



# ***Societies and Cultures: Change and Persistence***

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“Rapid change” is a common expression in describing contemporary societies of the Arctic, usually followed by mentions of cultural losses and social ills caused by the inability to cope with extraordinary rates of transitions. Indeed, for the past few decades rapid change has been a major trend in the North, and it remains so today. Change does not necessarily lead to cultural extinction, however. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the persistence of identities and the re-creation of traditions show that indigenous cultures can thrive in the modern world.

Under the recurring theme of change and persistence, this chapter discusses three major trends in Arctic societies and cultures. The first is the rapid change and its base in the recent colonization of the Arctic and paternalistic policies of welfare states. The second trend focuses on cultural expressions. Although there has been a measurable decline in linguistic and religious knowledge, in certain songs, dances and other art forms, this is only part of the cultural reality of the Arctic. “Culture gain” and “culture creation” have been present as much as “culture loss,” and many aspects of Arctic worldviews have persisted despite processes of change and replacement. The third trend focuses on social reproduction, kinship, and how traditional social relations have been transplanted into new settings with urbanization. Together, these trends indicate that the resistance and resilience of Arctic cultures and societies are as impressive as the changes they have so far managed to successfully negotiate.

## **A socially and culturally diverse Arctic**

“Arctic societies” and “Arctic cultures” are not as easy to define as it would appear. Seven of the eight Arctic countries have the majority of their territory and citizens south of the Arctic. If we

use the widespread definition of societies as groups of human beings that have the capacity to self-reproduce their collective existence, it becomes almost impossible to speak of “Arctic societies.” No human collective in the Arctic today is able reproduce itself without non-Arctic input. Culture, often defined as sets of rules and values shared by a given society, fares not much better in that respect, since all contemporary Arctic cultures are influenced by southern rules and values.

Arctic societies thus refer to groups ranging from co-residents of a settlement to ethnic groups and nations. Accordingly, Arctic cultures refer to the shared rules and values of these very diverse societies.

Finally, the notion of *identity* also has come to play a major role in assessing social and cultural developments in the Arctic in recent years. Identity refers to the ways in which individuals and groups perceive and act upon the social and cultural traditions they inhabit.

Within the diversity of cultural and social traditions in the Arctic, one can distinguish two broad types which correspond to two waves of colonization of the Arctic: One by the indigenous peoples, who established themselves in the Arctic millennia ago; The second by peoples from a European background, whose presence in the Arctic is much more recent and who remain closely connected to societies south of them.

Not all peoples residing in the Arctic today fit into one of these two categories. There are also peoples of mixed cultural ancestries, but with distinct identities and cultures, such as the Métis of Canada and the Kamchadals and other “old-settler” groups in Russia. And there are also some relatively recent colonizers of other than European background, such as the Sakha (Yakuts).

*Indigenous?*

As discussed in *Chapter 1. Introduction*, Arctic countries have different words to designate the peoples who were already established at the time people of European tradition came. This chapter uses the word indigenous as a common term, defined as follows:

Indigenous peoples are those peoples who were marginalized when the modern states were created and identify themselves as indigenous peoples. They are associated with specific territories to which they trace their histories. They exhibit one or more of the following characteristics:

- they speak a language that is different from that of the dominant group(s),
- they are being discriminated in the political system,
- they are being discriminated within the legal system,
- their cultures diverge from that of the remaining society,
- they often diverge from the mainstream society in their resource use by being hunters and gatherers, nomads, pastoralists, or swidden farmers,
- they consider themselves and are considered by others as different from the rest of the population. (1).

In addition, there is a third layer: recent immigrants who were born and educated outside the Arctic and who live by the cultural and social standards of their region of origin. Many return south after a few years, while some stay and integrate into the surrounding societies. In some areas of the Arctic, this recent immigration has come to constitute the majority of the population. This has been a particularly striking feature of the Russian Arctic throughout Soviet times. Even more recently, the countries of origin of these newcomers are becoming increasingly diverse.

Although this chapter will address all Arctic residents, more attention will be devoted to indigenous societies and cultures than to later immigrants. There are two main reasons for this. One is that, except in Europe, the literature describing social and cultural processes in the Arctic from a local perspective has focused on indigenous communities. Although more recent settlers figure prominently in national statistics, qualitative data about their communities are rare. For groups of mixed cultural ancestry, as well as for recent immigrants, data

are even less readily available. The other reason is that rapid social and cultural change has affected small-scale indigenous societies much more heavily than other groups.

## Rapid cultural and social change: traditions in transition

Although change has been and remains a constant in the Arctic, the nature and the rapidity of the changes vary widely over space and time. Social and cultural change started accelerating around World War II, more so in the Arctic than in many other areas of the world. In its first phase, state encroachment affected the autonomy of indigenous peoples. This was followed by successful struggles to regain control over local affairs but under wholly new circumstances that included not only traditions but also modernity and globalization. This section focuses on how this encroachment has affected Arctic societies.

### *Change: a constant in the Arctic*

Human colonization of the Arctic is comparatively recent. It started at least fifteen millennia ago. Since then, marked fluctuations of the environment, some of which have been at least as rapid as those predicted for current global warming, have regularly forced human populations to adapt. In such an environment, they had to perpetually fine-tune their adaptations, or risk dying out. There are many such examples in the archaeological and historical record.

