

The Heterogeneity of Arctic Cities

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Abstract: New forms of urbanization are unfolding around the world that challenge inherited conceptions of the urban as a fixed, bounded and universally generalizable settlement type. The Arctic is one example of a region where urbanization is a strong and powerful process defining new center-periphery power structures and dialectics. The urban arctic is marked by a particular spatiality. Urban space is produced in geographically quite isolated locations with harsh climatic conditions, with long distances to other cities, and still interconnected to the global flows through modern communication infrastructure as well as political and economic dependencies. Some of these cities are experienced as small urban spots in the so called “wilderness”. Because of their density, and economic and cultural diversity and vitality, these centres offer an “urban way of life” compared to their sparsely populated surroundings. Others are highly industrialized, boosting cities Arctic cities are also home to an increasing number of Indigenous peoples, as well as immigrants from all over the world creating quite diverse ethnic fabrics. The intimate relationship with nature is one of the elements that make Arctic cities liveable for its own citizens as well as in branding the region towards a fast-growing tourist industry. Meta-narratives such as the glorification of a pure and white wilderness is contrasted with the land-grabbing related to the exploitation and extraction of natural resources closer and closer to the polar area with the cities as service spots as well as promoting this industrial development in that sense participate in the destruction of the Arctic landscape.

Introduction

The Arctic is becoming increasingly urbanized (Berman and Orttung 2020, Dybroe et al 2010, Rasmussen 2011). At present, there are more than a hundred urban settlements north of 65 degree with a total of around 2 million residents (Varentsov et al 2018). In some areas of the Arctic, the processes of urbanization are extreme, linked on one side to the hyper-industrialization that follows the exploitation of natural resources, and on global tourism development on the other. The role and function of these cities in their respective regions is also changing. Some of them seem to be “winning” the competition between cities, while others are stagnating. Some of them will be part of the transnational service network and its mobile middle class—a global network of finance, production, and economy—and have to adopt their infrastructures and individual characteristics to these forces and their modes of life. These forces are transforming both the living conditions in the region and the cities themselves, what they represent, what goes on there, as well as the design of the cities. The Arctic has become a new frontier, a magic region,

35 representing a prosperous future for industrial development (Gunteriusen 2008). In light of the rising
36 significance of the circumpolar Arctic on the global geopolitical stage, consideration of the urban
37 geographies of this region is paramount. Moreover, such a consideration must take as its frame of
38 reference the North and the particular experiences and characteristics of northern regions brought into
39 focus, rather than understanding northern urban forms and processes through a southern urban
40 metropolitan lens.

41 Neil Brenner's (2013) work on "urban theory without an outside" frames our approach to the
42 Arctic as an urbanizing region. As he writes, urban theory has long been premised on the assumption that
43 cities are the cornerstone of urban forms and processes. Moreover, cities are viewed as distinctive,
44 discrete and bounded types of settlement space that can be contrasted to putatively "non-urban" zones that
45 lie outside or beyond them (suburbs, the countryside, the rural, the natural and so on). Yet Brenner (ibid.,
46 citing Amin and Thrift 2002) argues that in a world in which "the city is everywhere and in everything,"
47 the dominant understanding of the urban as a distinctive settlement type must be radically
48 reconceptualized. In advancing a conceptualization of the Arctic not only as urban, but as a socio-spatial
49 unit of analysis that advances and expands our understanding of urban theory, we seek to challenge
50 dominant paradigms of thought that firmly locate Arctic space and place outside urban bounds. Instead,
51 we view the Arctic urban as a distinct constellation of urban form and process in its production and
52 reproduction of complex socio-spatial networks of relations between smaller settlements and northern
53 towns and cities as well as much larger, southern, often-colonial metropolises. In doing so, we directly
54 engage with Brenner's (ibid.) efforts to shift urban theory away from a type of city-ism that is not only
55 bounded but that is population-centric, linear and binary. Indeed, as we argue here, Arctic regions are
56 enmeshed in distinctly unbounded and dispersed urban relations that are as central to northern town and
57 city life as they are to life in the smaller settlements. Moreover, they bring the Arctic into close and
58 interdependent relationships with southern urban networks through colonial continuities as well as the
59 complex socio-spatial dynamics of the global economy, labour migration and ever-changing Arctic
60 geopolitical dimensions.

61 In this chapter, we will add to the urban comparative discourse seen from the urban north.
62 Through looking more closely into the particularities of Arctic urbanism, its different historical and
63 contemporary drivers, and some of the forms of its expression, we aim at a deeper understanding of the
64 urban Arctic, and how it might advance our understanding of contemporary urban forms and processes
65 more generally. How is urbanism expressed, practiced, and performed in Arctic cities? Is it marked by a
66 particular spatiality? How is the urban space produced in these geographically isolated locations with
67 harsh climatic conditions, with long distances between cities? What are the spatial drivers and outcomes
68 within this area of small settlements in large landscapes?

