Thus, inclusive institutions are framed as a “precondition and aligning vision of local, national, and global common welfare” (Sachs et al., 2018: 8).

To define inclusive governance in more detail, the shift of discourse in international development studies from *good* to *inclusive* governance has to be taken into account. The concept of good governance can be framed as a high-quality process (Taylor, 2016: 2). It defines the quality of (political) decision-making and implementation that contains three determinants: (1) formal rules (laws, regulations, code of conduct, performance standards), (2) societal and organisational norms (social capital); and (3) institutional capacity (detection and anticipation of problems, mobilisation of knowledge, articulation of goals, making timely and coherent decisions) (ibid: 6ff.; Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014). Since political institutions are embedded in a broader (national, regional, international) institutional context, the theoretical understanding of good governance is more oriented towards outputs and processes rather than outcomes. While *good* governance is associated with terms such as accountability, transparency, efficiency, government responsiveness and effectiveness, *inclusive* governance also considers the distribution of policy outcomes (Leininger et al., 2018: 108). Inclusive institutions are thus supposed to be able to redistribute public goods and strengthen equality. Moreover, this distribution of political power is framed as a driver for institution-building and, ultimately for the distribution of policy outcomes (cf. World Bank, 2017). Since Indigenous institutions represent Indigenous peoples and lobby for their rights, they take an important role in the broader inclusive governance context.

By further following the sustainable development discourse on the role of inclusive institutions, the framework defines inclusive institutions as key to govern in times of transformative changes in the Arctic. In accordance with the principles of inclusive governance, institutions can distribute policy outcomes more equitably. This paper assumes that transnational political Indigenous institutions particularly play a key role for achieving global commons because they link the global and regional level of Arctic (Indigenous) governance and by that, complementing non-Indigenous governance structures. Additionally, political identity, Indigenous practices and knowledge systems are supposed to influence Indigenous institutions, their structure, logics and governance. Thus, besides the concept of inclusive governance, the framework on the governance of Indigenous institutions in the Arctic is complemented by elements of political identity and Indigenous knowledges.

The proposed framework aims at defining criteria for the analysis of transnational political Indigenous institutions and their governance in times of transformative changes. As institutional logics are “socially constructed, [and follow] historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs” (Thornton et al., 2012: 51), the analysis of Indigenous institutions and their governance seem relevant as they might differ to non-Indigenous forms of governance and by that, could allow mutual learning. Different institutional logics can lead to varying outputs as well as include and shape alternative paths to development (Calvo & Syrett, 2020). In the Indigenous context, customary systems of governance and traditional knowledges form the basis for sustainable production, consumption practices and resource conservation and management (Magni, 2017: 440). Thus, an analysis of transnational political Indigenous institutions should address questions on the organisation (formal rules, societal and organisational norms, institutional capacity, distribution of outcomes), the sharing and coproduction of knowledge (concepts of reciprocity and collectivity), their involvement in international fora (e.g. Arctic Council and United Nations Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC) as well as their creation and implementation of sustainable development measures. The framework aims at acting as a theoretical basis for in-depth analyses and the generating of hypotheses on the (inter)relation

between transformative changes (*independent variable*) and the governance of transnational Indigenous institutions (*dependent variable*).

By referring to the Arctic as a circumpolar region, transnational Indigenous institutions in the Arctic build upon transnational political identities. Thus, the framework proposes a strong focus on transnational, identical elements. Sharing experiences and the understanding of challenges is seen as an important basis for transnational cooperation (Wehrmann, 2020: 22). In the case of Indigenous peoples in the Arctic, they also share processes of re-empowerment and political identity building. The role of political empowerment is “to support poor and marginalised people to build resources, assets and capabilities they need to exercise greater choice and control over their own development, and to hold decision-makers in account” (Combaz & McLoughlin, 2014: 1). These elements of political empowerment particularly refer to Indigenous peoples as one of the most vulnerable peoples. Referring to Indigenous peoples in the Arctic, processes of re-empowerment and political identity building are interwoven as political identity building is an inherent part of political empowerment. Moreover, “identity is constructed and performed through the different discourse an individual relates to” (Nyseth & Pedersen, 2014: 132) and identity and group identities are interdependent (Kosko, 2013: 294). Following Tilly (2003: 608), one owns a political identity if an individual or a group considers oneself a political actor. Thus, political identities also express social arrangements. Nyseth and Pedersen (2014: 132) further frame Indigenous institutions as a “permanent, materialized and visualized expression” of Indigeneity and Indigenous identity. The structural dimension of these institutions specifically creates new “frames of reference for [...] identity construction” (ibid).¹⁵ With regard to transnational Indigenous institutions, political identities have led to the establishment of political institutions and are considered to shape them constantly. Thus, the framework addresses elements of political identity to further contextualise Indigenous institutions in the Arctic and their governance in times of transformative changes.

