

How young people would like to shape the Arctic's future and what is the policymakers' answer.

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Abstract: Climate change impacts are of great concern to the younger generations around the world. Different global youth movements have highlighted the needs and desires of young people for an active role in decision-making for future climate resilience processes. Nonetheless, the engagement of youth in climate action plans is often marginal without any concrete support and resources.¹ This is particularly visible in the Arctic, one of the main climate change hotspots, where young people have begun to have an increasingly influential role in political decisions. This paper aims to highlight the importance of youth participation in policy-making discussions and the different means by which policymakers can support and foment this, nowadays lacking, inclusion. The study focuses on the main formal documents written by the younger generation and their role in political decision-making.

Keywords: youth Arctic climate change policy-making.

(A) INTRODUCTION

The Arctic is a complex geo-political region with nearly four million inhabitants distributed over 30 million square kilometers spanning three continents and eight States. Additionally, the Arctic is home to over 40 different ethnic groups, representing 10 percent of the total Arctic population.² With increasing climate change impacts, Arctic governance and Indigenous engagement in the “political life of the nation states” have become international issues.³ On one hand, the Arctic ecosystem is fundamental to the balance of all other ecosystems, both from a climatic and scientific point of view. On the other hand, the rights of Indigenous people and safeguarding their traditions are fundamental to the crystallization and respect of international law.⁴

This work focuses on young people's perspectives on the future of the Arctic emphasizing the importance of both its ecosystem and the rights of Indigenous people. In doing so, it advocates for a critical reading of the current decision-making processes which often overlook the younger generation's points of view. Therefore, this work sheds light on the perspectives of today's younger generations and future leaders, discussing

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¹ United Nations Development Programme. ‘Elevating Meaningful Youth Engagement for Climate Action. March 2022 text available electronically at <<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-05/UN-DP-Elevating-Meaningful-Youth-Engagement-for-Climate-Action-2.pdf>>

² B.B. Michealsen *Signs of Civilisation: How punctuation changed history* (Sceptre Press, Tromsø 2022)

³ V N Snetkov et al (2020) “The Rights of Indigenous People of the Arctic and Their Implementation Challenges” IOP Conference Series: Earth Environmental Science [doi:10.1088/1755-1315/539/1/012184]

⁴ Arctic Centre. Arctic Indigenous People text available electronically at <<https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-People>>, accessed 12 September 2023

the need for their inclusion in current decision-making for a sustainable and resilient future.

(B) YOUTH VISIONS TO IMPROVE THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE ARCTIC

The visions for the Arctic proposed by the younger Arctic generations have been analyzed in some of the main and most recent policy papers. Nonetheless, climate change impacts in the Arctic have a widespread effect on global climate.⁵

Among indigenous Arctic communities, the Yukon First Nation has always fought for involvement in Canada's national political dialogue. In 1982, they achieved equal rights to the rest of the population, including right to vote and participate in political life, through Section 35 Part II of the Canadian Constitution Act.⁶ First Nations are considered to be specially advanced due to the inclusion of several generations into their political institutions. Their main organ is the Assembly of First Nations, which is the successor of the National Indian Brotherhood. In line with the systems used in the past, the Assembly of First Nations is led by the elders and sages but with a profound commitment and space dedicated to the younger generation.⁷

In 2023, the Yukon First Nation's leadership published *The Reconnection Vision*, a document establishing a climate action plan led by people under 30 years old. It lays out a vision that focuses on health, housing, food, energy, and mining as well as economics, governance structures, and education. It highlights the need to recognize the crucial role of indigenous people in restoring ecosystem diversity and in ensuring a sustainable future in face of a climate crisis.⁸ The document asserts that the commitment of young members of all indigenous communities is fundamental in this transition, establishing a bridge between older and future generations and combining indigenous knowledge with modern technologies and practices.⁹ Moreover, the *Vision* criticizes policymakers for focusing on greenhouse emissions as the only climate change trigger. Instead, it highlights disconnection as a key social climate change cause. More specifically, it focuses on disconnection in all spheres from the social, ideological, political, cultural, and identity. Therefore, investments in electric vehicles and solar panels are not enough.