69

70 **Conceptualization of Arctic cities**

71 Although arctic cities have not been much highlighted in mainstream urban studies, quite a substantial
72 amount of papers have been published on northern urban settlements. There has been general accounts of
73 for instance sustainable arctic cities (Kampervoll Larsen and Hemmingsen 2017, Berman, & Orttung
74 2020), as well as studies of particular cities, for instance Nuuk (Grydehøy 2014, Uhre & Dahl 2017),
75 Nunavut (Hicks & White 2015, Weber, B. (2014), Winnipeg (Gyepi-Garbrah et al 2014, Tromsø (Nyseth
76 et al 2010), Kirkenes (Granaas et al 2009, Viken et al 2009), Vadsø (Munkejord 2009), Kiruna (Nilsson
77 2009, Granaas 20...), Rovaniemi (Nyseth and Pedersen 2014), Luleå (Chapman et al. 2017), Umeå
78 (Hudson et al 2018). Others have compared arctic cities (Rasputin, et al 2020), or adopted a regional
79 perspective (Fried 1964, Gardner 1994, Kishigami et al 2008, Patrick & Tomiak, 2008, Dahl, 2010,
80 Sejersen (2010), Tester & Kulchyski 2011, Walker et al, 2013, Christensen et al 2017, Côte & Pottie-
81 Sherman. 2020). In addition writers have raised different topics of particular importance to arctic cities,
82 such as indigeneity (Stenbaek 1987, Nyseth & Pedersen 2014, Gyepi-Garbrah 2014), culture and identity
83 (Patrick and Tomiak 2008, Kishigami and Lie 2008, Nyseth & Pedersen 2014, Kielland 2017),
84 intercultural encounters (Walker 2015, Førde 2019), homelessness (Christensen 2014), place reinvention
85 (Nyseth & Viken 2009, Nilsson 2009, Munkejord 2009, Guneriussen 2008), demography (Dahl 2010,
86 Sejersen 2010, Dybbroe 2011, Rasmussen 2011, Heleniak 2020), architecture (Grydehøj 2014,
87 Hemmingsen 2015, Chapman 2018), urban planning and governance (Walker 2015, Nyseth 2010, Hicks
88 and White 2015) and climate change (Sejersen 2010, Weber 2014, Varentsov et al 2018). None of these
89 authors publish in the main urban studies journals, and there are no journals where key scholars in urban
90 theory and scholars on arctic cities meet or comment each others works. Despite the above listing then,
91 relatively little is known about Arctic cities (Berman and Orttung 2020), at least beyond the rather narrow
92 field of polar geography.

93

94 **Heterogeneity**

95 Despite the rapid urbanization of the Arctic, the Arctic city does not figure in mainstream theories of
96 urbanization. Arctic cities are however quite diverse with various forms of heterogeneity. In the Arctic
97 and sub-Arctic regions, we find a hierarchy of cities within the urban structure that includes larger cities,
98 smaller towns, and settlements. One may question the characterization of many of these places as cities.
99 The typical Arctic city has a population between 30 and 70 thousand people (Varentsov et al 2018). In the
100 Scandinavian and Canadian Norths, using classical definitions of the city as dense, large, and socially
101 heterogeneous, multi-functional, mixed-use space with a specialised labour force (Wirth 1938/2003),
102 there are mainly smaller settlements. The Russian Arctic are highly urbanized. Here we find multiple

103 cities with more than 100,000 citizens, with Murmansk as the largest with 300,000. In the sub-Arctic
104 region of Scandinavia, we find medium-sized cities (50,000-100,000) like Tromsø, Luleå, and Rovaniemi,
105 and smaller towns (10,000) like Hammerfest, Kirkenes, Alta, , and Kiruna. In Iceland there is only one
106 major city, Reykjavik, which has the dominant position as the capital, though Akureyri, a town of 6000 in
107 the northern part of the island, acts as a significant regional centre. In Greenland, Nuuk is defined as a
108 metropolis, even though it has just under 18,000 inhabitants. In the Canadian North, the three territorial
109 capitals—Iqaluit, Yellowknife and Whitehorse—have populations of approx. 8000, 20000, and 25000
110 respectively. In addition, there are many towns that function as regional centres—Inuvik, Rankin Inlet,
111 and Hay River to name a few.

112 Although mostly small in scale and population, Arctic cities still represent different forms of
113 urbanity and function as urban centres of importance in their regions. For example, not only do cities like
114 Nuuk and Yellowknife act as a administrative, economic, transportation and health and social services
115 hub for their respective regions, they both play significant roles in the global economy. So even with a
116 location outside the command centres in the world economy (Sassen 1991) cities in the Arctic North are
117 still expected to be motors of regional growth. As Sejersen (2010, 168) has argued, Arctic cities has been
118 used as drivers of social change and modernization in the colonial and postcolonial context and as such
119 have emerged as significant sites for the historical entrenchment of a colonial North and today as critical
120 sites for the articulation of resilience, sovereignty and postcolonial identity in the modern North.

121 It also makes a difference whether the city is located in Russia, Scandinavia or North America
122 determined by different histories, demographics, and governance. Their functions also differ from
123 location to location, from regional cities with no decisive power regarding the political, administrative, or
124 economic issues affecting them, to capital cities like Nuuk which play an important role in the national
125 economy.