In the wider context of political identities and re-empowerment of Indigenous peoples, the concepts of self-determination and self-government are relevant, too. The term of self-determination has to be understood against the backdrop of development. Framed as a process of social and economic change (Kosko, 2013: 293f.), development can lead to freedom or vulnerability depending on how an individual or a group can control their development. Self-determination ensures participation and substantive freedom to (re)gain this control and reduce vulnerabilities. Ensuing from this, self-government is described as “the ability of a people to make decisions on its own affairs without the interference or direction of external forces” (Heininen & Southcott, 2010: 16). Indigenous peoples have lacked and are often still lacking this ability due to colonial dynamics and discriminating legislation, which resulted in higher vulnerabilities (Kosko, 2013: 294). The shared experiences of Indigenous peoples in the Arctic voiced by similar histories of (internal) colonisation and post-colonisation led to the establishment of political Indigenous institutions. These institutions can support overcoming these lacks by reframing the dominant discourse of development and globalisation (Tom et al., 2019: 14). Thus, a strong relation between political identity and Indigenous institutions is identified, which is why elements of political identity are included into the framework.

Due to effects of colonialism, Indigenous knowledges¹⁶ and languages were under pressure and threatened intergenerational transmission/sharing of knowledge. Indigenous, traditional or local

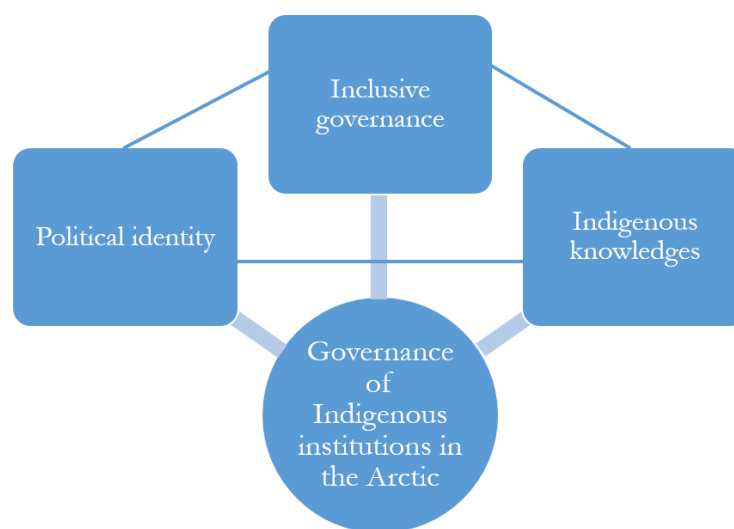
“knowledge and know-how [are] [...] unique to a given society and culture” (Magni, 2017: 438) inseparable from the knowledge holders and the land including the physical, biological and spiritual dimension (McGregor, 2004: 78). Indigenous knowledges stand for a way of life rather than only the knowledge of how to live, hence it is not only about understanding but about practising (ibid: 82). Concerning the role of Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous peoples are experiencing today that their knowledge systems and competences are valued to a different extent than before (Gearheard et al., 2010; UNESCO, 2017). For instance, the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges plays a more important role in studies on transformations towards sustainability (Pearce et al., 2013; Makate, 2019; Briggs, 2005; Wohling, 2009; Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015). This is also reflected in a rising awareness in research on adaptation and mitigation as well as on sustainable ways of living and use of resources of an importance about connecting scientific, Indigenous, local and traditional knowledge systems.^{17,18} This new relevance ascribed to Indigenous knowledges can have empowering qualities (Briggs, 2005: 107; Magni, 2017), which draws a link between Indigenous knowledges and political identity and their influence on Indigenous institutions. However, this awareness is not always or automatically transferred to the inclusion of Indigenous stakeholders into policy and decision-making (Magni, 2017: 442f).

As requirements for a methodology to integrate Indigenous knowledges, Lindblad et al. (2016) name legitimacy, credibility and usefulness, full and active participation, reciprocity and free, prior informed consent (FPIC). In the Arctic context, Indigenous knowledge holders share knowledges and values in relation to their environment as well as challenges in the recognition of their knowledge (ibid: 114). Indigenous knowledges are based on observations and experiences as many communities are continuously observing the state of their environment, biodiversity and weather conditions (ibid: 116). Additionally, Indigenous peoples practised a long-term/sustainable use of biological resources, which again strengthen the link between sustainability and Indigeneity (Tom et al., 2019: 2; UNGA, 2008). This link puts Indigenous knowledges in a key position for achieving sustainable development. The sustainable development paradigm does not only address Indigenous peoples but also calls for their input. Thus, the framework integrates Indigenous knowledges due to its relevance for Indigenous institutions and their governance in times of transformative change. These knowledge systems and practices are supposed to influence how Indigenous institutions are organised, shaped and governed as well as their policy measures.

