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AGORA: “Youth Visions on Arctic Sustainability”

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Global climate change has launched intense speculation on Arctic resources. As a result, the Arctic is experiencing a marked increase in human activity in a myriad of economic sectors from fossil fuel and mineral extraction to transport or tourism. Although this situation has been accompanied by an increase in economic prosperity, it also leads to the emergence of significant environmental and social challenges. In the push for the green transition, decisions about economic development are usually made through utilitarian ethical principles. However, while sustainable development is a popular buzzword for policy, significant practice and regulatory gaps remain in the deployment of Arctic economic activities¹ which have resulted in development that is unsustainable. In order to chart a pathway towards a genuinely sustainable Arctic development, questions such as the plural perspectives and values of Arctic stakeholders, issues of justice, or the respect and maintenance of traditional livelihoods and Indigenous rights must be taken into account.

These challenges have been at the heart of the H2020 research project “JUSTNORTH Toward Just, Ethical and Sustainable Arctic Economies, Environments and Societies”.² It is within the context of one of JUSTNORTH’s key events that the following articles were born.³ The present collection brings together Early Stage Researchers (PhD candidates or recent doctors) from a variety of nationalities and located in multiple disciplines (albeit with a predominant orientation towards International Relations). As intergenerational justice is a key issue in the future of the Arctic and of sustainable development, it is our explicit intention to give voice to the perspectives of young scholars and Arctic stakeholders. In the following pages, seven of them will address issues of sustainability under the light of energy extraction, Arctic geopolitics, Indigenous rights, environmental governance, youth participation, or maritime activities.

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² The early stage researchers event entitled “Youth Visions on Arctic Sustainability” was held on Wednesday 14th June 2023 as part of the overall JUSTNORTH General Assembly (14-16 June 2023), hosted by the Universidad Complutense of Madrid (UCM) and organized by JUSTNORTH Work Package 6 “Legal and Regulatory Pathways”, led by UCM Professor Elena Conde and composed by UCM researchers Belén Requena and Valentín Clavé-Mercier.