Other “internal” drivers for social and cultural change were technological innovations, such as dog traction, whale-hunting gear and know-how, and intensive reindeer herding, as well as contacts with other populations.

A major outside source of change was the increased colonization of indigenous lands by people of a European cultural tradition. The wave of colonization started before the end of the first millennium, and despite setbacks such as the demise of the Norse in Greenland around the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it increased exponentially. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it included all regions of the Arctic that were inhabited by indigenous peoples. By the outbreak of World War II, nations centered outside the Arctic had established sovereignty over most of the Arctic.



compiled by:  
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**Arctic peoples subdivided according to language families**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:grey; border:1px solid black;"></span> <b>Indo-European family</b>           | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> <b>Isolated languages</b><br>(Ketic and Yukagir) |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:grey; border:1px solid black;"></span> Germanic branch                       | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> <b>Eskimo-Aleut family</b>                       |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> <b>Uralic family</b>                | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightblue; border:1px solid black;"></span> Inuit group (of Eskimo br.)                       |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> Finno-Ugric branch                  | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightblue; border:1px solid black;"></span> Yupik group (of Eskimo br.)                       |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightyellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> Samoyedic branch               | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:darkblue; border:1px solid black;"></span> Aleut branch                                       |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightyellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> <b>Altaic family</b>           | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:darkblue; border:1px solid black;"></span> <b>Na-Dene family</b>                              |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:tan; border:1px solid black;"></span> Turkic branch                          | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightpink; border:1px solid black;"></span> Athabaskan branch                                 |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:tan; border:1px solid black;"></span> Tungusic branch                        | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightpink; border:1px solid black;"></span> Eyak branch                                       |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> <b>Chukotko-Kamchatkan fam.</b> | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightpink; border:1px solid black;"></span> Tlingit branch                                    |

- Arctic circle
- Arctic boundary according to AMAP
- Arctic boundary according to AHDR

**Notes:**  
 Areas show colours according to the original languages of the respective indigenous peoples, even if they do not speak their languages today.  
 Overlapping populations are not shown. The map does not claim to show exact boundaries between the individual language groups.  
 Typical colonial populations, which are not traditional Arctic populations, are not shown (Danes in Greenland, Russians in the Russian Federation, non-native Americans in North America).  
 (95)

**Population concentration and loss of autonomy, ca. 1940-1970**

The World War II era can be considered a watershed in the history of the Arctic, initiating social and cultural change at an unprecedented rate. The point of departure for this accelerated change was neither a pristine indigenous life in isolation from the rest of the world, since such

conditions did not prevail anywhere by that time, nor a long-standing period of stability or slow evolution. But for many peoples, it meant a change to totally new concepts and living habits. Before World War II, many Arctic societies led a relatively autonomous way of life based mostly on hunting, herding, fishing, and gathering, where kinship represented the main and almost sole focus of social organization.

The war itself had consequences everywhere in the Arctic. Greenland, as well as Iceland, were cut off from Denmark and had more contacts with North America, whereas the Faroe Islands were occupied by the British. Vast areas of the Saami homeland in Norway and Finland were burned by the retreating Germans. Later they were rebuilt according to new standards (2). The Skolt Saami left their homeland in Russia to settle in Finland (3) Alaska saw an increase in military activity following the Japanese invasion in the Aleutians. The Canadian Arctic and the Asian part of the Russian Arctic were less directly affected, but in all regions, the war ended the Arctic's relative isolation from centers further south.

The subsequent Cold War (1948-1988) perpetuated political interest and military presence. In addition to the increased military activity, there were several aspects of encroaching modernity that drove this early phase of rapid transformation. One of them was the rush to exploit the non-renewable resources of the North, generally with little regard for environmental consequences or impacts on indigenous societies. Another major factor of change was the spread of welfare state policies. Directed at indigenous peoples, they came out as paternalistic attempts at "social engineering." In several countries, the goal was to assimilate the indigenous populations as exemplified by the policies of Norwegianization (4), Russification (5), and Canadianization (6). In the Soviet Arctic, planned social change was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology (5). As described in more detail in *Chapter 5. Political Systems*, struggles for emancipation and local empowerment were already emerging in some regions before the war, beginning with the islands of the Atlantic.

At ground level, changes were numerous and pervasive. The influx of immigrants from the south accelerated. In indigenous communities, they came to fill the newly opened positions as administrators, teachers, health professionals, construction workers, etc. Most immigrants considered themselves superior to locals, at least implicitly. They enjoyed higher pay and a better standard of living. The influx of immigrants was especially strong in the Russian North, where the ratio of natives to incomers was transposed, going from 10:1 to 1:10 in some regions. In Greenland, the Danish population increased nine-fold between 1950 and 1975,

when it amounted to almost 20% of the total population of the island (7).

In all parts of the Arctic, the population became less scattered. This centralization involved relocations of whole groups of peoples, some of which were imposed. Previously nomadic peoples became sedentary, and "unprofitable" settlements were closed down. With a few exceptions (e.g. the Nenets reindeer herders of the Yamal Peninsula in Russia), centralization of nomadic populations was achieved by 1970. In the centralization process, new communities were built where many functions were controlled by incomers. A trend of urbanization was also emerging with people concentrating in a smaller number of larger settlements and towns.