126 The significance of urban space in northern regions is growing amidst a trend of population
127 growth, economic development, sovereignty interests, and optimism around the potential benefits climate
128 change may bring in terms of ‘opening up’ the North for future prosperity. Therefore, questions about
129 what urbanization and urbanism look like in northern places are gaining new ground as residents and
130 policy makers consider the future of northern regions. Rural-urban migration trends across the
131 circumpolar North suggest that northern urban places are growing in population not just through an influx
132 of southerners and international migrants, but also by rural northerners. Recent literature has attributed
133 rural-urban migration to geographies of economic (in)opportunity, citing that such migration is typically
134 understood as motivated by desires to find employment. However, though employment opportunities
135 certainly play a role in rural-urban migration in Arctic regions, other factors play a role in the growth of
136 Arctic cities.

137 **What Constitutes the Arctic City?**

138 So, what is an Arctic city? Using standard references to urban theory, it is perhaps easier to describe what
139 the Arctic city is not, rather than what it is (Nyseth 2017:62). At a time when half of the world's
140 population lives in cities, the city is everywhere and in everything. It is difficult to identify what is not
141 urban. According to Amin and Thrift (2002), we can no longer agree on what counts as a city, but we still
142 think of cities as distinct places. It could be helpful to think of the urban as more of a process than as a
143 fixed thing.

144 The settlement structure in the Arctic has undergone a major process of transition in recent
145 decades, with people moving away from small villages in order to settle in larger towns. Most of the
146 population growth experienced in the Arctic region occurs in urban centres. Arctic nature represents an
147 “empty” space in some of these areas, devoid of permanent settlements. Cities of the north are primarily
148 seen as “unplugged”, due to their remoteness and uncertain supply situation (Hammersam 2014). This is
149 however first of all the case for cities along the Greenland coast where ice reduce food supply long
150 periods of the year, while the open waters along the Norwegian coast makes these towns much more
151 connected. People here live in cities or smaller fishing villages, densely populated pieces of land below
152 huge mountains. In the fjords, remnants of a traditional way of life can still be found; household
153 economies based on combinations of fishing, farming and part-time work in public or private service.
154 This way of life has declined dramatically recently, with young people moving away, leaving behind an
155 aging population (Pedersen & Moilanen 2012). One of the spatial particularities of Arctic urbanism is
156 distinct borders to their surroundings. They are like small urban spots in the wilderness, with practically
157 no suburban areas and sparsely populated surroundings (Nyseth 2017: 63). Because of their density, and
158 economic and cultural diversity and vitality, these centres offer an “urban way of life” compared to their
159 surroundings (Munkejord 2009).

160 The result of these processes of transition has been the emergence of a particular kind of city—
161 one that is relatively small in size and population, one that is embedded in nature and in many ways
162 physically disconnected from other settlements in a way that differs significantly from larger, southern
163 urban centres with surrounding rings of suburbs and rural towns, and one that has served a key role in the
164 colonization and/or resource exploitation of the North. Some of these cities play national roles today;
165 Hammerfest is Norway's leading site for the development of natural gas from the Barents-see, Kirkenes is
166 the Nation's gateway towards Russia, and Tromsø has several national roles, including as a university city
167 and is also claiming the status as the Arctic Capital.

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171 **Settlement geographies and their influence on the contemporary urban Arctic**

172 The role of the State in shaping Arctic urban geographies has been profound, particular in regions like the
173 Canadian North and Greenland, where settlement and colonialism were part and parcel of the same State-
174 sanctioned modernization efforts. In the Canadian North and Greenland, the Canadian and Danish social
175 welfare states, respectively, played a critical role not only in settlement geographies but also in laying the
176 foundation for contemporary urbanization in both regions. Over the early- to mid-20th century both the
177 Canadian and Danish states actively pursued the centralization of previously nomadic Indigenous peoples
178 in the Canadian Arctic (Tester and Kulchyski 1994) and Greenland (Dahl 2010, Sejersen 2010). Though
179 such policies were enacted to promote northern participation in the wage economy and facilitate
180 administration by the colonial state, there were profound social and spatial implications as well. Also in
181 the Scandinavian north the social welfare state modernisation and industrialization programs enforced
182 centralization, particularly after the Second World War. In the wake of the Second World War, the
183 Canadian government embarked on an extensive and ambitious project to ‘modernize’ the Arctic. Part of
184 this effort included the centralization of previously nomadic northern Indigenous peoples through
185 northern settlement schemes, designed to bring the southern or European way of life to Indigenous people
186 living north of the 60th parallel. In Canada, the federal government envisioned northern Indigenous men
187 off to wage jobs during the day, their wives at home tending to children, healthy and safe within the
188 comforts of modern housing. “Instead of reservations,” Tester and Kulchyski (1994, 7) write, “[the
189 federal government] wanted ‘northern suburbs.’ They wanted Inuit citizens who would be self-reliant,
190 but integrated into a broader Canadian reality the outcome was quite contrary.” Indeed, the legacy of
191 flawed northern settlement initiatives can be seen today in the high rates of core housing need and
192 unemployment across the Canadian North. An additional legacy is found in the rising inequalities
193 between northern settlement communities, many of which are rural, and northern urbanizing centres.
194 These centres largely emerge through the concentration of federal and territorial administration, as well as
195 economic development, namely through extractive resource industries.

