The Arctic as a boundary object: who negotiates Arctic governance?

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Cooperation in the Arctic has been exemplary for much of the last three decades. The establishment of the Arctic Council (AC), in particular, managed to bridge the political divide of the Cold War and brought together the United States and Russia along with six other Arctic countries.[1] A unique entity in global politics, the AC also includes Indigenous representation with the rare ability to effectively veto state projects.[2] These projects primarily focus on human development, environmental and climate science cooperation, as well as technical expertise around shipping and the prevention of pollution.[3] However, in addition to the AC, there exist a number of additional forums that create a resilient governance web for the region.[4] These ensure the continued existence of channels of communication as well as the continued inclusion of non-state actors in Arctic governance processes in times when the AC's work is halted or hampered. Arctic governance can thus be understood as collaborative boundary work, in which actors holding a multitude of perspectives use (polar) knowledges and spaces to negotiate the boundary object that is 'the Arctic'.[5]

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1 Jennifer Spence, 'Is a melting Arctic making the Arctic Council too cool? Exploring the limits to the effectiveness of a boundary organization', *Review of Policy Research* 34: 6, 2017, pp. 790–811, https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12257. The other states are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

2 The Indigenous groups are the Aleut International Association, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, the Gwich'in Council International, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples in the North and the Saami Council: Evan T. Bloom, 'Establishment of the Arctic Council', *American Journal of International Law* 93: 3, 1999, pp. 712–22, https://doi.org/10.2307/2555272; Timo Koivurova, 'Limits and possibilities of the Arctic Council in a rapidly changing scene of Arctic governance', *Polar Record* 46: 2, 2010, pp. 146–56, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247409008365; Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv, Dawn R. Bazely, Marina Goloviznina and Andrew J. Tanentzap, *Environmental and human security in the Arctic* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014).

3 Dag Avango, Annika E. Nilsson and Peder Roberts, 'Assessing Arctic futures: voices, resources and governance', *The Polar Journal* 3: 2, 2012, pp. 431–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2013.790197; Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall, *The Arctic: what everyone needs to know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Elana Wilson Rowe, *Arctic governance: power in cross-border relations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). The founding document of the Arctic Council explicitly excludes the discussion of military security questions.

4 Resilience refers to the general ability of social and environmental systems to adapt to pressures, reshape or reconfigure over time: James Brassett, Stuart Croft and Nick Vaughan-Williams, 'Introduction: an agenda for resilience research in politics and International Relations', *Politics* 33: 4, 2013, pp. 221–8, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12032.

5 Spence, 'Is a melting Arctic making the Arctic Council too cool?'; Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griese-

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Yet, the nodal points of this web of actors defining Arctic governance are changing.[6] While the Arctic Council continued to function even after Russia's annexation of Crimea, more recently it has been asserted that: 'The far north of the world has entered a zone of geopolitical uncertainty.'[7] This assertion is built on state-centric thinking about several shifting dynamics, including but not limited to, the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022, and including in particular the subsequent denunciation of the war by members of the AC that led it to scale down activities until 28 February 2024.[8] It also relates to the widely discussed potential of oil and gas resources in the region. Particularly in the context of China and its Belt and Road Initiative, this assertion pitches the remaining seven member states of the AC against an alliance of petrol-hungry states from Asia. This realist narrative arc is supported by some of the commentary issued by think tanks following the outbreak of the war.[9]

Since the Arctic Council's long-term stability and pre-war mode of operating cannot be taken for granted, a dispersion of governance and the disempowering of some groups are likely despite tentative communications about reconvening some of the AC's work three years into the war in Ukraine. Such a dispersion would have a particular impact in relation to Indigenous representatives, who have a specific position in the AC as Permanent Participants.[10] It raises the question of how, where and by whom Arctic governance is being negotiated. With a view to exploring opportunities for furthering cooperation in the region, this article holds that merely focusing on the AC neglects the presence of a myriad of actors in Arctic governance, in addition to states and their agency.[11]

While the Arctic Council may be the most prominent governance forum in the region, it is certainly not the only one. In fact, the Arctic comprises a web

mer, 'Institutional ecology, "translations" and boundary objects: amateurs and professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39', *Social Studies of Science* 19: 3, 1989, pp. 387–420, https://doi.org/10.1177/030631289019003001; Etienne Wenger, *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Star and Griesemer, and Wenger, respectively, argue that boundary work entails the demarcation of competencies or ownership against competing claims by others. The boundary object is formed through such demarcations.

[6] Hannes Hansen-Magnusson and Charlotte Gehrke, 'The web of Arctic governance fora? More than just the Council', in Elena Conde and Corine Wood-Donnelly, eds, *The Routledge handbook of Arctic governance* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

[7] 'The Guardian view on the Arctic: threatened by Putin's war', *Guardian*, 11 June 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/11/the-guardian-view-on-the-arctic-threatened-by-putins-war. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 2 Jan. 2025.)

[8] The Council has since reached a 'Consensus … for the gradual resumption of official Working Group meetings in virtual format, enabling project-level work to further advance': Arctic Council Secretariat, 'Arctic Council advances resumption of project-level work', Arctic Council, 28 Feb. 2024, https://arctic-council.org/news/arctic-council-advances-resumption-of-project-level-work.

[9] Scott G. Borgerson, 'Arctic meltdown: the economic and security implications of global warming', *Foreign Affairs* 87: 2, 2008, pp. 63–77, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/arctic-antarctic/2008-03-02/arctic-meltdown; Elizabeth Buchanan, 'The Ukraine war and the future of the Arctic', Royal United Services Institute, 18 March 2022, https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraine-war-and-future-arctic.

[10] Jessica M. Shadian, 'From states to polities: reconceptualizing sovereignty through Inuit governance', *European Journal of International Relations* 16: 3, 2010, pp. 485–510, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109346887; Oran R. Young, 'Is it time for a reset in Arctic governance?', *Sustainability* 11: 16, 2019, p. 4497, https://doi.org/10.3390/su11164497.

[11] Corine Wood-Donnelly, *Performing Arctic sovereignty: policy and visual narratives* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019); Ingrid A. Medby, 'Articulating state identity: "peopling" the Arctic state', *Political Geography*, vol. 62, 2018, pp. 116–25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.10.008.

of different forums, which all have different governance aspects at their heart and can potentially create resilience.[12] What is required, then, is an assessment of the different ways in which the thematic boundaries of the Arctic are being addressed and what the conditions for access are. For this purpose, the article begins by nudging the Arctic scholarship that draws on International Relations (IR) concepts such as those of the English School closer to recent developments in the field of critical constructivist and norms research. While maintaining a focus on actors involved in Arctic politics, the twofold advantage of the approach implemented in the article lies in seeing connections between governance fields and asking a different set of questions, especially with regard to norm-generating practices. This discussion is subsequently linked to the conceptual discussion of 'boundary work' and 'boundary objects'. Next, the article briefly outlines the methods employed to analyse the boundary work of Arctic actors. On the basis that 'boundary work' takes place simultaneously at multiple scales and across multiple locations, it would be beyond the scope of the article to address all possible dimensions. The article thus confines itself to regional-specific platforms, noting that important decisions affecting the region and its inhabitants can or should also be taken elsewhere, such as policy-making to mitigate climate change, which is anchored in the United Nations context. In its interpretation of results, the article consequently focuses on the boundary work across different Arctic forums—such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Nordic Council (NC) and the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR)—and the responsibilities associated with their members.