In the Canadian Arctic, it remains a matter of contention whether the process of concentration was imposed or corresponded to the wishes of those involved. In many regions it entailed both aspects to some degree, often in succession (8). Although many individuals felt helpless and behaved passively in the midst of these transformations in and around their lives, local leadership developed, and these new leaders eventually took over responsibilities in the community.

Partly as a consequence of the availability and the form of new housing, household size and composition tended to shift from the extended to the nuclear family (9). In Greenland for instance, the average household size decreased from 7.6 in 1901 to 5.3 in 1955 and 2.6 in 2003 (10 -11). In some communities, there has been a development towards "matri-focal" families, revolving around a woman, rather than a couple, as head of household. Around 1975, 20% of all Asian Yuit (Russian Eskimo) families were headed by women, while about a third of the males aged 25-45 remained single (12).

Mandatory school education was introduced among some indigenous peoples in the 1950s or 1960s. For some children it meant attending boarding schools away from their families, where they were inculcated with foreign languages and cultures. In the process, many lost fluency in their mother tongue and were alienated from their families and communities.

Health care services were vastly improved with life in settled communities. As a result, mortality decreased while life expectancy and fertility increased, causing rapid population growth. At the same time, traditional healers,

### *Growing up with change in the Canadian Arctic*

Alexina Kublu tells of her experience of growing up in Igloodik and in Igluligaarjuk (Chesterfield Inlet), where she attended residential school from 1962 to 1967. She is currently Senior Justice of the Peace in Nunavut and chair of the Akitsiraq Law School Society.

*The first part of my childhood was spent close to my parents' families. As my grandparents didn't live at the same place we were surrounded either by paternal aunts and uncles or maternal aunts and uncles and their cousins as well as all my cousins wherever we happened to be. As children there was a "blanket" treatment of us yet we were treated as individuals. There were aunts and uncles to dole out affection, others to discipline, others who were childhood friends and others who ordered you around to help out with chores and you felt proud to be considered able to help.*

*The latter part of my childhood was spent in the residential school in Igluligaarjuk. You all got to do*

*chores as they were assigned and not because someone asked that you do it. You did not feel the pride of accomplishment but felt the wrath of failure to do so. The life you lived at home and the life at the school were so alien to one another you lived them separately and did not incorporate the lifestyle of one with the lifestyle of the other.*

From 1960 to 1987, the Inuit population of Igloodik grew from 87 to 806, the White from 4 to 48, ten-fold increases. The percentage of extended households decreased from 76% to 10%, to the profit of nuclear households. Many jobs were created. Simultaneously, the importance of hunting decreased. Alcohol and drug consumption increased, as well as criminality and cases of suicides (15).

Igloodik (2003 population: 1457) is home to Isuma Productions, which produced Zacharias Kunuk's internationally acclaimed movie "Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner" (2000).

healing methods, and midwifery were marginalized.

In some regions, wage employment and a cash economy were introduced when people settled into modern communities. This meant that kinship ties ceased to be the exclusive focus for economic cooperation. Moreover, unemployment also became a feature of life in settled communities, exacerbated by the rapid population growth. As it became increasingly possible to make a livelihood from activities other than traditional ones, the share of traditional activities in the local economies decreased. The symbolic value of hunting, fishing, and herding has been maintained or even increased (13), however which is not surprising given that work and subsistence activities are a central aspect of identity (14).

Transport and communications improved at an increased pace from the time of World War II. Television has become available in most Arctic households in recent decades, with its attendant exposure to new lifestyles and role models.

Most of the social and cultural changes in the post-war era were directed by government agencies. Many of them, such as the provision of education, health care, and welfare, had ethical justifications. Even though some of these changes were for the better, the way they were imposed led to a loss of control over local affairs, and over collective as well as individual destinies. In small northern settlements, local peo-

ple could not escape the impression that they were watching helplessly while things were being done around them and "for" them. As former Greenland Home Rule Premier Jonathan Motzfeldt has put it: "... things were administered by Danes, decisions were taken by Danes, and problems were solved by Danes. [...] The common Greenlander had a feeling of standing outside, of being observer of an enormous development, which s/he did not have the necessary background to understand" (16).

Even a seemingly more benign intervention, such as the imposition of a Euro-American system for family names among the Canadian Inuit during the 1960s and 1970s, introduced important departures in representations of selves and social relations (17-19). The feelings of estrangement caused by the loss of control over changes in turn contributed to the rise of social problems, such as suicide, violence, law-breaking, and alcohol abuse.

The decades around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were for many northern indigenous peoples the period in their histories when they had the least autonomy, and, simultaneously, were undergoing the farthest-reaching changes they had ever experienced. Some have evoked the notion of a "lost" or "broken generation" to describe the group of people who lived "between two worlds", not really belonging to either of the two, and who may have felt as little connected to their parents and grandparents as to their own children.