⁵ NATO Parliamentary Assembly, "What happens in the Arctic, does not stay in the Arctic" – climate change in the Arctic will have global consequences and cannot be ignored." <<https://www.nato-pa.int/news/what-happens-arctic-does-not-stay-arctic-climate-change-arctic-will-have-global-consequences>>

⁶ The Canadian Encyclopedia. *First Nations in Canada*. Published Online February 7, 2006 Last Edited April 5, 2023 text available electronically at <<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/first-nations>>; Rights of the Aboriginal People of Canada. Constitution Act 1982 (adopted and entered into force on 17 April 1982) text available electronically at <<https://caid.ca/ConstActor20208.pdf>> accessed on 11 September 2023

⁷ Commitment to the environment and the new generations that the First Nation had since their origins in fact in 1973, a delegation went to Ottawa to meet with then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau, holding a document called *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow*, which outlined their grievances and demands for a settlement.

⁸ Sachs, J.D.; Warner, A.D. *Natural resources and economic development: The curse of natural resources*. Eur. Econ. Rev. No 45/2001, 45, 827–838. [[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0014-2921\(01\)00125-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0014-2921(01)00125-8)]

⁹ The Narwal. *We're going to make things better: Yukon First Nations adopt youth climate plan*. 13 July 2023 text available electronically at <<https://thenarwhal.ca/yukon-youth-climate-plan/>>

In the face of climate change, indigenous young leaders highlight the need to implement social practices that weave together indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge and face not only the economics of climate but its profound social aspect.¹⁰

The union of indigenous and non-indigenous practices is also highlighted by the policy-oriented paper *An Arctic policy for young people*, published in 2020 by a government-appointed panel of Norwegian youth. This panel, composed of people between 16 to 28 years old from Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark, was tasked to provide advice and insight on a Norwegian white paper on Arctic issues and policy. This document does not only present the youth's position on different policy topics but also provides policy proposals that can be easily communicated to policymakers. The main addressed topic is the participation of young people in political life and policy-making processes, urging policymakers to facilitate a greater participation of young people: "Politicians must involve young people actively in debates, meetings and earlier stage of processes to have the chance to influence decisions [...] and ensure that proposals presented by youth movements do not just disappear under piles of papers in offices."¹¹ Additionally, the authors highlight the need for an active and influencing role of young people in the decision-making and political processes. The document proposes concrete actions such as mandatory inclusion of young people in the Government minister's visit to the North, resource allocation to youth councils for their participation in Arctic policy regional forums, or ensuring the involvement of youth in the preparation of future papers on the Arctic.¹² This approach would secure increased participation of youth, especially in issues of sustainability and climate change and the safeguarding of natural resources. As in the case of the *Reconnection Vision*, the position of the Norwegian youth strongly criticizes the policies proposed so far by the political deciders. However, both documents differ in that the Norwegian authors regard the social aspect of climate change as important but not essential, and instead highlight the reduction of mining and oil and gas production as the key challenge. Contrary to current policy that encourages the opening of local resources to international industries, the authors suggest a national and regional management of resources and the increment of renewable energies to counteract climate change and benefit local economies.¹³

Furthermore, the authors highlight additional major problems that affect the Arctic youth but that is also common to young generations in other parts of the world. International cooperation among younger generations, quality of life, education, and infrastructure are other topics that the authors want to emphasize as well as suggesting

¹⁰ "We believe quick fixes that respond to these symptoms that are rooted in consumption, such as electric vehicles and solar panels, don't go deep enough. We want to treat the root cause of climate change: disconnection." A passage based on *Reconnection Vision* (published 30 June 2023) text available electronically at <<https://reconnection.vision/#vision>> accessed 12 September 2023

¹¹ Members of the youth panel, *An Arctic policy for young people: The youth panel's input to the Government's white paper on the Arctic*, (published 2 November 2021) North Norway p. 10-11. text available electronically at <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/nord/arctic_young.pdf> last accessed 10 September 2023.

