



Nordic Arctic Strategies in Overview

During the last decade, all Nordic countries have drawn up strategies for their Arctic regions, with several countries even revising these Arctic strategies within this short period of time. It shows that the Arctic region has become a matter of higher political interest; not only at national level, where the focus has shifted from seeing the individual Arctic regions as general development areas to regions with geographic

specificities that deserve particular attention at this point in time. The interest does not only lie in the Nordic countries but they are reflecting on other actors' increased interest in the Arctic region; such as strategies drawn up by other circumpolar countries as well as the reason EU attention towards the Arctic regions. What are the goals and priorities in the Nordic national Arctic strategies?

Why Arctic Strategies now?

In 2016, the Arctic Council celebrated its 20 year anniversary. During the first decade of the millennium, advocates and stakeholders viewed the Arctic as the accelerating region for climate change and this heightened global attention to the region. Several other events also drew attention to the Arctic region and made the governments of the North more aware

that it posed a different situation now the Cold War was over.

One ongoing element in the Arctic strategies of the Nordic countries have from early on also have rested on security in the region but overtime the Nordic countries have become more focused on economic opportunities, exploration of the seas for oil, mining and other natural resource extraction possibilities. With

indigenous populations' resistance and in some cases conflicts, awareness has been elevated to the uniqueness of nature and pristiness of the Arctic. In the period onwards from the turn of the millennium, the voice of different land-use stakeholders within as well as outside of the region became ever more sophisticated which heated up the debate of the destiny of the Arctic on a global scale.



Map 1. The Nordic Arctic region includes the area in red: Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland and the Northernmost regions of Finland, Norway, Sweden. Map: Julien Grunfelder, Nordregio.

Different priorities among the countries

The national Arctic strategies of the Nordic countries share similarities regarding some of the included themes and issues, while at the same time reflecting quite different political perspectives. The national strategies all place a positive perspective on the opportunities linked to the use of natural resources, emphasizing the importance of sustainable resource management. The strategies also present strong consensus on the importance of environmental protection in the Arctic.

There is a shared strong emphasis on the importance of international law and the overall objective of maintaining the Arctic as a low-tension region. When it comes to the governance of the Arctic, several national strategies highlight the need to strengthen the Arctic Council, and the strategies generally have high national ambition on research in the Arctic

and also promote international cooperation on research. Most also emphasize opportunities related to fostering Nordic expertise and know-how, e.g. in environmental management and ship building technology. Several of the Nordic Arctic strategies stress the need for improved and joint monitoring and preparedness for e.g. oil spills in the vulnerable region. Almost all the countries including Iceland highlight in their strategies the promotion and safeguarding of the indigenous populations.

The national Arctic strategies differ particularly in their approaches and ambitions regarding the economic activities in the Arctic and have also different economic interests in the region. They also pose quite different degrees of emphasis on such issues as scientific research, climate change and the environmental protection. Further, the strategies weigh

differently on security issues and cooperation with Russia, just as the Nordic countries have different perspectives on the role and involvement of NATO and the EU in Arctic issues.

A new shift

A shift can be identified in the Arctic policies and strategies in the increased focus on internal regional processes, a shift that in particular the new Finnish strategy reflects. There are also aims for more joint efforts through more supra-national cooperation (particularly Sweden, Norway, Finland – though both the OECD context and the EU); efforts that manifest also through new available financial development tools.

National Arctic Strategy	First version	1 st revision	2 nd revision
Finland	2010	2013	2016
Sweden	2011	2016	
Norway	2006	2009	2014 (with further revision expected in 2017)
Kingdom of Denmark-Greenland-Faroe Islands		Sectoral revisions expected in 2017	
Faroe Islands	2011	(2013)*	
Iceland	2009	2011	(2016) *

Table 1. Overview of the year of adaption of the Nordic Arctic Strategies *Stakeholder analysis with the aim of positioning the countries in Arctic collaborations.