### ***Regaining autonomy and reaffirming cultures and identities***

In all of the Arctic countries whose governments were willing to negotiate land claims and measures of autonomy, indigenous peoples were quick to present coherent demands that reflected their cultures and aspirations. This demonstrates that indigenous cultures and identities had not been entirely crushed. Even during the “dark years” of directed change, an elite was able to emerge which was conversant with, if not at ease in, “both worlds.” These developments took place within the framework of nation states and in contexts of increasing economic dependence and encroaching globalization.

With the hope of regaining some autonomy came the reaffirmation of identities, cultures, and sometimes also languages. As Nikolai Vakhtin puts it about Soviet and post-Soviet Chukotka, “the horrible totalitarian mincing machine in which the Chukotkan minorities found themselves in the 1950s-1980s could decrease their ability to resist, could decrease the linguistic and cultural differences between them, but was far from what is needed to wipe those differences (and those people) out. As soon as the leveling pressure went down, immediately new groups, new types of individual and group identities, even new languages, began to appear.” (20) Although it does make reference to roots in the past, cultural reaffirmation is not a “return to traditions” in the sense of a simple reactivation of previously existing customs. It is an active re-creation of culture and symbols, whose functions in current contexts differ from the ones they had a few decades earlier.

The context for this cultural reaffirmation is one in which most indigenous peoples have been living since at least the 1970s in settled communities, surrounded by most of the paraphernalia of modern life in the way of household goods, communication technology, modes of transportation, but also community committees, local schools, recreation, etc. Many of the challenges they face are therefore new ones. Social unity has been harder to achieve in communities that bring together groups that had little to do with each other in earlier times. Societies have also become more complex and more differentiated, and are segmented along new lines, such as lifestyle patterns, political parties, and religious denominations. Social stratification has increased. Sharing networks are affected. And, as much as anywhere else,

gender roles are in the process of redefinition (see *Chapter 11. Gender Issues*).

As we discuss later in the chapter, some indigenous languages have disappeared, but others are being revived, and others still are as healthy as ever. Group identities have shifted, but their distinctness has been preserved (21). World views and spiritualities are reaffirmed. The arts are flourishing, often as vehicles as much for collective as for personal identity.

More and more indigenous persons live in urban centers outside the Arctic. More often than not, they expand the borders of their home communities rather than getting “lost in the crowd.” Less trivial than it seems, food tastes have changed (22), which has an impact on the degree of local renewable resources exploitation, on the dependence on imported foods, and on household activities and budgets.

### ***How much change can cultures and societies take?***

Change is an aspect of all societies and cultures. It is more “normal” and in that sense “healthier” than stagnation. Traditions come, transform themselves, and some eventually pass. Obsolete elements of cultures are discarded and new ones emerge. One must question the tendency to consider change as a threat to some immemorial “tradition” in discussing indigenous societies, when it is called progress in western societies.

How the people affected by changes perceive them (the so-called *emic* perspective) determines how they react to them. Research so far has focused too little on local perceptions of changes. One may strongly suspect that the most damaging aspect of change is the feeling of not being able to control it locally, neither individually, nor collectively as a society. This means that attempts at “planned social change” from the outside are doomed to create as many problems as they solve, even if the planning rests on pertinent scientific knowledge.

The occurrence of massive changes in all aspects of life simultaneously with symptoms of cultural and social distress (e.g. violence, suicide, alcoholism) has made many people suspect a causal association between the two: the symptoms are seen as the consequence of the inability to cope with the changes. Little research has been done so far, however, into what may be considered “overly” rapid transitions and the accumulated effects of different types of changes. Therefore, we still lack convincing explanations of why problems erupt when and

### *Icelandic culture coping with a rapidly growing tourism industry*

In the past decade, Iceland has gone through profound structural changes, from an economy dominated by primary production to a more service dominated economy where tourism is becoming a major factor. Almost every municipality and rural community has expectations towards growth in tourism and tries to formulate a strategy either for the visualization of heritage in the area in forms of museums or other recreational resources, or of identifying special attributes embodied in the community or surrounding area. Elements of an earlier vivid and now declining culture are turned into a commercial product for tourists and other amenity land users. This is not only an economic change but to a high degree also a change in mental and occupational focus, which impacts on the creation of rural identities and reshapes historical and cultural conscious-



PHOTO: SIGRÍÐUR G. ASGEIRSDÓTTIR  
Tourism in Iceland

ness. It is too early to predict whether this will turn out to become a long-term sustainable foundation for the survival of small communities and rural areas.

*Anna Karlsdóttir, University of Iceland.*

where they do, such as in the traditional and isolated communities rather than in larger centers where the pace of change is more rapid (23). We are even less able to predict the outcomes of change. For example, local empowerment does not in and of itself reduce vulnerabilities. This is illustrated not only by the fact that suicide rates are comparably high in Nunavut and in Greenland, although these two regions have followed quite different historical developments but also by the fact that rates have continued to increase ever after the introduction of self-government (24-25). (This is further explored in Chapter 9. *Human Health and Well-being*.)

Health specialists tend to explain the symptoms in terms of response to “acculturative stress” (26), i.e. a view of indigenous cultures and identities as bound to erode into those of the mainstream. This does not fit the fact that Arctic indigenous cultures and societies have proven to be resistant and resilient.