196 In Greenland, the timeline is similar in some keyways, though it differs from the Canadian North
197 in part through its different colonial history with Denmark but also through its geographic characteristics
198 as an island (see Grydehøj 2014). Like the Canadian North, the Second World War brought about
199 significant change to Greenland, as it became “the threshold between the old and the new” (Stenbæk
200 1987, 301). Since the 1700s, Greenland had been a colony of Denmark, with Danish colonial
201 administrators attempting to keep a Greenlandic way of life separate from that of the Danes living in
202 Greenland, something Ørvik (1960, 68) calls “a northern model of development without modernization.”
203 Not surprisingly, Greenlanders started to perceive the urbanization process as a colonial project even
204 though the colonial status of Greenland had been abolished. The town became the symbolic, as well as

205 concrete, manifestation of western cultural and political dominance and the arena for assimilation of
206 Greenlanders into a Danish way of thinking and behaving. A similar sense of disempowerment over
207 decisions that have such bearing on daily life can be seen in experiences of relocation and resettlement in
208 Newfoundland and Labrador.

209 Across both contexts, one of the key tools for centralization was the expansion of social welfare
210 services, including the implementation of public health programs, education, public housing and income
211 support. Compliance was ensured by the northward extension of what quickly became two significant
212 institutions in the lives of northern people—the child welfare and penal systems. However, the structure
213 of social welfare has developed in many converging and diverging ways across Nunavut and Greenland.
214 For example, the housing system in Greenland is characterized by a higher degree of private and
215 cooperative home ownership than Nunavut, where public housing is in the clear majority (Hansen and
216 Andersen 2013, Tester 2006). Devolution processes in both Greenland and Nunavut have seen each
217 jurisdiction increasingly responsible for the provision of social services and health, yet each continues to
218 be closely tied to Denmark and southern Canada, respectively, for addictions and mental health treatment,
219 advanced health care treatment, and the penal system.

220 Though the resettlement plans of the mid-20th century was enacted to promote Greenlandic
221 participation in the wage economy and facilitate administration by the colonial state, they also had
222 profound social and spatial implications. Centralization policies put into motion a distinct rural-urban
223 geography in Greenland, a geography that frames the emergence of visible forms of homelessness in
224 Greenlandic urban centres (Christensen et al. 2017; Christensen and Arnfjord 2020). The shifting spatial
225 dynamics of the Greenlandic social welfare state have particular consequences for those who are without
226 adequate education, or who are dependent on health and social services. Moreover, when writing of rural-
227 urban geographies in the context of the Arctic, it is important to recognize that the rural is itself incredibly
228 recent: “Yet the settlement lifestyle is itself scarcely a century old, and its origins are deeply embedded in
229 Greenland’s colonial administration, which funded and encouraged the transition from nomadism to
230 sedentarism. Today’s Greenlandic and Danish valorization of peripheral Greenland is a late- or post-
231 colonial creation and is applied to places that, in the context of their founding, in fact represented early
232 step’s in Greenland’s journey toward urbanization” (Grydehøj 2014, 210).

233 A proactive regional policy to avoid depopulation of the periphery after World war II became an
234 important issue in Scandinavia. In the 1970ies “Desentralized concentration” became the preferred term
235 for the settlement program aiming at centralization of the rural population in regional centres, so called
236 growth centres to avoid depopulation of the periphery regions, particularly in the north. The
237 “municipalization” of the welfare state added to this through strengthening the municipal administration

238 with a strong mandate and budget as well as and decision making power, even in very small
239 municipalities.

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241 **Drivers of urbanisation in the Arctic**

242 The driving forces behind urbanization in the North are also diverse. Drivers of urbanization differ
243 somewhat from the global trend of the post-industrial city with its symbolic economy based on “soft”
244 competences like the culture industry and network and information technology. Laruell (2019) highlights
245 three drivers of today`s urbanisation; industrial activities, the militarisation of the Arctic, and the
246 development of regional administrative centres. The latter is related to a range of socio-economic and
247 political factors, for instance concentration of public services and a number of national and international
248 institutions (Weber et al 2017). Nuuk and Tromsø are for instance important centers of higher education,
249 and recently also tourism.

250 Militarization is also a driver to urbanization in some parts of the Arctic, for instance in the
251 Russian Arctic, in the Canadian North and in Northern Norway. Towns like Inuvik and Iqaluit, the capital
252 of Nunavut was established as a of Canada`s cold war strategies for controlling the arctic. During the
253 Cold War, security considerations defined national policy priorities for the North, influencing the
254 economic bases of cities like Kirkenes on the Norwegian side and Murmansk on the Russian side of the
255 border. State support for the mining company Syd-Varanger A/S in Kirkenes had primarily military
256 instead of economic motivations during this period (Eriksen and Niemi 1981). When the Berlin Wall fell
257 and the communist regime in the Soviet Union collapsed, the mining industry there shut down as well
258 (Viken and Nyseth 2009). This sort of state industrial support legitimized through military interests
259 became history after the cold war.

260 Many Arctic cities were established as industrial cities, like, Kiruna, and Narvik, which came into
261 existence around 1900. Recently the arctic is facing a new phase of industrialization as a consequence of
262 the global race for fish, oil, gas, wind and minerals of all kinds, also causing urbanization. Hammerfest is
263 a typical example in northern Norway of a city that is being transformed from a small city based on fish
264 production to one with a petroleum-based economy within global networks. The urbanization of the
265 Arctic is therefore in part driven by hyper-industrialization (Benediktsson 2009). In Canada centralization
266 was clearly a way to ensure the delivery of services to northern people in Canada, but also a way to
267 facilitate the federal government`s chief aim with regards to the North: the development of non-renewable
268 resource industries. Writing about Whitehorse, Lotz (1967) suggests that all signs pointed to an approach
269 to northern development entirely wedded to resource extraction. To counter the boom-bust nature of such
270 development, many towns heavily depended on government expenditure and attracted a predominantly
271 transient population.