We argue that the Arctic itself is a boundary object, and it is the collaborative boundary work between a multitude of Arctic governance actors—drawing on different knowledges and platforms in informal and formal contexts—that makes Arctic governance resilient, even when the region's intergovernmental powerhouse, the Arctic Council, is incapacitated or disempowered. In this regard, the article stresses the *implications* of this type of boundary work—noting the facilitation of cooperation for which the region became known following the Cold War—and the *resilience* of governance formats created by and shaping collaborative boundary work. At the same time, however, the forums—apart from the AC—have yet to find ways for binding policy-making. Additionally, some of the boundary work concerning the polar region is competitive, as actors have to cater for a diverse range of interests and loyalties.

The Arctic as a boundary object: who makes normative orders?

While the notion of boundary objects originally relates to knowledge coordination and management, it is often conceptually tweaked to enable its use for analyses of global politics. It is particularly pertinent if we approach the boundary object and its conception of the role of knowledge from the constructivist position that

[12] Hansen-Magnusson and Gehrke, 'The web of Arctic governance fora?'; Merje Kuus, 'Between an archipelago and an ice floe', *Polar Record* 59: e10, 2023, pp. 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247422000316.

understanding the world through communicative practices cannot be separated from creating it,[13] including accounts of who holds responsibilities and how this adds up to a broader normative order.[14] As we demonstrate in this section, this process also applies to the Arctic.

In recent years, IR has begun to take an interest in Arctic affairs and governance because many empirical observations concerning the region contradict realist assumptions about global politics as an arena of continuous state struggles for survival or supremacy. Scholars developed the concept of 'Arctic exceptionalism'[15] from the 1990s as cooperation developed that included the supposed arch-enemies the United States and Russia (and the Soviet Union before it) and continued despite confrontations between the two in other forums, such as the UN, after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. It seemed as though the perennial motivations for state action, such as fear and greed,[16] largely kept out of Arctic politics, paving the way for interaction around the norms of cooperation and multilateralism.[17] Although the exceptionalism concept has been criticized for its reliance on a narrow understanding of security,[18] the notion that *Arctic* relations might contain lessons for *global* politics has resonated with researchers who have taken a closer look at how cooperation developed over time into complex regimes and interdependencies.[19]

With a view to making broader claims about normative orders,[20] IR scholars interested in Arctic politics have recently begun to draw on English School conceptual tools in particular.[21] Herein, international society is characterized as a fragile yet resilient entity that comprises sovereign states 'linked through various kinds of political practices and institutionalized structures' that reduce conflict

[13] Nicolas Greenwood Onuf, *Making sense, making worlds: constructivism in social theory and International Relations* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013).

[14] Rainer Forst, *Normativity and power: analyzing social orders of justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[15] Juha Käpylä and Harri Mikkola, *On Arctic exceptionalism: critical reflections in the light of the Arctic Sunrise case and the crisis in Ukraine* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015); Heather Exner-Pirot and Robert W. Murray, 'Regional order in the Arctic: negotiated exceptionalism', *Politik* 20: 3, 2017, pp. 47–64, https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v20i3.97153; Lassie Heininen, 'Special features of Arctic geopolitics—a potential asset for world politics', in Matthias Finger and Lassi Heininen, eds, *The global Arctic handbook* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019), pp. 215–34.

[16] Richard Ned Lebow, *A cultural theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[17] Exner-Pirot and Murray, 'Regional order in the Arctic'.

[18] Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv and Kara K. Hodgson, '"Arctic exceptionalism" or "comprehensive security"? Understanding security in the Arctic', in Lassi Heininen, Heather Exner-Pirot and Justin Barnes, eds, *Arctic yearbook 2019* (Akureyri: Arctic Portal, 2019), pp. 218–30.

[19] Michael Byers, 'Crises and international cooperation: an Arctic case study', *International Relations* 31: 4, 2017, pp. 375–402, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117817735680; Olav Schram Stokke, 'Geopolitics, governance and Arctic fisheries politics', in Elena Conde and Sara Iglesias Sánchez, eds, *Global challenges in the Arctic region: sovereignty, environment and geopolitical balance* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 170–95; Oran R. Young, 'Whither the Arctic? Conflict or cooperation in the circumpolar north', *Polar Record* 45: 1, 2009, pp. 73–82, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247408007791.

[20] Andrew Hurrell, *On global order: power, values, and the constitution of international society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[21] Sanna Kopra, 'The Arctic from the perspective of the English School of International Relations: a novel research agenda', *The Polar Journal* 12: 2, 2022, pp. 261–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2022.2137088; Exner-Pirot and Murray, 'Regional order in the Arctic'.

and enable cooperation.[22] These include international law, treaties and the norms of diplomatic interaction. The approach goes beyond the cost–benefit explanation of institution-building that is prevalent in liberal institutionalism by underscoring the normative responsibility of states with capacity for leadership. This foundational idea was expressed by Hedley Bull thus:

> Great powers … assert the right, and are accorded the right to play a part in determining issues that affect the peace and security of the international system as a whole. They accept the duty, and are thought by others to have the duty, of *modifying their policies in the light of the managerial responsibilities* they bear.[23]

In particular, those who believe that the rest of the world can learn something from Arctic exceptionalism should find the English School's concept of 'standard of civilization' useful, as it seeks to encapsulate the formal and informal normative ideals around which international society is said to operate.[24] The advantage of this concept stems from its combination of a system-level explanation for institution-building with an actor-focused explanation for action—restraint exercised by great power states in return for legitimate leadership. All of this is embedded in a pluralist methodology,[25] which not only leaves open what kind of data or sources to draw on and how to analyse them, but also includes non-state entities under the notion of 'world society', considered as a broadening of 'international society'.[26]

Fruitful as these approaches promise to be in bringing further attention to Arctic politics in the IR community, we would like to point towards critical norms research in the context of the 'world society' as a potential widening of the scope of inquiry.[27] The approach is rooted in ontological assumptions compatible with the English School approach, derived from constructivism in that norms and normative order are regarded as dynamic. This means that norms are not as much given (in international treaties or conventions) as they are constituted through meaning-in-use.[28]

Two distinct advantages arise from this broader focus. The first concerns the interest of some 'world society' scholars in systemic questions. Much of

[22] Hurrell, *On global order*, p. 3.

[23] Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002; first publ. in 1977), p. 196, emphasis added.

[24] Barry Buzan, 'The "standard of civilisation" as an English School concept', *Millennium* 42: 3, 2014, pp. 576–94, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829814528265.

[25] Cornelia Navari, 'Introduction: methods and methodology in the English School', in Cornelia Navari, ed., *Theorising international society: English School methods* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1–20.

[26] Barry Buzan, *From international to world society? English School theory and the social structure of globalisation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See especially Kopra, 'The Arctic from the perspective of the English School of International Relations'.

[27] Friedrich Kratochwil, *The status of law in world society: meditations on the role and rule of law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[28] Antje Wiener, 'The dual quality of norms and governance beyond the state: sociological and normative approaches to "interaction"', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 10: 1, 2007, pp. 47–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230601122412; Antje Wiener, 'Enacting meaning-in-use: qualitative research on norms and International Relations', *Review of International Studies* 35: 1, 2009, pp. 175–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509008377.