### ***Towards a common Arctic culture and identity?***

Recently, the spread of information and communication technology has given rise to new blends of traditions and elements of “world culture,” in music and arts, clothing fashions, food, etc. This coexistence of traditions and modernity is currently observed among many indigenous peoples worldwide. It includes renewal and in some cases reinforcement of ethnic identities, as well as an instrumentalization and commoditization of cultures. This trend is probably stronger in the Arctic than in poorer

regions of the world because of the generally high incomes and good communications networks.

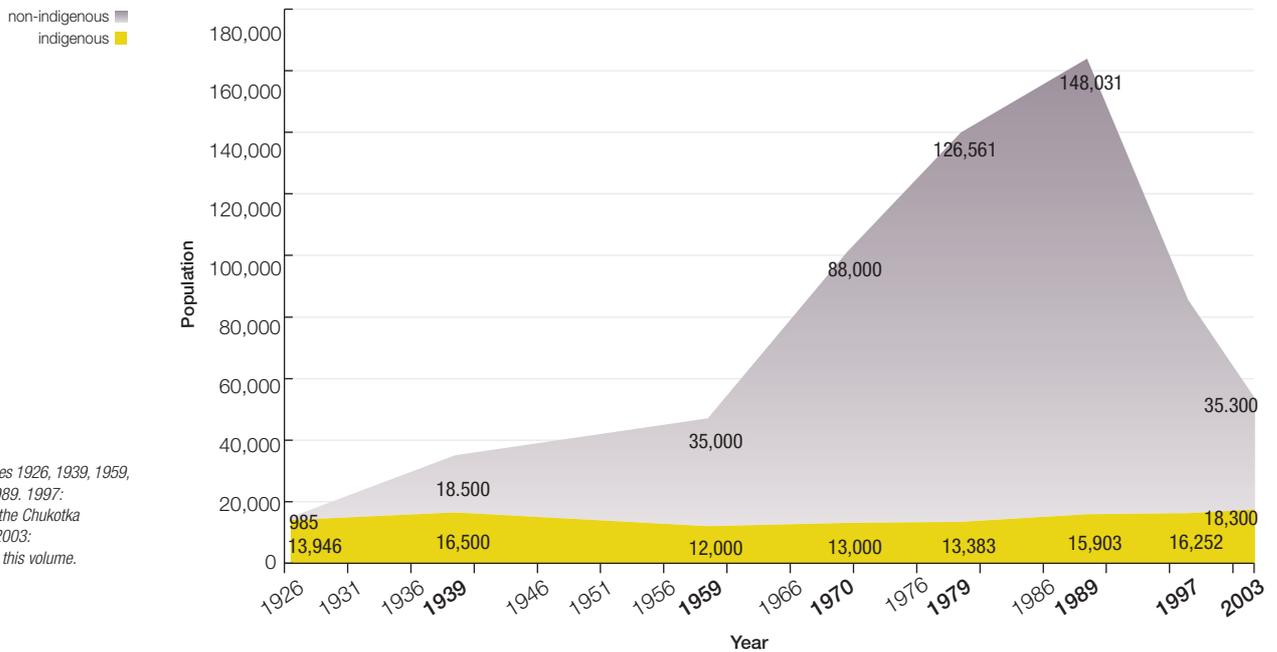
These new blends illustrate Marshall Sahlins’ assertions, based on recent research in many parts of the Third and Fourth Worlds, that peoples around the world see no opposition between tradition and change, indigenous culture and modernity, townsmen and tribesmen. Culture is *not* disappearing, he concludes: rather, it is modernity that becomes indigenized (27).

In the North, this process includes elements of an emerging Arctic identity. The Arctic is generally considered as a specific geographic and cultural area and within each of the countries that straddle the boundaries of the Arctic, “nordicity” (28) emerges as an element of regional identity. In some cases, indigenous peoples may downplay their local identity and emphasize a common indigenous background. For example, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Saami Council have fostered, respectively, common Inuit and Saami identities. In some regions, indigenous and non-indigenous identities are converging. Increased cooperation across the Arctic may foster the emergence of a feeling of community throughout the region.

### ***Circumpolar synchronicity despite short-term offsets***

Within the overall trend of rapid social and cultural change, there is variation across the Arctic as to when these changes occurred. In Fennoscandia, indigenous peoples’ contact with people of European origin started a millennium

Population of Chukotka 1926–2003



Sources: censuses 1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989. 1997: estimates from the Chukotka administration 2003: Bogoyavlenskiy, this volume.

ago, whereas this happened only a century ago in remote areas of the Canadian Arctic.

Developments in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian Arctic have been quite distinct. Wide-scale changes started already a decade before World War II, with massive efforts to exploit non-renewable resources, importing immigrant populations for that purpose. In addition, the state implemented ideologically driven experiments aimed at transforming society, especially with regard to indigenous peoples. It was not until 1990 that Russian indigenous peoples were allowed to create their own independent national organization: the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON). Small indigenous peoples of the Russian North are now better connected with developments abroad than they were in Soviet times, but the evolution of their situation still remains quite distinct from other circumpolar regions. Except in resource rich regions, this situation is characterized by dis-investment from the state, which previously played a central economic role. This has caused severe impoverishment and social and cultural disruptions. In addition, there has been a massive out-migration of recent immigrants (29-31). Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian state has cut subsidies to its Arctic provinces, which has been very effective in inducing newcomers to leave as in Chukotka. Without such economic (dis-)incentives they tend to stay: Norilsk is a case in point (32). Another significant area of contrast is that where-

as most parts of the Arctic were Christianized before World War II, this process only began a decade ago in Northeastern Russia.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, differential access to self-government introduced further divergences in social and cultural change across the Arctic.