272 Some of these new industrial towns look like large construction sites, where most of the
273 population increase is due to a multinational army of construction workers. Others are more like industrial
274 “working camps” based on fly-in, fly-out concepts of the workforce, for instance in Fermont, Canada.
275 The new residential houses that are being built are constructed rather cheaply and without much
276 consideration to either design or site location. The large silos filled with cement that line the piers are
277 visible signs of the ongoing construction. The Russian Arctic is developing at high speed, as are parts of
278 the Swedish and Finnish North, and the international mining companies are knocking on doors of the
279 Norwegian Arctic as well. Kirkenes location close to the now much more open Russian border, makes
280 Kirkenes a centre of a highly intensified exchange of people, goods, knowledge and even east-west
281 political negotiations between Norway and Russia (Viken & Nyseth 2009, Viken and Swencke Fors
282 2013). Despite this transnational exchange, mining still imprints the town’s economy and image.

283 The economies of these cities are not only characterized by the export of natural resources at all
284 levels of the production process, but also by the export of capital. Although these economies are highly
285 globalized, little if any of the export income is circulated back into the local economy. There are almost
286 no locally owned businesses involved in any of these industries. Take the iron mine in Kirkenes as an
287 example. Until 1996 the mine was operated by a state-run company that closed down in 1996 but
288 reestablished with foreign owners in 2016. A global marketplace has brought in new actors from faraway
289 countries, creating new relational networks between places, firms, and individuals.

290 Meanwhile, in both the Canadian North and Greenland, urbanization continues as a result of
291 devolution and self-government, non-renewable resource extraction and increasing integration into the
292 global economy. On the one hand, urbanization is an inevitability with the development of resource-
293 dependent economies, particularly in the Canadian North, where capital, employment opportunities and
294 amenities become concentrated in northern urban locales. On the one hand, urbanization is fuelled by the
295 desire to better administer the social welfare state to a relatively small population spread out over vast
296 land masses, a necessity for gaining increased autonomy and economic independence from southern
297 Canada in the case of the Canadian North, and Denmark in the case of Greenland.

298 **Arctic Urban Nature**

299 Connection to nature is a critical component of the Arctic culture, both through informal economic
300 activities and for leisure. Arctic cities are no exception. Arctic cities have a unique and strong societal
301 relationship to their natural surroundings and providing opportunities for regular interaction with nature
302 constitutes an important dimension of human development (Weber et al 2017:282.) People living in
303 Arctic cities spend much of their free time in nature, all year round. This intimate relationship to nature
304 may very well be one of the elements that make Arctic cities liveable; a particular quality of these cities
305

306 representing easy access to extreme sport activities such as skiing in rough mountain terrain, mountain
307 climbing, and all sorts of other extreme wilderness activities. It is this seemingly “empty” space of nature
308 that attracts people and makes the development of a tourist industry possible (Viken 2011). For most of
309 the tourists, the city is a place to rest in between the exploration of the wilderness. The city, with its urban
310 forms of life, represents an exception from the wilderness, a stark contrast to other parts of the world
311 where urban sprawl makes it difficult to distinguish one city from the next, and where the only “nature” is
312 the city park. Urban life is followed by intimate relations to the non-urban through extreme performances
313 in “the wild”. These cities attract a growing segment of highly competent urban athletes seeking
314 adventure, challenges, and risks. With Arctic nature being so abundant in close proximity to and
315 sometimes even within the cities, there are concerns that urban tourism stakeholders may be increasingly
316 appropriating the rural (Carson 2019:13). Nature is also a part of moving the exotization of the Arctic into
317 the cities themselves. Dog-sledding dogs are the “urban foxes” of the north. In Alta, Norway, the
318 Finnmark Race has become a huge global sporting event, gathering dog sled teams from all over the
319 Arctic region during the week-long event (Granaas, 2015). The city becomes a meeting place between
320 dogs and people – between the human and the nonhuman. These relationships with nature challenge the
321 spatial divisions between the civic and the wild, producing what Hinchliffe and Whatmore (2006,124) call
322 “heterogeneous urban inhabitants.” While “urban foxes” in the UK symbolize the adaptation of nature to
323 the city, the urban Arctic is a relational practice where human activities are urgently dependent on their
324 adaptation to a nature that not only surrounds them, but also permeates the urban settlements. For
325 example, in Hammerfest, were the is fences surrounding the city to keep the reindeers out of peoples
326 gardens are not only designed to keep reindeer out, but function at the same time to keep its urban
327 inhabitants inside.

328

329 **Ethnic Multiplicities: Indigenous, Multicultural Cities**

330 In Greenland and the Canadian North, despite the historical role of urban settlements as part and parcel of
331 the colonial process, their presence on Indigenous lands, and as Indigenous spaces, is clear.