Arctic governance research is focused on particular regimes, like environment,[29] trade[30] or security,[31] with the express intention of analysing how an organization or institution structures a particular field. Yet, this issue-focused approach neglects potential linkages and cross-fertilizations between fields that have recently become more prominent in critical norms and world society scholarship. For example, based on systems theory in the social sciences, Friedrich Kratochwil argues that attention ought to be paid 'to the boundary-spanning exchanges that link systems to their environment'.[32] This approach chimes with early global governance scholarship interested in connections between governance fields, rather than stand-alone regime analyses. In this vein, as Ernst-Otto Czempiel wrote, 'The three issue-areas of security, well-being, and rule are related to each other. What happens in one is not independent of what is happening in the others.'[33] Accordingly, the links are established in translation zones[34] in which communicative connections are sought to be developed (or fail).[35] This perspective, moving beyond the isolated analysis of particular regimes, should allow scholars to make broader statements about regional or global order.

A second advantage derives from the recent development within the research agenda on norms and normativity in global politics. After two phases—emphasizing that norms matter alongside material capacities and exploring their adaptation in policy processes, respectively—the most recent phase addresses norm contestation.[36] Based on the premise that the meaning of norms is flexible,

[29] Timo Koivurova, 'The Arctic Council: a testing ground for new international environmental governance', *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 19: 1, 2012, pp. 131–44, https://doi.org/10.26300/btx9-4h48; Olav Schram Stokke, 'Climate change and institutional resilience in Arctic environmental governance', *Politics and Governance*, vol. 12, 2024, https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7369; Corine Wood-Donnelly, 'Evaluating normative capacity through Arctic environmental governance', *Climatic Change* 176: 127, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-023-03603-3.

[30] Clive Schofield and Tavis Potts, 'Across the top of the world? Emerging Arctic navigational opportunities and Arctic governance', *Carbon & Climate Law Review* 3: 4, 2009, https://doi.org/10.21552/CCLR/2009/4/117; Borgerson, 'Arctic meltdown'.

[31] Timo Koivurova and Filip Holiencin, 'Demilitarisation and neutralisation of Svalbard: how has the Svalbard regime been able to meet the changing security realities during almost 100 years of existence?', *Polar Record* 53: 2, 2017, pp. 131–42, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247416000838; Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv, Marc Lanteigne and Horatio Sam-Aggrey, eds, *Routledge handbook of Arctic security* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020); Renato Fakhoury, 'Polar stars: toward an epistemological understanding of security constellations and the Arctic case', *Global Studies Quarterly* 3: 4, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksad058.

[32] Kratochwil, *The status of law in world society*, p. 143. Among Arctic studies that use a potentially more encompassing approach are: Kamrul Hossain, 'Securing the rights: a human security perspective in the context of Arctic Indigenous peoples', *The Yearbook of Polar Law Online*, vol. 5, 2013, pp. 493–522; Zoe Garbis et al., 'Governing the green economy in the Arctic', *Climatic Change*, vol. 176, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-023-03506-3; Hoogensen Gjørv and Hodgson, '"Arctic exceptionalism" or "comprehensive security"?'; Andreas Østhagen, 'The Arctic security region: misconceptions and contradictions', *Polar Geography* 44: 1, 2021, pp. 55–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2021.1881645.

[33] Ernst-Otto Czempiel, 'Governance and democratization', in James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, eds, *Governance without government: order and change in world politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 250–71 at p. 256.

[34] Trine Villumsen Berling, Ulrik Pram Gad, Karen Lund Petersen and Ole Wæver, *Translations of security: a framework for the study of unwanted futures* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2022); Hannes Hansen-Magnusson and Charlotte Gehrke, 'Re-thinking global governance as fuzzy: multi-scalar boundaries of responsibility in the Arctic', *Global Society*, publ. online 8 July 2024, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2024.2373077.

[35] Mathias Albert, Oliver Kessler and Stephan Stetter, 'On order and conflict: International Relations and the "communicative turn"', *Review of International Studies* 34: S1, 2008, pp. 43–67, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210508007791.

[36] Phil Orchard and Antje Wiener, 'Norms and norm contestation', in Patrick A. Mello and Falk Ostermann, eds, *Routledge handbook of foreign policy analysis methods* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 51–66 at p. 52.

scholars ask a series of questions that differ from the research interests in previous phases. According to Phil Orchard and Antje Wiener, these questions might be phrased as 'how contestation affects norm-change or stability, whether and if so how contestation affects normative order, as well as more fundamentally how contestation contributes to norm-generation and change, and who has access to contestation?'[37] The latter question in particular points to an engagement with the principles and rules underpinning rule-making in global politics.[38] Rather than deriving legitimacy from capacity, as expressed in Bull's quote above, responsibility is negotiated through the interactions of states and non-state actors.[39]

Having addressed how Arctic scholarship can supplement its IR approach, let us take a closer look at the politics of boundary and boundary work, and the ways in which the issues of contestation and responsibility can be incorporated.

Setting boundaries and assigning responsibilities

Susan Star and James Griesemer pioneered the concept of boundary objects in their study of a science museum.[40] Focusing on the creation of new knowledge in the interplay of diverse interlocutors—including scientists, administrators, lay researchers and others whose communication with each other was enabled by the boundary object—they looked at 'cooperative work in the absence of consensus'.[41] At the heart of their study is a situation of cooperation under conditions of heterogeneity, namely 'the process through which actors from different social worlds … manage to coordinate with each other in spite of their differing points of view'.[42] Even though no overall or prior consensus had been reached, 'cooperation continued, often unproblematically',[43] which negates the notion that prior consensus and congruence of points of view are prerequisites for cooperation. The conceptualization of 'knowledge' herein derives from the sociological school

[37] Orchard and Wiener, 'Norms and norm contestation', p. 54. See also: Antje Wiener, *A theory of contestation* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014); Holger Niemann and Henrik Schillinger, 'Contestation "all the way down"? The grammar of contestation in norm research', *Review of International Studies* 43: 1, 2017, pp. 29–49, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000188; Lucrecia García Iommi, 'Norm internalisation revisited: norm contestation and the life of norms at the extreme of the norm cascade', *Global Constitutionalism* 9: 1, 2020, pp. 76–116, https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381719000285.

[38] Amitav Acharya, 'Norm subsidiarity and regional orders: sovereignty, regionalism, and rule-making in the Third World', *International Studies Quarterly* 55: 1, 2011, pp. 95–123, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2010.00637.x.

[39] Sassan Gholiagha and Mitja Sienknecht, 'Between (ir)responsibility and (in)appropriateness: conceptualizing norm-related state behaviour in the Russian war against Ukraine', *Global Constitutionalism* 13: 2, 2024, pp. 370–91, https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381723000357; Hannes Hansen-Magnusson and Antje Vetterlein, 'Responsibility in International Relations theory and practice: introducing the handbook', in Hannes Hansen-Magnusson and Antje Vetterlein, eds, *The Routledge handbook on responsibility in International Relations* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 1–28.

[40] Star and Griesemer, 'Institutional ecology'. See also introduction to this special section: Maren Hofius and Matthias Kranke, 'Boundary work and the (un)making of global cooperation: mapping the terrain', *International Affairs* 101: 3, 2025, pp. 761–78, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaf061.

[41] Susan Leigh Star, 'This is not a boundary object: reflections on the origin of a concept', *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 35: 5, 2010, pp. 601–17 at p. 604, https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243910377624.