### **Trend summary**

In spite of some differences in content and the timing of changes across the Arctic, some trends of the past few decades are amazingly similar and synchronous. Arctic cultures and societies are rapidly being transformed. After World War II, the rate of change accelerated and paternalistic welfare state policies were imposed. Such planned change gave rise to hitherto unknown social problems. Later, as the pressure to assimilate decreased, cultures and identities started to reaffirm themselves. This revival of tradition occurs in new forms that accommodate modernity and incipient globalization.

## **Cultural trends: languages, religions, world views, and art**

The rapid social changes that have taken place since World War II, coming on top of the fact that many Arctic societies remained isolated from other parts of the world for so long, have had profound effects on cultural expressions such as languages, religions, world views, and

art. This section provides a survey and some examples of the current situation across the Arctic. A recurring theme is again the merging of traditions and new influences.

### Languages: losses and reversed language shifts

The circumpolar North today is dominated by languages that originated far south of the Arctic. Russian is currently the most wide-spread language, followed by English, Norwegian, Icelandic, Swedish, Finnish, and other Scandinavian languages. The gradual spread of

these languages, brought to pass by the Euro American colonial expansion of the past millennium, peaked in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of mandatory schooling for all Arctic residents. Many of the over 40 indigenous languages, which had characterized the linguistic space of the Arctic for centuries or even millennia, became threatened by extinction or insignificance after World War II. Icelandic and Faroese, which despite their southern roots can be said to have developed into their present form *in situ*, are exceptions. Apart from their ambiguous status as being indigenous to the Arctic, howev-

Language Name/s	Total Population	Number of Speakers	Language Retention (% of total population)	Language Family	Country/ies Spoken
Ahtna	500	80	16	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA
Aleut	2,200	305	14	Aleut branch of Eskimo-Aleut	Russia, USA
Alutiiq	3,000	400	13	Yupik group of Eskimo branch of Eskimo-Aleut	USA
Central Alaskan Yupik	21,000	10,000	48	Yupik group of Eskimo branch of Eskimo-Aleut	USA
Chipewyan	6,000	4,000	67	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada
Chukchi	15,000	10,000	67	Chukotko-Kamchatkan	Russia
Deg Hit'an (Ingalik)	275	40	15	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA
Dena'ina	900	75	8	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA
Dogrib	2,400	2,300	96	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada
Dolgan	7,000	5,700	81	Turkic branch of Altaic	Russia
Enets	200	50	25	Samoyedic branch of Uralic	Russia
Even	17,000	7,500	44	Tungusic branch of Altaic	Russia
Evenk	30,000	9,000	30	Tungusic branch of Altaic	Russia
Eyak	50	1	2	Eyak branch of Na-Dene	USA
Faroese	47,000	?	100	Germanic branch of Indo-European	Faroe Islands (Denmark)
Finnish	ca. 5,000,000	?	100	Finno-Ugric branch of Uralic	Finland, Sweden, Norway
Gwich'in	3,000	700	23	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada, USA
Hän	300	15	5	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada, USA
Holikachuk	200	12	6	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA
Icelandic	290,000	?	100	Germanic branch of Indo-European	Iceland
Inuit	90,000	74,500	83	Inuit group of Eskimo branch of Eskimo-Aleut	Canada, Greenland (Denmark), USA
Kaska	900	400	44	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada
Karelian	131,000	62,500	48	Finno-Ugric branch of Uralic	Russia
Kerek	400	2	1	Chukotko-Kamchatkan	Russia
Ket	1,100	550	50	Ketic	Russia
Khanty	21,000	12,000	57	Finno-Ugric branch of Uralic	Russia
Komi	344,500	242,500	70	Finno-Ugric branch of Uralic	Russia
Koryak	9,000	2,700	30	Chukotko-Kamchatkan	Russia
Koyukon	2,300	300	13	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA
Mansi	8,200	3,100	38	Finno-Ugric branch of Uralic	Russia
Nenets	35,000	28,500	81	Samoyedic branch of Uralic	Russia
Nganasan	1,300	500	38	Samoyedic branch of Uralic	Russia
Norwegian	ca. 4,500,000	?	100	Germanic branch of Indo-European	Norway, Sweden
Saami group	57,200	26,100	46	Finno-Ugric branch of Uralic	Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia
Sakha (Yakut)	382,000	358,500	94	Turkic branch of Altaic	Russia
Selkup	3,600	1,570	44	Samoyedic branch of Uralic	Russia
Siberian Yupik	2,400	1,370	57	Yupik group of Eskimo branch of Eskimo-Aleut	Russia, USA
Slavey	5,200	3,900	75	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada
Swedish	ca. 9,000,000	?	100	Germanic branch of Indo-European	Sweden, Finland
Tagish	400	2	1	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada
Tanacross	220	65	30	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA
Tlingit	11,000	575	5	Tlingit branch of Na-Dene	USA, Canada
Tutchone	2,500	400	16	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	Canada
Tanana	940	210	22	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA, Canada
Upper Kuskokwim	160	40	25	Athabaskan branch of Na-Dene	USA
Yukagir	900	70	8	Yukagir	Russia

Source: Krauss 1997: 32-34; except for Dolgan, Karelian, Komi, and Sakha: All-Soviet Census for 1989. No language retention data available for Faroese, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish (population figures: Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2003). (95)

er, these languages are also characterized by a retention rate of almost 100%.