332 Decolonization is an on-going process, creating a complex ethnic fabric in these cities. In Canada the
333 majority of Indigenous people, whose identities and traditional cultures tend to be linked to smaller and
334 often rural or remote¹ community settings, are today living their lives in urban centres. This increasing
335 urbanization of the Indigenous population also in Scandinavia is a more recent development, related to

¹ It is important to acknowledge here that “rural and remote” in the context of Indigenous peoples in Greenland and the Canadian is the result of the colonial settlement process, and is locating Indigenous settlement always in reference to the settler city or core. In fact, Indigenous communities were not, and are not, by definition, remote.

336 both the reclaiming of identity and to increased mobility from rural to urban areas (Nyseth and Pedersen
337 2014).

338 While Arctic cities are, by and large, inherently Indigenous cities, they are also the sites of a
339 growing degree of immigration and multiculturalism. Arctic cities are home to diverse ethnic and cultural
340 groups, including Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous or settler population and a grow number of
341 immigrant groups representing a wide range of nationalities from all over the world. The Arctic urban has
342 also emerged as an important space for Indigenous community-building and cultural expression. For
343 example, in Nuuk, the relationship between Greenlandic youth, urbanity and modern Greenland are
344 closely intertwined. In Yellowknife, the formation of the Dene Nahjo, the launch of the Urban Moosehide
345 Tanning Project and the development of the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Camp have all been distinctly
346 urban projects, bringing together Indigenous peoples from diverse communities within the Northwest
347 Territories. Iqaluit was an Inuit meeting-place and a trading post with the Hudson's Bay Company until
348 the Second World War when an influx of non-Inuit moved to the area for military purposes. Following
349 the Second World War, Iqaluit became a centre for the expansion of the Canadian Social Welfare State in
350 the eastern Arctic. Following the settlement of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and the subsequent
351 creation of a Nunavut territory, Iqaluit has emerged as a centre for urban Inuit identity in Canada.

352 Meanwhile, in Tromsø, Norway, there are more than 140 different nationalities currently living in
353 the city. Tromsø also defines itself as an Indigenous city, home to the largest population of Sami in
354 Norway outside the Sami core districts (Pedersen and Nyseth 2015). Kirkenes has become a bi-lingual
355 city as a consequence of its large Russian population. Historically the population of the Norwegian north
356 has been a mix of three "tribes" - the Sami, the Kvens (people of Finnish origin), and the Norwegians,
357 and in some parts, also Russians. These areas have been the home to people from different nationalities
358 and cultures for several hundred years. Russians, Finns, and Sami have shared the land in the eastern part
359 of Finnmark since the 17th century. Russian immigration, on the rise since the fall of the Soviet Union, is
360 therefore not a completely new event, but represents a historic continuity. Multiculturalism therefore has a
361 long history in the region, but its current forms are new. This is a result of the increased mobility into and
362 out of the region, including temporary mobility, like Russian fishermen visiting Kirkenes on a short time
363 basis, and the influx of travellers of all kinds including tourists, merchants, and temporary workers (Viken
364 & Swencke Fors 2014).

365 Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada has an incredibly diverse population, with roughly
366 30% of Indigenous (Dene, Metis and Inuit) and the remaining 70% a combination of settler and recent
367 immigrant populations, representing over 100 different nationalities and languages (Statistics Canada,
368 2016). A range of professional, extractive industry and service sector employment opportunities have
369 driven the settlement of newcomers to northern cities. This has been further supported by efforts from the

370 Canadian government to encourage immigration to northern communities have further increased the
371 cultural and linguistic diversity in its northern cities.

372 If cities are key sites where new identities are formed (Sassen 2012), this is certainly happening in
373 Arctic cities. Experimentations with Indigenous identity is ongoing, with the emergence of new cultural
374 practices nonexistent in the rural communities from where they originate. Rejecting the historical
375 imaginary of Indigenous people being “out of place” in urban contexts, they are now claiming the cities as
376 theirs with the same legitimacy as anyone else, injecting them with new forms of hybrid identity (Nyseth
377 and Pedersen 2014). A century ago, assimilation into the majority culture was the only option for
378 Indigenous migrants to the cities, which stripped them of their cultural distinctiveness as a consequence.
379 Today’s Arctic cities seem able to include indigenous cultures in the production of a multicultural city
380 image, although not entirely free of conflicts and negotiations. Because Arctic cities are heterogeneous
381 when compared to the more uniform subcultures in the Sámi districts, these cities are particularly
382 interesting to study as meeting places between cultures.

383

384 **Urban growth policies**

385 There are key differences in the urban policy across the Arctic. For example, according to Gardner
386 (1994), there exists a passive sense of the inevitability of urban migration in the Canadian North by
387 allowing resources to funnel to centres and a neglectful apathy around economic development in the
388 settlement communities. Similarly, Ervin (1969) postulated that federal policy in Canada promoted the
389 ‘incipient urbanization’ of Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, encouraging the concentration of northern
390 people into settlements built on southern models, where northern Indigenous people experienced minority
391 group status and resulting marginality. The outcome was profound sociocultural disintegration through
392 what Fried (1964) termed a ‘crisis of transition’. Nunavut has tried to reverse this trend by decentralizing
393 the administration of its government, but it has not been much with much success (Hicks and White 2015;
394 Weber 2014). Meanwhile in Greenland, urbanization has been a very deliberate strategy, and while there
395 were efforts to decentralize after Home Rule the current government has essentially accepted the
396 urbanization of Greenland. Moreover, as Sejersen (2010, 168) states: “the urban status and its
397 consequences for Greenland as a whole have become more and more importunate not only because more
398 and more people move to the towns, but because towns are singled out as a drivers of social change.”