[42] Pascale Trompette and Dominique Vinck, 'Revisiting the notion of boundary object', transl. by Neil Draper, *Revue d'Anthropologie des Connaissances* 3: 1, 2009, pp. 3–25, https://doi.org/10.3917/rac.006.0003.

[43] Star, 'This is not a boundary object', at p. 605.

of symbolic interactionism.[44] It is compatible with the way knowledge has been described in the hermeneutic tradition more broadly:[45] as a socially mediated but individually held vantage point on the world.[46]

Notably, while Star and Griesemer's study initially demonstrated how a variety of different parties or stakeholders managed to coordinate their perspectives on artefacts in the museum, subsequent uses of the notion of boundary object underscored the *political* dimension of such an undertaking. It is herein that we can take a look at who has access to contestation and the difficulty of arriving at a shared understanding. In this regard, knowledge that comes to the fore in interactions around boundary objects denotes an ontological process that establishes a reciprocal relation between the object and the 'knower': by naming or defining an object—which seeks to establish 'what it is'. Those who engage in the process position themselves as figures of authority that are both able and in a legitimate position to do so. In the analysis of global politics, this positioning has been likened to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital.[47] In this process, the boundary *object* becomes subjected to boundary *work*, which does not need to be interested in cooperation but might involve demarcation and competition for the sake of gaining or maintaining status in a given social order.[48] Etienne Wenger, for example, emphasizes the organizational dimension of boundary objects, highlighting that:

> When a boundary object serves multiple constituencies, each has only partial control over the interpretation of the object. For instance, an author has jurisdiction over what is written, but readers have jurisdiction over what it comes to mean to them.[49]

It is precisely in the process of struggling over such interpretations that questions of status and standing arise, as do questions of authoritative roles and responsibilities.[50] Assigning or taking responsibility for something or someone is a social practice embedded in a normative context.[51] Those who bear responsibility—the 'subjects' of responsibility—possess particular rights, or are expected to fulfil particular duties towards other people, living beings or inanimate objects—the 'objects' of responsibility. The question of 'who should be responsible?' can also

[44] Star, 'This is not a boundary object'.

[45] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method* (New York: Continuum, 2004; first publ. in 1960); Paul Ricœur, *Memory, history, forgetting*, transl. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Hannes Hansen-Magnusson, *International Relations as politics among people: hermeneutic encounters and global governance* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020).

[46] Kieran Bonner, 'Hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism: the problem of solipsism', *Human Studies*, vol. 17, 1994, pp. 225–49, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01323603.

[47] Hannah Hughes and Alice B. M. Vadrot, 'Weighting the world: IPBES and the struggle over biocultural diversity', *Global Environmental Politics* 19: 2, 2019, pp. 14–37, https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00503; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[48] Mariline Comeau-Vallée and Ann Langley, 'The interplay of inter- and intraprofessional boundary work in multidisciplinary teams', *Organization Studies* 41: 12, 2020, pp. 1649–72, https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840619848020; Thomas F. Gieryn, 'Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists', *American Sociological Review* 48: 6, 1983, pp. 781–95, https://doi.org/10.2307/2095325. For International Relations, see Lebow, *A cultural theory of IR*.

[49] Wenger, *Communities of practice*, p. 104.

[50] Comeau-Vallée and Langley, 'The interplay'.

[51] Hannes Hansen-Magnusson, 'The web of responsibility in and for the Arctic', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32: 2, 2019, pp. 132–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1573805. See also: Hansen-Magnusson and Vetterlein, 'Responsibility in IR theory and practice'.

be approached from a different vantage point and lead to a discussion over who should not be responsible. Similarly, discussing what they are responsible for can evoke a debate over what they are not responsible for. Addressing boundary objects through the lens of responsibility thereby helps to tease out the political processes, including their normative and contextual foundations, through which they are constituted and contested.

The Arctic is a critical example of a boundary object and boundary work because of the central role of the polar regions in the global climate and thus for societies around the planet. Complex interaction and feedback loops between the thawing permafrost and subsoil, land and ocean surfaces, and the atmosphere, affect temperatures and long-term weather phenomena in and beyond the region.[52] The Arctic has been warming at a rate three to four times faster than the global average in recent years.[53] Politically, the Arctic has been subject to considerable institutionalization processes since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, in particular the formation of the Arctic Council.[54]

The AC resulted from several initiatives for cross-border cooperation focusing on environmental research. It is a unique governance forum: not only does its core membership comprise eight Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States, known collectively as the Arctic 8) but also representatives of six Indigenous organizations, known as the Permanent Participants, which have full consultation and veto rights on AC proposals.[55] Even though the Permanent Participants do not have formal status under international law, they outrank the 13 observer states, twelve NGO observers and 13 intergovernmental and interparliamentary organizations at the Arctic Council.[56] However, despite their empowered position, Indigenous representatives struggle to convince states of a 'right to be cold',[57] to ensure not just their economic but also their cultural survival. This problem is notably related to the fact that states hold multiple responsibilities towards a number of objects, making it problematic to pinpoint precisely a 'responsibility to freeze', i.e. identifying who should be in charge of addressing the causes and consequences of climate change, which has major impacts on Arctic communities and non-Arctic, remote societies.[58] Furthermore, the mode of operation in the AC has increasingly emphasized the

[52] Hannes Hansen-Magnusson, 'Die "Eingebundenheit" der Polargebiete: Zeit für einen Metaphernwechsel in den internationalen Beziehungen?', *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* 29: 1, 2022, pp. 141–54, https://doi.org/10.5771/0946-7165-2022-1-141.

[53] Mika Rantanen et al., 'The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the globe since 1979', *Communications Earth & Environment* 3: 1, 2022, p. 168.

[54] E. C. H. Keskitalo, *Negotiating the Arctic: the construction of an international region* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Wilson Rowe, *Arctic governance*; Dodds and Nuttall, *The Arctic*.

[55] Shadian, 'From states to polities'. This veto is de facto, not *de jure*, as decisions in the Council are based on consensus.

[56] For an overview of the observers, see the Arctic Council's website: https://arctic-council.org/about/observers/.

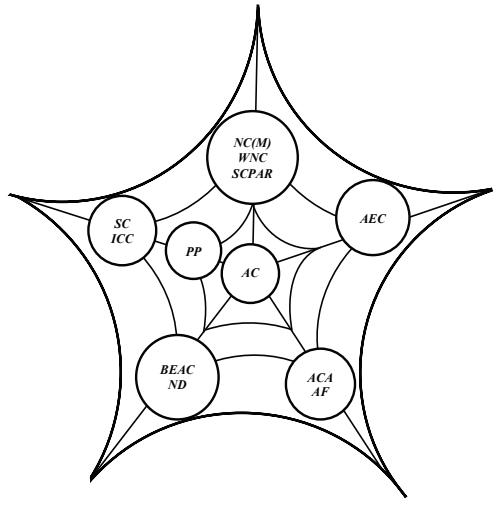
[57] Sheila Watt-Cloutier, *The right to be cold: one woman's fight to protect the Arctic and save the planet from climate change* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

[58] Mathias Albert and Sebastian Knecht, 'A responsibility to freeze? The Arctic as a complex object of responsibility', in Hansen-Magnusson and Vetterlein, eds, *The Routledge handbook on responsibility in International Relations*, pp. 369–79; Hansen-Magnusson, 'The web of responsibility'.

distinction between Arctic and non-Arctic actors in recent years, as geopolitical and economic interest in the region has attracted a host of non-Arctic actors, with the Arctic 8 emphasizing their elevated status in the AC-centred governance set-up over non-Arctic observers.[59]

Although it is a key forum, the Arctic Council is just one of several mechanisms for discussing Arctic politics and shaping policies. In this regard, the governance set-up of the Arctic has been described by the metaphor of a 'web',[60] comprising a number of connections and nodal points (see figure 1 below). Regardless of calamitous scenarios that have been evoked ever since the discovery of potential polar oil and gas reserves,[61] this governance web functioned rather smoothly until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Since then, its configuration has been undergoing changes, raising questions over the direction of collaborative boundary work, which forum should or could occupy the centre of Arctic governance, who is part of it, and what kinds of responsibility they hold.