The state of indigenous languages throughout the circumpolar North varies significantly. Many are characterized by a dramatic loss of speakers, including many of the Saami dialects/languages, Yukagir, Aleut, and several Athabaskan languages in Alaska and Canada. Other indigenous languages seem to be in relatively good shape. These include Northern Saami, Tundra Nenets, Sakha, Chukchi, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, central and eastern Canadian and Greenlandic Inuktitut (the eastern variants of the Inuit language), Chipewyan, Dogrib, and Slavey. One obvious reason for this difference relates to demographic factors. It is not surprising, for example, that the language of the Sakha, who number over 400,000 (although only a small portion of them live in the Arctic), is in much better shape than the language of the Yukaghir of whom there are only slightly more than 1,000 people. A variety of other factors,

including government policies, ethnic prestige, and local leadership, have also played a role in language retention.

Government policies throughout the circumpolar North were generally indifferent, sometimes even hostile to the preservation of indigenous languages well into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The situation in the Soviet Union was different and asynchronous with other parts of the Arctic. On the one hand, indigenous languages of the North were actively supported back in the 1920s. On the other hand, local initiatives to battle language loss had little chance under the authoritarian conditions of pre-perestroika politics. Danish Government policies regarding the Greenlandic language though long based on paternalistic attitudes represent probably the longest history of language preservation, with the result that the Inuit language – particularly as spoken in Greenland – is one of the more positive examples of Arctic language retention today. The box below describes this case in more detail.

#### *Hopes and motivations for the Greenlandic Inuit language*

Greenlandic is part of the Inuit language and of the Eskaleut linguistic stock. The Inuit language is spread from the eastern tip of Siberia and Aleutian Archipelago through the whole Arctic coastline of North America, the Labrador Peninsula, and Greenland. The basic grammatical structures, the phonological and cultural base are virtually the same. Regionally different external influences through European contact led to distinct educational policies for each area. The Greenlandic experience was “softer” than those of Inuit in other areas. Not only were the Dano-Norwegian policies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century “nicer,” but missionaries tried to reach the Inuit in their own language, and trade relations with outside merchants became more influential.

Certain intellectual trends also influenced the policies of Denmark towards the Greenlanders. For example, between the 1840s and the 1860s, progressive administrators and young intellectuals facilitated the development of Greenlandic literacy and educational materials. S. Kleinschmidt developed a standard system of spelling for the Greenlandic Inuit language, issued a Greenlandic dictionary, and provided a full translation of the Bible, while H. Rink published traditional Greenlandic stories and tales. At the same time, the first Greenlandic periodical was published and the principle of political self-government was gradually introduced.

A new era started in the 1950s. Greenland was incorporated into the Danish jurisdictional sphere

on Danish terms and Greenlandic was challenged by the massive influx of the Danish language and Danish educational practices. There were cases when Greenlandic parents encouraged their children to speak Danish even though they did not understand Danish themselves. This period lasted until Greenland Home Rule was introduced in 1979. The new political situation fostered the stabilization of the Greenlandic Inuit language. The Home Rule Government was in charge of education in Greenland and the Greenland Home Rule Charter made Greenlandic the main language, while providing for Danish language teaching and permitting the official use of both languages. In the meantime, a new phonemic orthography (a writing system which tries to achieve a close resemblance between spoken sound units and written symbols) had been introduced in 1973, which made it much easier to write in Greenlandic.

Poetry and music are now blossoming and literature is being revitalized. The Greenland Home Rule Government established a Greenland Language Committee, a Greenland Place Names Authority, and a Greenland Committee on Personal Names. Those committees are responsible for tracking language and naming trends and also collaborate with similar authorities in neighboring and Arctic areas.

*Carl-Christian Olsen (Puju), Greenland Home Rule Language Commission*

Contact between indigenous and outside languages in the Arctic has been going on for centuries (33). One result has been the development of a number of pidgin and contact languages (34), as well as of one “mixed language,” namely Copper Island Aleut (35). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, language contact reached a new level of intensity, leading to one-sided language shifts in favor of southern languages promoted by schools and government agencies (36). Some people became bilingual, but it should be pointed out that most Arctic communities had been bi- or even multilingual long before southern states encroached onto their territories.

Within the general picture of language loss, there are fortunately also examples of reversed language shift, where indigenous languages are regaining ground. This includes the Saami language, where the case study presented in the box below illustrates how political, social, and cultural empowerment enables language revitalization. A similar development occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when political and romantic nationalism stimulated a revival of standardized and purified Icelandic (37) and Faroese (38). These examples confirm an earlier (39) observation that language



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NELSON H. GRAYBURN

shift is not about languages but are a social, political and economic phenomenon.