Goals and priorities in the national Arctic strategies

Finland	• Business development and opportunities • Competitiveness and sustainable growth • Ensure the wellbeing and health of the population • Give prominence to knowledge and education • Focus on youth and resolving of long-term unemployment • UN Sustainable development goals
Sweden	• Counteract the negative health and social effects of climate change • Acknowledge the effects of global markets and social economic pressure • Establish long-term and relevant transport solutions • Maintain/increase Nordic and European cooperation on Arctic issues
Kingdom of Denmark - Greenland & the Faroe Islands	• Include Greenland and the Faroe Islands in policy-making • Ensure sustainable use of living resources • Prioritize the culture and needs of Arctic societies • Increase economic incentives and opportunities • Emphasis on the importance of the role of the Arctic Council
Faroe Islands *	• Enhance Arctic collaboration on knowledge-based industries and expertise • Strengthen new economic opportunities • Conservation and sustainable use of living resources • Prioritize a West Nordic approach in Arctic cooperation
Iceland	• Work towards Iceland being recognized as a coastal Arctic state • Secure indigenous rights • Educate and increase knowledge within and about the Arctic • Business development and collaboration • Emphasis on the importance of the role of the Arctic Council • Prioritize a West Nordic approach in Arctic cooperation
Norway	• Cooperate internationally on business and knowledge development • Emphasize resource industries as a knowledge-based business sector • Strengthen research and education in Northern Norway • Establish a more reliable infrastructure • Better environmental protection • Emphasis on the importance of the role of the Arctic Council

Table 2. Goals and priorities. **Based on stakeholder analysis of the Faroe Islands within Arctic collaboration.*

National and regional discrepancy

Conventionally, the central administration, typically the Arctic divisions within the ministries of foreign affairs in the different countries, have formed the Arctic strategies with the minister of foreign affairs; in some cases led by the prime minister. Only in some but very few cases, the regional representatives, upon which the strategies do effect, have been consulted in the process. Therefore, the strategies' focus is prone to have been on high policy topics rather than daily life issues, wellbe-

ing and sustainable community development within the Arctic. Furthermore, the focus in the strategies has also mirrored knowledge generated from scientific conduct through the Arctic Council permanent working groups which tends to be more aimed at natural science conditions and changes, at the cost of a focus on social issues. The public servants from the ministries have also argued that their approach to many of the shifts they foresee as the main challenges to Arctic communities are meta-changes like climate

change and other related issues more than shorter term societal changes.

The Nordic Arctic is multifaceted, a fact which is often lacking from the debate on sustainable development in the Arctic. Actors outside the Arctic are mostly concerned about environmental issues, while the people living in the Arctic experience the situation differently. Based on the specific challenges and rich opportunities, a bottom-up approach is needed, directly involving people living in the Arctic, with special attention to youth perspectives

through involving young people in the region.

In terms of social, environmental and economic parameters, the diversity of rural communities, towns and cities in the Nordic Arctic is impressive. From popular tourist attractions to large scale industrial operations based on forestry, mining and oil, and from massive fishing businesses and aqua farming to small innovative entrepreneurs building new IT

tools, creative entrepreneurs organizing big cultural festivals and vibrant towns and cities comprising Arctic and high tech universities, research and innovation organizations, the Nordic Arctic is holding its own in extraordinary surroundings and at the edge of societal innovation. The Arctic strategies should also mirror this, and thus, there is a general need for a more regional and local perspective in Arctic development policy.

BOX 1. THIS POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief was developed as part of the work conducted under the Nordic Working Group for Sustainable Regional Development in the Arctic; a working group commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R) for the period 2013–2016.

The purpose of the activities of the working group was to assess opportunities and challenges for a sustainable regional development in the Nordic Arctic and to identify future development perspectives to provide more comprehensive knowledge and input for development of the Nordic Arctic policy.

Further reading / Key documents

Iceland

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Faroe Islands

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Finland

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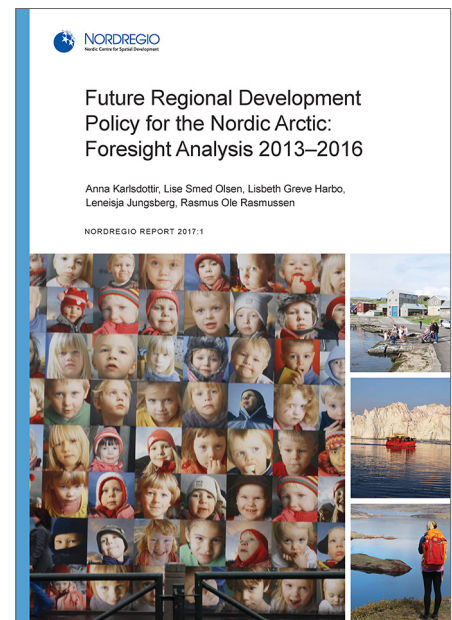
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Future Regional Development Policy
for the Nordic Arctic: Foresight Analysis
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