¹² *An Arctic policy for young people*, p. 10-15

¹³ *An Arctic policy for young people*, p. 6, 28; Innovation News Network, *Norwegian Mineral Strategy to ramp up production of materials crucial to global industry*, (published 7 September 2023) <<https://www.innovationnewsnetwork.com/norwegian-mineral-strategy-to-ramp-up-production-of-critical-materials/37070/>>

solutions to the political world. *An Arctic policy for young people* also includes extensively the point of view of the Sámi indigenous population. The document addresses the problems that the indigenous Norwegian population faces as their survival is at risk due to climate change effects and it proposes solutions.¹⁴ The authors highlight the role of Sámi life and culture in Norwegian identity and urge the authorities to empower this population and widespread their knowledge to revert past policies of Norwegianization.¹⁵ Finally, the authors also stress the importance of mental health, the inclusion of Sámi youth in the activities of other young Norwegians, and the provision of logistical and financial support to achieve this.¹⁶

Once we have analyzed the documents drafted by the young people organized at the national and local levels, this article moves on to the analysis of the initiatives promoted by international actors. The body most involved in youth Arctic projects is The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF). It is a working group of the Arctic Council with the mandate to address the conservation of Arctic biodiversity and to communicate its findings to Arctic governments and residents, promoting Arctic sustainability.¹⁷ CAFF has worked for many years with young generations to create a stable platform where youth present their work directly to Environment Ministers and other authorities. Additionally, the CAFF aims to connect Arctic youth with global international youth. In May 2021, the CAFF's Youth Advisory team and CAFF's Steering Committee published the *Arctic Youth Engagement Strategy: 2021-2026*.¹⁸ Unlike the first two documents analyzed which focus on analyzing the problems faced by the younger generations and try to provide guidelines to the authorities, this paper aims to inform

¹⁴ T. Koivurova et al., Legal Protection of Sami Traditional Livelihoods from the Adverse Impacts of Mining: A Comparison of the Level of Protection Enjoyed by Sami in Their Four Home States. *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* (2015) text available electronically at [http://dx.doi.org/10.17585/arctic.v6.76]

¹⁵ T. Falch, P. Selle & K. Stromsnes, The Sámi: 25 Years of Indigenous Authority in Norway, *Ethnopolitics* (2016), 15:1, p. 125-143, Text available electronically on [https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2015.101846]; *Fornorsking*, is the word to indicate the «Norwegianization». It was for a long time synonymous with a policy of assimilation of the Sami minority. This policy stretches from about 1850 up to roughly 1980. Both in Norway and Sweden the Samis appeared in this period as clearly distinct people who lived in certain places in such concentrated communities that their existence was considered a problem which called for a special national policy. For this reason the authorities for more than a century implemented policies to erase this culture, eliminating all traces of this culture from schools, from the registers of the registry and forcing the Sami population to move to urban centers. It officially ended in 1997 with the Statement on the Sami People's Day. Taken from H. Minde, Assimilation of the Sami – Implementation and Consequences *Journal of indigenous people rights* (2005) No. 3/2005, p. 6-13; Statement on the Sami People's Day (Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council Vienna, 6 February 2020) text available electronically on <https://www.norway.no/globalassets/2-world/osce/statements/2020-02-06-statement-on-the-sami-people-day.pdf> accessed August 2023

¹⁶ An Arctic policy for young people, p. 31.