Following sustainable development studies, the developed framework in this paper aims at contextualising Indigenous institutions and their governance in times of transformative changes. In order to analyse transnational political Indigenous institutions and their governance in the different dimensions of transformative changes as well as to generate hypotheses about interrelationships, the concepts of inclusive governance, political identity and Indigenous knowledges will be considered on the basis of the theoretical framework (see figure 2). To implement policies towards sustainable development inclusively, institutions need to distribute policy outcomes equitably. Additionally, the framework stresses the role of political identity for the establishment, organisation, shifts and policy outcomes of Indigenous institutions. Those institutions create structures and points of reference for constructing and shaping political identities. For analysing Indigenous institutions, the framework further proposes to include Indigenous practices and knowledges to address alternative ways to development and the link between Indigeneity and sustainability. Thus, this approach can also contribute to the broader

discourse of sustainable development studies by highlighting the relation of Indigeneity and sustainability.

Figure 2: Criteria for the analysis of the governance of Indigenous institutions in the Arctic



Source: Author

Applicability

The developed framework of transformative changes and Indigenous governance is exemplarily applied to the ICC and the Saami Council to illustrate its applicability. Thus, the *independent variable* (transformative changes) and the *dependent* (governance of Indigenous institutions) are outlined. The governance of Indigenous institutions in times of transformative changes shall be sketched out along the different elements of the framework, *inclusive governance*, *political identity* and *Indigenous knowledges*.

Transformative changes in the Arctic, here defined as the *independent variable*, consists of different, interwoven dimensions, the ecological, economic, geopolitical, social and political. These different dimensions impact institutions, their establishment, activities and evolution in the region (see figure 1). They also shape the circumstances of the work of Indigenous institutions at different levels of governance. For instance, climate and environmental change strongly influence their policy approaches and overall priorities of their activities. As transformative changes form a dynamic environment for institutions, which are coined by long term processes that are not easily depictable, an analysis could identify events/moments where changes become visible – framed as critical junctures. Thus, the policies of institutions could be specified and analysed along the elements of the developed framework (see figure 1 & 2). These in-depth analyses should acquire new insights into the governance of Indigenous institutions (*dependent variable*) in times of transformative changes (*independent variable*).

The *dependent variable*, the governance of Indigenous institutions, shall be exemplarily classified by outlining two transnational political institutions, the ICC and the Saami Council. The ICC was established in 1977 and comprises different sub-institutions, namely ICC Alaska, ICC Canada, ICC Greenland and ICC Chukotka (Russia). It represents an Indigenous population of 180,000 people. Its first and principal goals are to strengthen unity among Inuit, promote Inuit rights at the

international level and seek full and active participation of the developments in Inuit homelands. The Saami Council was already established in 1956 and represents 50,000 to 80,000 Indigenous peoples in Finland, Russia, Norway and Sweden. As with the ICC, the Saami Council's primary aim is to promote Saami rights and interests. At the same time, the Council wants to attain recognition for the Saami as a nation. The work of the Saami Council is guided by the decisions and strategies developed by the Saami Conference, which is the highest body of the Saami Council and arranged every four years.

Applying the framework to the ICC and the Saami Council seems fruitful, because they are both engaged on different governance levels, for instance, in international negotiations and fora promoting Indigenous rights and interests at the Arctic Council as Permanent Participants (two out of six Permanent Participants) and ECOSOC holding Consultative Status II at the United Nations. They developed a "complex and sophisticated set of governance bodies" (Wilson, 2020: 29) and took over leadership roles in the Arctic governance system (ibid: 27). The ICC and the Saami Council are *transnational political institutions* that represent transnational Indigenous peoples in different nation-states resulting in varying circumstances, resources, rights and capacities. Those different political realities shaped by the nation-states also influence Indigenous governance. For instance, different self-government arrangements are in place, such as comprehensive land claims, self-government agreements, public governments or even Indigenous autonomy like in Greenland. These institutions are representing two different sub-regions in the Arctic with a comparable but still different vulnerability to transformative changes influencing their governance. Moreover, the institutions are both considered as NGOs, which represents a different category in the governance system beyond states. The two organisations also work together on an institutional level and support initiatives from one another, which was, for instance, important in the context of drafting UNDRIP (Plaut, 2012: 198ff.).