399 Today, Nuuk is a city undergoing incredible expansion, building up and out at a pace that is
400 almost impossible to track. The fervent push behind this rapid development, however, is not only to meet
401 the needs of people who currently call the city home, but also the thousands of Greenlanders that the
402 municipality of Sermersooq (which includes Nuuk) and the Greenlandic government plan to resettle in the
403 coming years. 20 minutes from central Nuuk, a new Sermersooq subdivision—Siorarsiorfik—will be the

404 largest urban development project ever in Greenland, designed to address significant population growth
405 and persistent housing need in the municipality, as well as draw young Greenlanders living abroad back
406 to the country's capital. Two new primary schools, one secondary school, and a 20,000 sq. meter retail
407 area are also planned. In addition, a large indoor stadium and art museum- both to be designed by the
408 famous Danish architect Bjarke Ingels- are also proposed. A large tunnel will be constructed to link the
409 new neighbourhood to Nuuk Centre.

410 In Nuuk, there has also been a significant centralization of a number of public functions where
411 most publicly or semi- publicly owned corporate offices and administrations gradually has been gathered
412 in the capital Nuuk, and correspondingly, higher education has gradually been concentrated in a few
413 cities. The extension of the social welfare state to Greenland following the Second World War was a key
414 strategy in what was effectively an ongoing Danish colonial interest in Greenland. Under the Self Rule
415 government in Greenland today, urbanization is facilitated through deliberate policies. The most
416 important change in this direction is probably that the 18 Greenlandic municipalities were merged into
417 five large municipalities in 2018, and as a consequence the majority of the city administration and the
418 associated jobs has been gathered in the five municipal centre cities. Not only has there been a significant
419 centralization of a number of public functions where most publicly or semi-publicly owned corporate
420 offices and administrations gradually has been gathered in the capital Nuuk, but it has had a significant
421 impact on the centralization of postsecondary education, public housing and health and social services.
422 Parallel to the centralization of municipalities has been a health facilities centralization ongoing since
423 2011. The former 16 health districts were compiled into five health regions. This meant the closer to
424 district hospitals and the centralization of health care services in the five largest Greenlandic centres, a
425 move that was justified by economic advantages and administrative arguments that it would improve the
426 quality of health care.

427 While important social welfare functions have been concentrated in the core centres of these five
428 municipalities, the implementation of a simultaneous "real costs" policy has also played a key role in
429 encouraging rural-urban movement. While Hendriksen argued that the social welfare state previously
430 served to facilitate small settlement dwelling due to subsidy programs that supported village/settlement
431 life, particularly the uniform price system, policy change in 2005 resulted in a partial reform (husleje
432 reform) of this system. The uniform price system subsidized electricity, heating and water for the smaller
433 communities, but since 2005 has been gradually clawed back in order to create prices in the smaller
434 communities that reflect "real costs"—a reform that is geared to benefit the economic dynamics in the
435 towns and to promote a transfer of populations from local communities to the more competitive towns.
436 As a result, the smaller communities increasingly find themselves stigmatized and isolated also due to
437 changes in the transportation structure and the pricing system. A similar sense of rural stigmatization is

438 found in the Newfoundland case illustrated by Côté and Pottie-Sherman, where public discourse pits
439 mainland Newfoundlanders against those living in small, isolated island settlements reliant upon
440 subsidized ferry services.

441 The relationship between Arctic cities and their transnational and territorial contexts are far from
442 clear in terms of political power, strategic decision-making, economic relations, and networking, because
443 there is a non-horizontal, south-north hierarchy of relationships. The political and economic links are tied
444 to the national capitals in the south, not towards other cities in the Arctic. There are however important
445 exceptions to this pattern. Kirkenes, located at the Norwegian-Russian border, has developed close
446 connections to the cities on the Russian side (Viken and Nyseth 2009) since the opening of the border
447 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The creation of the Arctic Council in the 1990s and the
448 establishment of its secretariat in Tromsø has led to extensive connectivity across the Arctic Region.
449 Arctic cities could thus be characterized through their degrees of openness to external influences and their
450 level of connectivity. The combination of openness and exteriority, along with their territoriality, shape
451 their dynamic potential. In several Arctic cities, potentials and opportunities for new development have
452 emerged as a result of the interactions and intersections this connectivity enables. However, these cities
453 are still viewed as fixed entities in a classical sense - relatively stable, nested, geographical areas defined
454 by their export-oriented production (fishing, mining, oil, natural gas), exploited by transnational politics,
455 economics, and business. This perspective signals the presence of a latent colonial tendency in
456 understanding Arctic areas and cities.