¹⁷ The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic. It is composed by eight Arctic States that implement the policies in the region, six permanent participants represent the indigenous people of the Arctic, six working groups carry out the Council's activities and thirty-eight observers that share their expertise. Arctic Council official site see on <https://arctic-council.org> accessed 12 August 2023. E. Wilson, What is Benefit Sharing? Respecting Indigenous Rights and Addressing Inequities in Arctic Resource Projects *Mdpi Journal Resources* (2019), p. 8, 74; text available electronically at [https://doi:10.3390/resources8020074]

¹⁸ Arctic Council & Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, *Arctic Youth Engagement Strategy: 2021-2026*, (published May 2021) text available electronically at <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/81nob480-4dc8-41aa-a883-b657bf8fcff0/content> accessed August 2023.

the younger generation of the CAFF's commitment and position on these specific issues. While the key terms of the first two analyzed documents were "connection" for *Reconnection Vision* and "participation" for *An Arctic policy for young people*, this document focuses on "leadership".¹⁹ Throughout the text, the authors focus on the cultivation of the next generation of Arctic leaders and policymakers capable of participating in all the phases of decision-making and in the complex scenario of diplomacy.²⁰

(C) THE INSTITUTIONS' ATTEMPTS TO INCLUDE YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLITICAL DIALOGUE

This section investigates the progress made by institutions on youth issues and how policymakers are trying to create spaces for young people. Compared to the past when young generations were relegated to tasks of lesser importance and were often not given much space in international conferences and meetings, youth inclusion nowadays has been elevated both in quantity and quality. On one hand, more and more panels at international conferences are dedicated to or led directly by early-career scientists and practitioners. Additionally, international bodies have increased tools and resource allocation for young people. The European Union has historically been engaged in promoting youth mobility programs (e.g. Erasmus and Youth for Europe) and more recently tried to reshape its policies towards young people along to the results of their periodic feedback. One of the most profound criticisms raised by the younger generations towards the institutions is their lack of direct contact with young people. For instance, *An Arctic policy for young people* emphasized the role of "participation" and the lack of opportunities for youth involvement.

Direct interactive action with young people is one of the objectives of The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and The Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030.²¹ These documents highlight recent problems and difficulties for the younger generations, particularly the challenges regarding mental health, youth participation in decision-making, capacity building, and social inclusion. Both strategies emphasize the importance of the inclusion of young people in general. Additionally, the documents stress that "different needs, backgrounds, life situations, and interests should lead to different activities and policies".²² Even without a direct reference, this can be extended to indigenous people, particularly young indigenous generations. In this regard, on

¹⁹ Arctic Youth Engagement Strategy p. 4-6.

²⁰ Arctic Youth Engagement Strategy p. 8-10

²¹ The Council of Europe is not an EU body but it is the continent's leading human rights organization. It includes 46 member states, 27 of which are members of the European Union; EU Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union youth strategy 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01). (Resolution 12 December 2018) text available electronically at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL&from=EN> Last accessed on 1 September 2023 Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030. Engaging young people with the Council of Europe's values (CM/Res(2020)2). text available electronically at <https://rm.coe.int/background-document-youth-sector-strategy-2030-english/1680ao-bb33>

²² F. Hofmann-van de Poll, H. Williamson, *European Youth Strategies – A reflection and analysis* text available electronically at <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/101043895/European+Youth+Strategies+-+reflection+paper.pdf/ba2cb002-9705-620d-3ddb-bc4939c6d3b4>

the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on 9 August 2023, the High Representative on behalf of the European Union Josep Borrell dedicated a particular mention to indigenous youth as agents of change for self-determination using these words:

“Indigenous youth stand at the frontline of some of the most pressing crises humanity faces today, such as the loss of biodiversity and climate change. At the same time, they lack avenues for full participation in political and public life, to address challenges such as loss of territories, livelihoods, and resources, or to advocate for self-determination and defend their rights. The EU continues to promote the participation of indigenous leaders and indigenous human rights defenders, including indigenous youth, in development processes and key global decision-making fora. [...] This year the EU has for example invested €2.3 million in a new Arctic Youth Dialogues initiative to involve Arctic and European youth, including indigenous youth, in policy and decision-making, for a peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous future for the region, in line with the EU's Arctic Policy and the Youth Action Plan in EU external relations”.²³