Figure 1: The Arctic governance web



Note: AC—Arctic Council; ACA—Arctic Circle Assembly; AEC—Arctic Economic Council; AF—Arctic Frontiers; BEAC—Barents Euro-Arctic Council; ICC—Inuit Circumpolar Council; NC—Nordic Council; ND—Northern Dimension; PP—Permanent Participants; SC—Saami Council; SCPAR—Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region; WNC—West-Nordic Council.
Source: Adopted from Hansen-Magnusson and Gehrke, *The Routledge handbook of Arctic governance* (forthcoming).

[59] Elana Wilson Rowe, 'Ecosystemic politics: analyzing the consequences of speaking for adjacent nature on the global stage', *Political Geography*, vol. 91, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102497. Note that status here refers to the issue of who can set the agenda of the Council or veto projects. Those with 'observer' status cannot speak out against initiatives.

[60] Hannes Hansen-Magnusson, 'What does it take to hold shared responsibility for the Arctic region?', *Global Policy*, 12 Nov. 2020, https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/12/11/2020/what-does-it-take-hold-shared-responsibility-arctic-region.

[61] Borgerson, 'Arctic meltdown'.

In what follows, we discuss the Arctic as a boundary object, focusing on the most prominent Arctic governmental forums, including—and beyond—the Arctic Council. By operationalizing the 'boundary' approach, we present their *modus operandi* and how they provide access and voice, and thus potentially agency, for different perspectives on Arctic governance. This discussion allows us to show what kind of boundary work takes place and by whom in particular forums. In the broader picture, the overview allows us to draw conclusions about the location of responsibilities and why it is so difficult to establish policy practices that serve both local and Indigenous communities as well as societies around the globe. To inform this analysis, the following section briefly outlines the methods employed in this study.

Methodology

This article builds on a thematic analysis of two types of data concerning the boundaries of Arctic governance: 1) policy documents and mission statements of governmental bodies and institutions, and 2) field notes of researchers documenting participant observation at Arctic conferences.[62] All data was in English. Analysis occurred between 2021 and 2023, and as such the analysis encompasses data from both before and after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, marking an important theme in the analysed data. The following briefly summarizes the data generation process for the two types of data, beginning with policy and institutional documents and followed by participant observation field notes.[63]

First, the authors analysed 176 policy and institutional documents totalling approximately 3,000 pages concerning 19 governmental bodies and institutions (the Arctic 8, the European Union, the Arctic Council, the NC, the West-Nordic Council—WNC, the Nordic Council of Ministers—NC(M), the BEAC, the Northern Dimension—ND, the SCPAR, the Saami Council—SC, the Inuit Circumpolar Council—ICC—and the Arctic Economic Council—AEC). These documents were identified via online desktop research, focusing primarily on the most recently published documents while also considering historical materials such as founding documents. The organizations in question were chosen based on their central role in Arctic politics.[64] The analysis of the documents sought to provide insights into the purpose and activities of the respective institutions, as well as their affiliations and interactions with other institutions, states or actors involved in Arctic governance. The insights gained from this analysis, in turn, informed the researchers' participant observation activities.

[62] For methodological implications of the different types of data, see Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic analysis: a practical guide* (London: SAGE, 2022).

[63] Owing to funding issues, we were unable to conduct interviews for the purpose of this study. However, we aspire to do so in future research projects and our research objectives are informed by over 50 interviews that we conducted with relevant Arctic stake- and rightsholders for a previous research project: Hannes Hansen-Magnusson and Charlotte Gehrke, 'Navigating towards justice and sustainability? Syncretic encounters and stakeholder-sourced solutions in Arctic cruise tourism governance', *The Polar Journal* 13: 2, 2023, pp. 216–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2023.2251225; Charlotte Gehrke and Hannes Hansen-Magnusson, 'Tales from the frontier of sustainable global connectivity: a typology of Arctic tourism workers', *Journal of Arctic Tourism*, vol. 2, 2024, pp. 1–14, https://doi.org/10.33112/arctour.2.1.

[64] Hansen-Magnusson and Gehrke, 'The web of Arctic governance fora?'.

Second, the authors engaged in participant observations at polar conferences, specifically in person at the 2021, 2022 and 2023 iterations of the Arctic Circle Assembly (ACA) and the 2023 Arctic Science Summit Week. Traditionally associated with ethnographic modes of research, the method of participant observation has gained traction in IR research in recent decades.[65] Particularly in the polar context, researchers have employed participant observation to study the actions of diplomats and policy-makers, notably in conference settings.[66] Here, as Kathleen Musante notes, participant observation is often used as 'one among several qualitative research methods' complemented, in this case, by document analysis.[67] Participant observation allows researchers to immerse themselves in the contexts they study and reflexively contemplate their own place in the research.[68] In the authors' case, this position is one of Arctic researchers. The research team, which was based both within and outside the Arctic Circle, is made up of individuals of different academic backgrounds, career stages and genders, priming the researchers to observe different aspects at the polar conferences in question. The activities of researchers participating in conferences and participant observation at conferences are similar in many ways; they involve immersing oneself in the local context, making connections and building rapport with conference attendees, and observing sessions. However, in addition to merely attending conferences, those conducting participant observations must be critically aware and observant of their environments, taking note of everything from the seemingly mundane and routine to unspoken rules and social calculations.[69] The authors took field notes to document their observations of conference proceedings, including Arctic governance stake- and rightsholders' interactions in informal conference settings. To analyse the above-described data, following the work of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke on thematic analysis, the authors first ensured the uniformity of the material (English-language text files).[70] Next, we systematically coded the texts,

[65] Susan Kang, 'What the documents can't tell you: participant observation in International Relations', *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50: 1, 2017, pp. 121–5, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096516002274; Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Alena Drieschova, 'Track-change diplomacy: technology, affordances, and the practice of international negotiations', *International Studies Quarterly* 63: 3, 2019, pp. 531–45, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz030; Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker, 'Autoethnographic International Relations: exploring the self as a source of knowledge', *Review of International Studies* 36: 3, 2010, pp. 779–98, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000689.

[66] Beate Steinveg, 'Arctic conferences as arenas for power games and collaboration in International Relations', *The Polar Journal* 12: 2, 2022, pp. 240–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2022.2137086; Beate Steinveg, *Arctic governance through conferencing: actors, agendas and arenas* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023); Beate Steinveg, 'The role of conferences within Arctic governance', *Polar Geography* 44: 1, 2021, pp. 37–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2020.1798540; Merje Kuus, 'Foreign policy and ethnography: a sceptical intervention', *Geopolitics* 18: 1, 2013, pp. 115–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.706759.