457

458 **Design**

459 Some of these Arctic cities are quite new, less than 100 years old, and came into existence as a result of a
460 mine, a harbour, a fleet base, and so on. There are some older cities like Tromsø, which is more than 200
461 years old, that grew because of commercial trade and sea transport. Taking this into account, it can be
462 said that many Arctic cities are not a consequence of self-sustainable growth to any high degree. This
463 means that they are as fragile and as vulnerable as the resources and the politics that fuelled their growth.
464 Because these cities are relatively young in comparison to cities in central Europe, and because their
465 development was often a result of industrial forms of production, their visual aesthetics are dominated by
466 modern post-war architectural design. Few of these cities have buildings of historical value. Some of
467 these cities like Hammerfest and Kirkenes were completely destroyed during the Second World War, and
468 their current forms were shaped in the 1950's and 60's. Tromsø, with its small wooden houses, is an
469 exception in the Arctic, even though city growth, urban planning, and several city fires have destroyed
470 large parts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century architecture.

471

472 **Urban Arctic Imaginaries**

473 The cultural economy of the urban Arctic also has its specificities. Festivals like the Tromsø International
474 Film Festival (TIFF), and the Barenz Spectacle in Kirkenes, both of which take place in January during
475 the darkest period of winter, attract a large number of visitors. Umeå was appointed the European City of
476 Culture in 2014, Bodø is a coming ECC in 2024 and the Tromsø bid for both the 2014 and 2018 Olympic
477 Winter Games – although without success – still illustrates attempts of an ambition and a willingness to
478 take on the responsibility of huge cultural events. All of these events challenge old myths about the region
479 as underdeveloped and provincial and produced new symbolic meanings that provoke images of the
480 exotic, magical, and spectacular (Guneriusen 2008). It is not clear how this cultural economy might be
481 affected by the new and expanding industrial development. Culture might prove to be a contestable and
482 conflictual aspect in the branding of these cities, where image is everything. In this imageniring the Arctic
483 wilderness is being turned into something beautiful and spectacular, with no remaining trace of the older
484 images of an unfriendly, dark, and inhospitable landscape. Arctic “magic” has been “rediscovered” and is
485 now found in the most unlikely places and events, particularly related to the boom of the tourism industry
486 seeking new experiences out from the beaten tracks. The recent tourist boom in the Arctic related to
487 winter tourism has – until the pandemic slowed everything down – transformed cities like Tromsø into an
488 Arctic destination, and in other areas to promote new forms of tourism such as “last chance tourism” to
489 see the icy wonders of the North before they disappear, for instance on Greenland (Müller, 2015). Cities
490 like Whitehorse in Canada illustrate the close connection of tourism to strategies aimed at developing the
491 city as a creative hotspot.

492

493 **Closing up**

494 The urban Arctic in Scandinavia and Canada reveals a number of forms and particularities that are distinct
495 to the Arctic and yet bear resemblances to urbanism in other parts of the world. Arctic cities are also
496 ordinary cities (Robinson 2006). Arctic cities can be seen as an urban paradox, challenging what we
497 know and think about what urbanity means. A closer look soon unveils small settlements and towns in
498 transformative stages, within a network of relations that not only crosses the Arctic landscape and
499 national borders but is of global reach. The welfare state, both in Scandinavia and in Canada state provide
500 these communities with public institutions and infrastructure to fulfill their role as regional urban centers
501 in the modern world. Ways of being urban and ways of making new kinds of urban futures are indeed
502 diverse here. In the era of the Anthropocene, the arctic is undergoing rapid transformation caused by
503 urbanization, resource exploitation and climate change. One of the most important issues facing Arctic
504 regions is the perceived need to transition from a non-sustainable “boom-bust” cycle, based on resource
505 extraction, to a more diverse and sustainable economy (Larsen et al 2014). As the cities will continue to

506 absorb an even greater share of the Arctic population (Heleniak, 2020) there is a need for new conceptual
507 approaches in order to deal with the challenges that follows. “One size does not fit all” as Thrift writes
508 about cities and modernity (Thrift 2000). In the Arctic region, urbanization needs to be reflected upon
509 with regards to what in other regions would be considered to be rural settlements and small towns in size
510 and functionality. Considering the forces re-shaping these northern areas, it is important to understand
511 that the changes we are witnessing signal the emergence of a new type of small-scale urban development.
512 In line with Bell and Jayne (2009) arguing that small cities for too long have been ignored by urban
513 theorists we argue that also arctic cities have been passing under the radar of urban studies. Following
514 from Robinson’s global South post-colonial perspective of urban studies, we strongly agree that
515 theorizing about cities should be more cosmopolitan, and to include a greater diversity of urban
516 experiences (Robinson 2006, Hubbard 2006). We agree with Brenner and Schmid in that the classic city
517 and its metropolitan variants can no longer serve as the primary reference point for urban struggles or for
518 visions of possible urban worlds. A wide range of new urban practices and discourses are being produced
519 in diverse places, territories and landscapes, often in zones that are geographically removed from large
520 cities where new forms of collective insurgency are merging in response to the patterns of industrial
521 restructuring, territorial enclosure and landscape reorganization (Brenner and Schmid 2015:178).
522 Northern Canada, Greenland and Northern Scandinavia represents two regions where these processes are
523 ongoing. How can another urbanization be imagined? Urban planners and politicians in the Arctic cities
524 need alternative visions and imaginaries for the Arctic pointing beyond the present dominating petro-
525 images produced by global resource extraction companies. In order to develop a more sustainable,
526 socially just, democratic, territorially balanced and ecologically viable Arctic future new images are
527 called for.

528

529

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