The European Union strongly promoted the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007.²⁴ In the last years, the UN has been committed to following the guidelines of young people and including young indigenous people in its decision-making processes. The involvement of young people and their preparation as future leaders and politicians is crucial for the achievement of the long-term objectives set by the United Nations.²⁵ Nonetheless, there is no direct reference to youth in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, although the role of future generations can be directly linked to SDG4 “Quality education”, SDG5 “Gender equality”, SDG10 “Reduced inequalities” and SDG17 “Partnership for the goals”.²⁶ Another important initiative led by the UN, in particular by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, was the Global Indigenous Youth Summit on Climate Change, a web-based event held on 9 August 2023. It was a

²³ Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union (8 August 2023) text available electronically at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/08/08/international-day-of-the-world-s-indigenous-people-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/> Last accessed 14 September 2023

²⁴ UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (adopted 13 September 2007) text available electronically at https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeople/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf Last accessed 14 September 2023 ; Favel, B.; Coates, K.S., *Understanding UNDRIP: Choosing Action on Priorities over Sweeping Claims about UNDRIP*; *Macdonald-Laurier Institute, Aboriginal Canada and the Natural Resource Economy Series*, (2016) No. 10/2016;.

²⁵ Official page UN Youth, available electronically at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/> Last accessed 14 September 2023

²⁶ “Young people want to and already contribute to the resilience of their communities, proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress, and inspiring political change. They are also agents of change, mobilizing to advance the Sustainable Development Goals to improve the lives of people and the health of the planet. Youth-led organizations need to be encouraged and empowered to participate in translating the 2030 Agenda into local, national and regional policy. They play a significant role in the implementation, monitoring and review of the Agenda as well as in holding governments accountable. With political commitment and adequate resources, young people have the potential to make the most effective transformation of the world into a better place for all.” Available electronically at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/>

great opportunity for all the young generations of the participating indigenous people and for the other stakeholders to know better and more thoroughly the richness of these cultures and the value of the younger generations.²⁷

Finally, it is essential to highlight the role of young people and indigenous people in Norway's Chairship of the Arctic Council, 2023-2025. It defines Arctic youth and Indigenous People as cross-cutting priorities putting them at the forefront for the achievement of the objectives in the four identified pillars: "The Oceans", "Climate and Environment", "Sustainable economic Development" and "People in the North".²⁸

(C) CONCLUSIONS

This paper presented an overview of the current policy discussions which address the pressing need to include the younger generations in present and future policymaking. Recent times have witnessed the mobilization of younger generations with the aim to influence national and international policies. These movements have created a shift not only in current and future policy-making but also in international relations study programs which now are being pressed to include the increasing driving force of young people.

Climate change effects and impacts are a pressing challenge for all generations, one that requires profound structural changes by our societies to provide a voice for future generations who will be facing the most severe climate change effects. The current climate crisis is urging governments to shift away from the "traditional logic" and to instead include different voices in policymaking, particularly those of younger people who have the main responsibility of creating a resilient and sustainable future.

This crisis is pushing young people to have a more influential role, greater self-esteem, and awareness of their key role. However, there is still a strong asymmetry between the societies that give more space to young people and invest time and resources in the younger generation and their suggestions. The Arctic and Northern Europe, as we have seen in this article, can be models to draw inspiration from in terms of youth investment and influence in society. However, there are still many conservative states where the voice of young people is attenuated and investment in future generations is lacking. In the past, it might have seemed impossible that Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old girl with only a sign and her lunch could influence world leaders and after a few years become the leader of a movement that every Friday pours millions of young people into the squares of the world. In line with this political scenario in which the action of every human being counts, this paper has stressed the need for the inclusion of younger generations, and tomorrow's leaders, in the policymaking relative to our current climate crisis.

²⁷ Official page of the event see on (<https://event.unitar.org/full-catalog/global-indigenous-youth-summit-climate-change>)

²⁸ Norway's Chairship Arctic Council, 2023-2025 (available electronically at https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/034e4cd49a44684b5fb59568103702e/230322_ud_ac_programbrosjyre_en_web.pdf Last accessed on 14 September 2023.