An analysis of the Saami Council and the ICC is further considered to be relevant because their "ultimate vision of self-determination and exercising self-government is similar" (Kuokkanen, 2019: 9). This right to self-determination includes the right to live as Indigenous peoples with their own institutions. Moreover, the creation and exercise of these formal institutions following elements of *inclusive governance* demonstrate certain similarities such as strategies of adaptation, processes of cooperation and collaboration as well as the incorporation of *Indigenous knowledges* (Plaut, 2012: 193ff.). Both institutions are referring to a transnational *political identity* by initiating processes of collective political identity and institutions construction, which can be considered as a relocation of sovereignty (Shadian, 2010). By exemplarily looking at two Indigenous institutions in the Arctic, the elements of the developed framework can be identified as highly relevant (see figure 2). *Inclusive governance*, *Indigenous knowledges* and *political identity* play a significant role for the establishment, development and governance of these institutions.

Prospective in-depth analyses should include strategies, policy papers, and the activities at international fora as well as conduct qualitative interviews with representatives of the institutions to gain new insights into Indigenous governance in times of transformative changes. The analyses could be further strengthened by collecting quantitative data through surveys and by additionally integrating relevant secondary data. Hence, different types of (inter)relation between the *independent* and *dependent variable* could be analysed, which allows conclusions on how Indigenous institutions govern in times of transformative changes (see figure 1 & 2).

Conclusion

The developed elements propose a framework for the analysis of Indigenous institutions in the Arctic and their governance in times of transformative change. The framework about this (inter)relation between transformative changes and the governance of Indigenous institutions needs to address in particular concepts of *inclusive governance*, *political identity* and *Indigenous knowledges*. By applying this framework as a theoretical basis to other cases or regions, existing theoretical and empirical gaps can be addressed by deriving hypotheses on policy approaches regarding sustainable development issued by Indigenous institutions in transforming regions. These analyses want to find out more about the governance of Indigenous institutions in times of transformative change with a specific focus on inclusive governance, political identity and Indigenous knowledges. Nevertheless, the framework stresses the great diversity of Indigenous political institutions and the local/regional context they are embedded in, which requires contextualisation. Through focusing on transnational political Indigenous institutions framed as non-state actors, the framework addresses the broadening of the Arctic governance paradigm beyond states. Moreover, the concept of transnationality enables linking the regional with the global level of governance, which is considered to be key for achieving sustainable development.

Transformative changes in the Arctic impact Indigenous institutions and their governance as these changes determine the circumstances in which they operate (see figure 1 & 2). After applying the framework exemplarily to the ICC and the Saami Council, the first implementation displayed that the inclusion of *Indigenous knowledges* plays a significant role for their governance. Moreover, by referring to a transnational, *political identity* and uniting Indigenous communities of the Arctic, the first transfer showed that for the ICC and the Saami Council this concept is highly relevant as well. *Inclusive governance* plays a significant role for the organisation and work of these institutions, too, as it is supposed to be a guiding principle.

Through allowing an analysis focusing on Indigenous policy approaches towards sustainable development, the framework also contributes to broadening our understandings of sustainable development. Hence, the framework can also be applied and adapted to other contexts and regions, where Indigenous peoples have developed Indigenous institutions.¹⁹ This underlines the necessity to strengthen the nexus of Indigeneity and sustainable development in current discourses on sustainable development by analysing Indigenous institutions in transforming areas and their policy approaches framed as contributions to achieve global commons.