[67] Kathleen Musante, 'Participant observation', in H. Russell Bernard and Clarence C. Gravlee, eds, *Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), pp. 251–92 at p. 252.

[68] Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive research design: concepts and processes* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Kathryn Haynes, 'Reflexivity in qualitative research', in Gillian Symon and Catherine Cassell, eds, *Qualitative organizational research: core methods and current challenges* (London, SAGE, 2012), pp. 72–89; Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Theoreticians' obligation of transparency: when parsimony, reflexivity, transparency and reciprocity meet', *Review of International Studies* 37: 3, 2011, pp. 973–96, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001026.

[69] Greg Guest, Emily E. Namey and Marilyn L. Mitchell, 'Participant observation', in Greg Guest, Emily E. Namey and Marilyn L. Mitchell, eds, *Collecting qualitative data: a field manual for applied research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE 2013), pp. 75–112 at p. 77.

[70] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic analysis*.

inductively observing themes in the material. Based on the themes identified in this first round of coding, we recoded the data, thus refining the theme selection. Finally, the authors grouped the patterns identified in the analysed field notes, policy and institutional texts to structure the following presentation of results and analysis.

Arctic boundary work

Arctic boundary work is anchored in the polar region as well as being defined by actors and activities outside the region. As the Russian invasion of Ukraine and related geopolitical developments continue to unfold, stake- and rightsholders observe challenges to the region's emblematic collaborative boundary work. As the central forum of the region, the Arctic Council's currently diminished operational scope significantly undermines efforts to translate cross-boundary cooperation in environmental research into governance, at regional and global levels.[71] Scientists lack access to the Russian Arctic, which negatively affects their ability to collect data and feed it into climate modelling, some of which is happening through the different (research) working groups of the AC. But since the origins of the climate crisis are widely held to lie in activities that are based outside the region, the diminished role of the AC also limits the ability to bring questions concerning the 'responsibility to freeze' onto the global agenda.

As a boundary object, the Arctic has shifted from being an entity of cooperation towards one marked by boundary work that emphasizes demarcation—i.e., competitive boundary work. When the AC operates as intended, it brings together some of the most powerful states on the planet in a governance field and setting in which they normally do not meet. Given their core membership in the AC, prior to February 2022 the US and Russia—two of the UN Security Council's five permanent members (known collectively as the P5)—were able to work towards a shared understanding of the implications of global warming on the region and on the region's significance for weather patterns in non-Arctic regions. The remaining P5 countries had observer status in the AC and were thus potentially part of a broader global discourse on this responsibility. Overall, notwithstanding their differentiated status in the Arctic, the involvement of the P5 would have represented an anchor for linking different governance fields across scales on the basis of shared discursive spaces. The P5 could have been the common denominator between environmental governance in the region and global efforts towards mitigating global warming through the UN system. With the reduced operation

[71] At the time of our initial analysis and writing in 2023 and 2024, the future of the Arctic Council appeared uncertain due to the geopolitical ramifications of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Norwegian chairship of the Council (2023–25) has since been credited for its work towards ensuring the Council's continued existence, including efforts towards the latter. See Trine Jonassen, 'The Arctic Circle Assembly 2024: "If we lose the Arctic Council, it is lost forever"', *High North News*, 24 Oct. 2024, https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/if-we-lose-arctic-council-it-lost-forever; Serafima Andreeva and Svein Vigeland Rottem, 'How and why the Arctic Council survived until now—an analysis of the transition in chairship between Russia and Norway', *The Polar Journal*, vol. 14, 2024, 229–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2024.2342111. Yet, ongoing (geo-)political changes, such as US President Trump's renewed interest in acquiring Greenland, and their relation to the imminent Danish Arctic Council chairship promise an eventful, if uncertain, future for the Council (https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/20/world/europe/greenland-trump-denmark.html).

of the Arctic Council following Russia's invasion of Ukraine,[72] and uncertainty over its long-term future despite the partial resumption of the council's activities in 2024, this link is severed—or, at least, precarious. A number of alternative options are available (see table 1 below).

Table 1: Arctic governance forums

Forum	*Collaborative and competitive boundary work*	*Membership*	*Reach and thematic scope*	*Evaluation*
BEAC	Regional initiatives around e.g. Indigenous groups, youth, emergency preparedness	DK, FI, IS, RU, SE and EU	Limited geographic and thematic scope	Reduced significance as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine
ND	Cooperation around environment, transport, public health and culture	IS, NO, RU and EU; Belarus (observer)	Limited geographic and thematic scope	Reduced significance as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine
NC(M)	Policy initiatives and mutual learning through sustained dialogue regarding content and process, especially around democracy, human rights and social welfare	Parliamentarians and governments from DK, FI, IS, NO, SE, FO, GL and the Åland Islands; Saami Parliamentary Council (observer)	Focus on domestic politics, especially public policy initiatives	Dense network of interpersonal and institutional ties, but with little extraterritorial reach
WNC	Interparliamentary dialogue around common policy issues, e.g. fisheries, tourism, renewable energy, research, and business opportunities	Parliamentarians from IS, FO and GL	Rich links into other (parliamentary) forums, the NC, EU, OECD and UN	Wide reach of contacts but hails from countries with comparatively little diplomatic influence
SCPAR	Sustainable development and environmental protection, knowledge exchange	Parliamentarians from CA, DK, FI, IS, NO, RU, SE and the US, joined by members of European Parliament and Indigenous representation	Best practice and policy promotion with a potential to reach beyond the Arctic	Infrequent meetings (every two years) make it unlikely to have a more significant role

[72] Samu Paukkunen and James Black, 'Arctic cooperation with Russia: at what price?', *International Affairs* 100: 6, 2024, pp. 2637–48, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae226.

SC and ICC	Promotion of Indigenous sovereignty without territorial claims, with particular focus on sustainable development, human rights and empowerment	Representatives from Saami communities in FI, NO and SE, and Inuit communities in Alaska, CA, GL and RU	Close institutional ties to other councils in the region, e.g. AC, BEAC and UN Economic and Social Council	Effective voice of their own constituency but finite resources and lack of diplomatic sway compared to states limit global influence
AEC	Business interest representation in various Arctic forums highlighting challenges and opportunities	Club structure for membership (fee-based)	Reach into the Arctic and beyond, e.g. International Maritime Organization, World Economic Forum	Particular vested interests may not coincide or align with civil society perspectives
Arctic conference circuit	Promotion of dialogue, cooperation and knowledge exchange	Informal and open platform for civil society, science, business and policy-makers	Emphasis on Arctic but global side events, especially in G20 countries	Informality is conducive to seeking solutions for challenges, but holds little policy clout

Notes: Country/territory names abbreviated using ISO codes: CA—Canada; DK—Denmark; FI—Finland; FO—Faroe Islands; GL—Greenland; IS—Iceland; NO—Norway; RU—Russian Federation; SE—Sweden.
Forums: AC—Arctic Council; AEC—Arctic Economic Council; BEAC—Barents Euro-Arctic Council; ICC—Inuit Circumpolar Council; NC—Nordic Council; NC(M)—Nordic Council of Ministers; ND—Northern Dimension; SC—Saami Council; SCPAR—Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region; WNC—West-Nordic Council.