Notes

1. Please note, that I am a non-Indigenous researcher who has been socialised in a European context. Therefore, I can only take an outsider's perspective on Indigenous governance.
2. The development paradigm is changing through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because of its understanding of sustainable development as a universal challenge for all countries, although the Agenda still differentiates between 'developed' and 'developing' countries (Ziai, 2016: 197f.). Concerning development studies, Wehrmann (2020: 22) stresses that also looking north can support this field of study.
3. Cf. also the Arctic Human Development Report (Larsen & Fondahl, 2014).
4. Following the definition of José Martínez Cobo of 1986, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities "on an individual basis, an indigenous person is one who belongs to these indigenous populations through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one its members (acceptance by the group). Martínez Cobo embedded the idea of empowerment into this definition by highlighting the sovereign right and power to decide (Magni, 2017: 438). The term Indigenous needs to be contextualised within the colonial and post-colonial setting.
5. Indigenous peoples used to live in the Arctic for over a thousand years (cf. Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland, 2018). Today, Indigenous Peoples present a minority of the population in the region, although there are great differences in the various states. In Canada, Indigenous peoples represent about 50 per cent of the Arctic population and in Greenland they form the majority on the island. In the whole Arctic, Indigenous peoples include over 40 different ethnic groups, amongst others, Saami people, Inuit, and Chukchi (ibid).
6. Laruelle (2019: 149) describes colonialism as "an often-understudied aspect of Arctic development today".
7. Indigenous peoples are recognised "to be the most vulnerable and at risk human communities in the world" (Morgan, 2016: 1). Moreover, they "live in the most vulnerable ecosystems" (Magni, 2017: 441). Lifestyles of Indigenous peoples and other non-dominant communities are under threat in the Global South and Global North (Tom et al., 2019). In the Arctic context, vulnerabilities differ amongst Indigenous peoples.
8. This article does not want to strengthen a hierarchical relation or duality between non-Indigenous and Indigenous approaches. However, it acknowledges power asymmetries that led to dominant and non-dominant discourses. Indigenous knowledges are not 'only' contributing to sustainable development, but are "inherently sustainable" (McGregor, 2004: 79).
9. Indigenous peoples and their institutions are understood as active, not passive agents of change acknowledging their knowledges in sustainable practices, land use, resource management, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (Magni, 2017: 438).
10. Sustainable development and environmental policies are at the core of the Arctic Council since its establishment.
11. The declaration affirms that "indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such" (UNGA, 2008: 1). Self-determination is framed as a human right.

12. The non-binding declaration was approved although countries with settler history, Canada, the U.S., Australia and New Zealand protested and voted against UNDRIP. Since 2016 however, Canada belongs to the full supporters of the declaration.
13. The 2030 Agenda directly “refers to indigenous peoples 6 times, three times in the political declaration; two in the targets under Goal 2 on Zero Hunger (target 2.3) and Goal 4 on education (target 4.5) – and one in the section on follow up and review that calls for indigenous peoples’ participation” (United Nations, 2020a).
14. The capitals and economic centres of the Arctic states are located in the South of the nation-states.
15. For the urban context in the Arctic, Nyseth and Pedersen (2014) analyse Saami identities in three cities in northern Scandinavia and found out that institutions at the local level play a key role for defining an urban identity appreciating Saami culture and building social networks. Social networks in Arctic cities in turn shape “knowledge flows, and also influence local identity” (Zamyatina, 2013: 443).
16. There is an ongoing debate on how to name/frame Indigenous knowledge(s). Tom et al. (2019) are speaking of ‘knowledges’ in order to address the differences in Indigenous systems and cultures. Wohling (2009: 3) lists various possible terms such as “Aboriginal science, ethnoscience, traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous ecological knowledge, indigenous knowledge systems, folk ecology, ethnoecology, indigenous intellectual and cultural property, cultural knowledge, and local knowledge”. Many articles prefer the term “local knowledge” since it implies the existing issue of scale and transferability (ibid: 5 & Briggs, 2005: 105). Thus, it could express the localness, boundedness and fine-scale focus of local knowledge systems (cf. UNESCO, 2017). Berkes (1993) defines traditional ecological knowledge as “[a] cumulative body of knowledge, practice and beliefs, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment.”
17. Many authors criticise the binary tension between Western science and Indigenous knowledge systems (Escobar, 1995; Briggs, 2005 & Gupta, 1998). They emphasise that the discourse on Indigenous knowledges is shaped by post-colonial frameworks, which needs particular attention in terms of power relations as well as social and cultural contextualisation (McGregor, 2004).
18. *Inter alia* pushed forward by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019). In Aichi Target 18 in the Convention on Biodiversity, it is formulated that by 2020, traditional knowledges should be integrated in the implementation of the convention (cf. Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015). Also, the Brundtland Report (1987) already acknowledged Indigenous knowledges in the context of sustainable development.
19. Studies from Indigenous communities in Ecuador for instance show that Indigenous practices produce new institutional forms, which can co-exist, accommodate or being in conflict with non-Indigenous forms, and follow alternative paths to development, e.g. the *Buen Vivir* paradigm (Calvo & Syrett, 2020: 272). This paradigm was developed in reaction of Latin and Central American Indigenous communities to negative impacts of development. It stands for a “set of values and norms that is shared by different indigenous communities worldwide and represents a new conceptualisation of development” by highlighting values such as community and communitarianism, human-nature-universe relationship, equality and complementarity (Magni, 2017: 438f.).

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