The obvious candidates to substitute for the Arctic Council in this kind of boundary work are the BEAC and the ND programme. Both feature a wide membership that includes 'western' Arctic states in Europe as well as the EU; Russia withdrew from BEAC in September 2023. The working approach of both forums replicates that of the Arctic Council in terms of the organization of thematic working groups. They hold responsibility for conducting regional initiatives around youth, Indigenous groups, transport, environment, public health and culture, thereby linking several governance fields. Yet, the forums'

geographical scope is limited, and, like the Arctic Council, they have suffered from inertia since the outbreak of war in Ukraine. As a result, funding is reduced and states are becoming less interested in continuing the programmes.[73] The collateral result implies that non-state entities' agency in the region is being eroded further.

An alternative site that is comparable to the Arctic Council in terms of the composition of its membership and the range of topics covered is the SCPAR. While the BEAC and ND are populated by members' political executives and civil servants, the SCPAR comprises members of the legislatures of the Arctic 8 countries, with the European Parliament and Indigenous representatives having observer status. There is no particular policy responsibility assigned to its members, as the SCPAR is a platform for knowledge exchange, best practices and policy recommendations.[74] Having itself been founded in 1993, the SCPAR also promoted the establishment of the Arctic Council and its permanent secretariat in Tromsø, Norway. In this regard, the SCPAR would be well placed for the necessary collaborative boundary work to create alternative organizational forms to the Arctic Council and associated responsibilities, should that be required. Such a forum could elevate Arctic issues to the global level, though notably neither the UK nor China (as non-Arctic states) are members of the SCPAR, which would therefore not include voices from the entire P5 cohort. Meanwhile, another shortcoming is the infrequent timing of meetings, which take place every two years, and understandably, there are questions over its composition—Russia being a member—while the war in Ukraine continues.

Even though there is an element of Indigenous representation in SCPAR, the potential collapse of the Arctic Council and its uncertain long-term prospects have fundamental consequences for the Indigenous contribution to Arctic boundary work. Indigenous groups would no longer command the specific role they were afforded under the working rules of the AC in any of the other forums in which they remain active. From their inception, the SC and the ICC—both of which represent Indigenous Peoples—were concerned with rights and sovereignty issues, often focusing on culture, tradition and self-determination through ways of life that build on millennia of life in the Arctic. These efforts are indicative of competitive boundary work that foregrounds Indigenous identity by way of contrasting one's own way of life to the colonialist practices that have laid claim to territory and resources for the last two centuries. Their boundary work also centred on arguments of environmental 'stewardship',[75] showcasing the entanglement of culture, economic production and the environment. As symbolized by the struggle for the 'right to be cold',[76] however, questions remain over the most

[73] Personal communication with a politician from the Arctic region, Sept. 2023.
[74] Hansen-Magnusson and Gehrke, 'The web of Arctic governance fora?'.
[75] Betsy Baker and Brooks Yeager, 'Coordinated ocean stewardship in the Arctic: needs, challenges and possible models for an Arctic Ocean coordinating agreement', *Transnational Environmental Law* 4: 2, 2015, pp. 359–94, https://doi.org/10.1017/S2047102515000151; F. Stuart Chapin, III, 'Social and environmental change in the Arctic: emerging opportunities for well-being transformations through stewardship', *Ecology and Society* 26: 3, 2021, https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12499-260315.
[76] Watt-Cloutier, *The right to be cold*.

suitable way to assign a 'responsibility to freeze'. The 'right to be cold' relates to questions of cultural identity embedded in particular climatic contexts, meaning that a change in this context would resemble more than a threat to economic well-being, namely the endangering of Indigenous culture. While economic losses could be offset through financial compensation, cultural identity does not lend itself to that kind of quantification. Responsibility for these processes would lie with those causing climate change, predominantly located outside the Arctic region. As a result, Indigenous groups' claim to sovereignty without territory[77] is hindered by the territory-focused statehood prioritized in most global forums. Furthermore, these groups are also limited by a lack of the resources required for active engagement across multiple forums—such as the UN, and others—which exemplifies the struggle described by Bourdieu to convert social capital into influence.[78]

In sum, the changing situation across different Arctic forums weakens the prospects for collaborative boundary work and effective governance. Yet it would be a false dichotomy to insinuate that the alternative to cooperation is conflict. The exact opposite is non-cooperation, which better describes the recent developments in the region. Collaborations are currently being phased out or remain in limbo rather than being actively cut off, meaning there is little contestation and conflict, but instead silence and a disregard for taking up responsibilities. As we show in the next section, these responsibilities are scattered and diffused among the remaining components of the 'governance web', amounting to a number of shortcomings. Overall, this scattering does little to pinpoint effectively a 'responsibility to freeze'.

Is the Arctic bound for 'medieval governance'?

As the discussion above suggests, the web of Arctic governance is undergoing significant reconfiguration. The remaining settings lack inclusive membership, argumentative 'clout' or geographical scope to offer a viable alternative. In the following section we argue that they are increasingly marked by what has been referred to as a form of medieval governance—that is, a 'system of overlapping authority and multiple loyalty'. According to the global governance literature, the universalistic claims of the nation-state, on the one hand, and the global political economy, on the other, hold the system together.[79] In the case of the Arctic, we argue that it is the nation-state together with the broader and more recent multidimensional notion of 'sustainability' that maintain the system. This argument should find support among English School scholars who have identified sustain-

[77] Heather N. Nicol, 'Reframing sovereignty: Indigenous peoples and Arctic states', *Political Geography* 29: 2, 2010, pp. 78–80, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2010.02.010; Harald Bauder and Rebecca Mueller, 'Westphalian vs. Indigenous sovereignty: challenging colonial territorial governance', *Geopolitics* 28: 1, 2023, pp. 156–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.1920577.

[78] Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power*.

[79] Jörg Friedrichs, 'The meaning of new medievalism', *European Journal of International Relations* 7: 4, 2001, pp. 475–502 at p. 475, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066101007004004 (emphasis from the original omitted). See also Bull, *The anarchical society*.

ability as a new and core primary institution of global politics.[80] Importantly, sustainability comprises more than the long-term use of resources, speaking to issues of justice that encompass social, environmental and economic dimensions.[81] As these dimensions need not align congruently, questions of sustainability and justice might themselves become a boundary object. Translated to the context of Arctic governance, this means that while the two claims may make the governance web resilient to rupture, they cannot be reconciled in a way that would be conducive to creating collaborative boundary work suitable for addressing the 'responsibility to freeze'. In their totality, the overlapping governance arrangements point towards diverse loyalties. In other words, the competing duality that is the hallmark of 'medievalness' is not conducive to efficient governance.

Here, the NC and WNC, along with the NC(M), are cases in point. The NC and WNC are interparliamentary bodies founded in 1952 and 1985, respectively, that both precede the Arctic Council by some decades, while the executive-bound NC(M) was founded in 1971. The latter's primary task is the coordination and development of joint policies in fields such as welfare, education, culture, environment and research.[82] Both interparliamentary and intergovernmental arrangements proceed by consensus, with the NC providing space for debate, while the NC(M) yields executive power. They are an example of the difficulty of coherent, collaborative boundary work and the diffusion of responsibilities that are primarily orientated towards the benefit of the respective state.

Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Iceland are members of both the NC and the WNC—organizations that are platforms for addressing common challenges pertaining to politics, economics, culture and the environment.[83] Similarly, the WNC coordinates initiatives in the fields of tourism, fisheries, renewable energy and research.[84] Across both forums, there are also links to EU institutions, even though the WNC countries are sceptical of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy[85] and Greenland voted in 1985 to withdraw from the bloc.[86] However, the three entities' membership in the NC, the other members of which have closer ties with the EU—whether as members of the bloc or of the European Economic Area—and therefore need to ensure their policies comply with EU law, showcases the overlapping and intersecting forms of governance that apply to the region. They are instances of collaborative yet also competitive boundary work.

The AEC is another alternative forum, albeit one that likewise showcases the medieval nature of Arctic boundary work in that it is collaborative, yet with elements of competitiveness stemming from particular interests. The AEC seeks

[80] Robert Falkner, *Environmentalism and global international society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[81] Hansen-Magnusson and Gehrke, 'Re-thinking global governance as fuzzy'.
[82] Hansen-Magnusson and Gehrke, 'The web of Arctic governance fora?'.
[83] The NC also comprises members from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. 87 representatives are elected to the NC from national parliaments, while the WNC comprises 18 members: six from each of the three countries.
[84] Egill Thor Nielsson, *The West Nordic Council in the global Arctic* (Reykjavik: University of Iceland, 2014), p. 14.
[85] Alyson J. K. Bailes, *Nordic and Arctic affairs: small states in the Arctic: what impact from Russia–West tensions?* (Reykjavik: Centre for Small State Studies, University of Iceland, 2015).
[86] At the time, it was officially named the European Economic Community.

to promote economic development and cooperation in the region,[87] making it a collaborative partner by default. It reaches beyond the region by maintaining links to the International Maritime Organization and the World Economic Forum, serving a diverse membership from different economic sectors. Responsibility regarding sustainable growth is a core part of its agenda that plays out across several working groups which deal with infrastructure, telecommunications and responsible resource development.[88] As its membership is not derived from political mandates but rather obtainable through a fee, the AEC holds very little political capital, representing the vested interests of its members. This is not to say that AEC members harbour nefarious intentions, but they hardly represent civil society more broadly. It is conceivable that AEC members' understanding of sustainability is based on a shorter time horizon than that perceived in other forums that need to take a longer perspective. This may curtail its interest in engaging questions over the 'responsibility to freeze' that extend to Arctic communities more broadly.

Finally, one of the sites most conducive in terms of collaborative boundary work is the Arctic conference circuit. In particular, the ACA and AF are the standout events, taking place annually in Reykjavik and Tromsø, respectively. Their mode of operation has been described as 'bazaar governance'[89] because they bring together a broad range of representatives from policy-making, science, Indigenous groups, civil society and business. Lately, the ACA has expanded its activities into spin-off forums, held in Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Greenland, China, South Korea, the Faroe Islands and the United Kingdom. These forums are evidence of the global reach of Arctic affairs. They are further contextualized by a number of smaller events with a narrower remit, such as the Arctic Science Summit Week, which brings together scientists and policy-makers, or the Northern Lights Business and Cultural Forum, which focuses on economic developments and cultural exchanges. Beate Steinveg's research has shown how the meetings contribute to shaping agendas and creating an inclusive approach to Arctic governance.[90] While these meetings promote dialogue and cooperation, particularly around exchanging knowledge, and though the informality may be conducive to seeking novel solutions to the pressing issue of climate change and other socio-economic challenges, the conference circuit has limited power to actually create binding policies.[91]

Though the relatively close-knit and closed-off nature of the specialist circle of experts at these events affords trust-building and networking advantages, it also creates disadvantages concerning the potential for groupthink and the exclusion of

[87] Arctic Economic Council, 'Code of Ethics', 2020, https://arcticeconomiccouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/code-of-ethics.pdf.

[88] Hansen-Magnusson and Gehrke, 'The web of Arctic governance fora?'.

[89] Duncan Depledge and Klaus Dodds, 'Bazaar governance: situating the Arctic Circle', in Kathrin Keil and Sebastian Knecht, eds, *Governing Arctic change: global perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 141–60.

[90] Steinveg, *Arctic governance through conferencing*; Steinveg, 'The role of conferences within Arctic governance'; Kuus, 'Between an archipelago and an ice floe'.

[91] However, the informality of these conferences may be conducive to seeking novel solutions to the pressing issue of climate change and other socio-economic challenges.

marginalized voices.[92] As befits a 'bazaar' and in line with the metaphor of medievalism, the conference circuit resembles a rather large specialist circle in which the cacophony of voices does not convincingly add up to a coherent whole, as it lacks a centralizing authority. This is not to say that such development is impossible, but it is unclear whether a self-organizing, coherent system will emerge 'from within'—and in time to allocate an effective 'responsibility to freeze'.

Conclusion: the short-term future of Arctic governance

While the Arctic Council is certainly the most prominent forum for Arctic governance in the region, and while current geopolitics surely influences how this forum and others will operate in the coming years, the good news for governance in the region is that a myriad of different platforms for dialogue and cooperation are already in place. Allowing for collaborative boundary work, these platforms are interstate and intergovernmental, involving a large number of civil society, local and Indigenous actors, which enables a continued discussion about projects that span a broad range of social, economic and cultural activities. As the article has illustrated, this 'medieval' network and the collaborative boundary practices connecting it—clearly exceeding the work of the AC's working groups—make Arctic governance fairly resilient. Yet, the network's 'medievalness' also comes at the cost of effectiveness, which ultimately bears down on who should hold the 'responsibility to freeze'.

In the coming years, these different platforms might increase in importance. Some of the authority and powers that were invested in the AC by the Arctic 8 could shift to these inter-parliamentary, intergovernmental, civilian or scientific sites of conversation. They might even retain some of the circumpolar communicative and collaborative boundary-working capacity that characterized the region prior to the war in Ukraine.[93] On a positive note, despite the long-term uncertainty of the forums, this shift means that important projects around climate change research, but also socio-political and socio-economic development, *can* continue or be initiated. The potential disadvantage is that these forums have their own rules of participation and decision-making; they lack some of the prominence and political clout of the AC. This dispersion of authority comes with new rules around who can access conversations and what policy suggestions are brought forward by them—eminent questions that the third wave of norm scholarship has started to address but that have not yet been raised in connection with Arctic governance scholarship. The most obvious actors to suffer from these changes are the Permanent Participants, whose standing in the Council is not replicated in other forums—because of either their rules of procedure or their lack of comparable discursive reach. In relation to the web of Arctic governance depicted in figure 1, the shift in authority would result in a different nodal position. The

[92] Berling, Pram Gad, Petersen and Wæver, *Translations of security*.
[93] Hannes Hansen-Magnusson, 'Making polar and ocean governance future-proof', *Politics and Governance* 10: 3, 2022, pp. 60–69, https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i3.5332.

future web might look quite different from the one sketched in this article. It might even be necessary to include new forums or mention the many meeting places we did not include owing to the format restrictions of this article—for example, the Arctic Mayors' Forum or the Arctic Coast Guard Forum. On the global level, states need to negotiate competing responsibilities, since even Arctic states might regard some of the region's topics of concern as secondary in their own list of priorities.[94] Climate change is an existential threat for Arctic inhabitants, but it is also a threat for societies elsewhere, since climate feedback loops interact with other parts of the planet. It is thus in the interest of humanity to collectively address the question of the 'responsibility to freeze'.[95]

[94] Hansen-Magnusson, 'The web of responsibility'.
[95] Albert and Knecht, 'A responsibility to freeze?'.