An important question is how individual speech communities deal with language shift and loss. Does the apparent link of language and identity lead to the disappearance of ethnic and other group identities as a result of language shift processes? Luckily, there are communities and groups, such as the Inuktitut

Camp leader Taiara, on right, visits his younger brother, Mugaluk Pallayak in Salluit, northern Quebec, May, 1964. On the wall is an example of the syllabic writing system used by Canadian Inuit. Loosely translated, it reads: “Anyone drinking is forbidden to enter this house when I am out hunting.”

### *Saami language shift*

Saami is a Finno-Ugric language and belongs to the Uralic family. Recent estimates indicate that there are about 38,000 Saami speakers. There are somewhere between 50,000 – 100,000 Saami individuals, and in many Saami regions, there are more people identifying themselves as Saami than there are Saami speakers (40). This is particularly the case in many coastal and fjord areas of Finnmark and Troms, Norway. The Saami people have been subjected to assimilation policies. For example, “Norwegianization” was an official policy of the Norwegian Government that lasted from the 1880s until the 1970s, which led to a language shift from Saami to Norwegian. However, during the 1970s, a Saami movement gradually managed to influence minority policies in Norway, and reversing the language loss had high priority. The role of language revival in this culture-political process is well illustrated by the following episode.

In one of the coastal Saami villages, where Saami is spoken as the mother tongue mainly by those over 50, a son came to his mother, who was studying Saami at the university, and said: “Do I have to go to the university to learn Saami?” (41). The mother realized that this should not be the case, which became a turning point for providing Saami as a subject in schools in a region where it had never been offered before. The pupils expressed the

desire to learn, some of the parents brought the initiative to the school authorities, and the community became the source for teaching materials. There was a shortage of local written material. At the same time, there was a rich oral tradition in the region held by the elders, and the schools developed a program based on the local community, its history, and cultural traditions. The pupils produced their own textbooks on various themes for their excursions and fieldwork in the community. Their work resulted in a collection of traditional oral material that would otherwise have been lost. Open community gatherings were held to discuss the various themes. The information gathered by the pupils in their communities was brought back to the community and the informants, who got the chance to give feedback. Direct contact between school and community was established (42).

The efforts of the Saami movement during the 1970s and 1980s have borne fruit. The revitalization of the Saami culture and reversing of the language shift slowly evolved from the core Saami district to regions where the Saami language for decades seemed to have disappeared from the public spheres.

*Gunn-Britt Retter*, Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat

### *Aleuts and the Russian Orthodox Church*

Russian Orthodoxy has been a prominent part of Aleut life since approximately the 1790s, when the first missionaries arrived and established churches in most Aleut communities. While some researchers have highlighted the devastating effects of the first fifty years of Russian-Aleut contact (1741 – 1790s) and the role that the church played in imposing new social forms, religious institutions, and material culture, others have pointed to the similarities between the Aleut pre-contact religion and Orthodoxy as the reason for the acceptance of the new religion.

The Russian Orthodox Church triggered undeniable accomplishments in education and literacy by supporting elements of traditional Aleut culture and by preserving their language. This enabled a peaceful intertwining of both cultures. For the majority of contemporary American Aleuts, the Russian Orthodox Church is woven into the fabric of their lives. They are devoted followers and believe it was embraced by their ancestors over two hundred years ago. Many communities carefully maintain graceful church buildings that are not only places of worship but also symbols of Aleut culture.

The Commander Island Aleuts traveled a different historical path. Their islands were resettled from the islands of Atka and Attu in the western Aleutians in the 1820s. These islands were not

included in Russia's sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, and the people were separated from their original communities. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, they were converted to atheism by the Bolsheviks. When the Orthodox Church began regaining influence in the changing post-Soviet society in 1990s, the Aleuts of Russia came full circle. The Russian Orthodox Church is not the only religion on the Commander Islands today and the impact of religion on the social lives of the Aleuts is still limited. An Orthodox parish was formed in the village of Nikolskoye in 2000 and an apartment converted into a "church." Occasionally, priests from nearby Petropavlovsk come to perform weddings, baptisms, and other functions.

An Aleut Elder, Vera Timoshenko, recalls how her mother told stories about the closely knit community of Nikolskoye and the role of the Orthodox Church in teaching people how to be humane and compassionate, industrious, and obeying. Vera wishes Nikolskoye would build a real church to revive the Orthodoxy that used to be a spiritual foundation of the Commander Island residents. She believes that the rebirth of the church may solve some of the social problems, such as alcoholism, and may teach people to treat each other with kindness and respect (52).

*Victoria Gofman*, Executive Director,  
Aleut International Association

speakers of Nunavik, where almost 100% of the population continues to speak the language and where it fulfills a variety of crucial functions in contemporary life (43). On the other hand, for many Alaskan Iñupiat, indigenous language use is limited to individual words and phrases and a particular intonation of Village English (44). Still, even in the Iñupiaq case, "language may continue to fulfill its [symbolic] functions even in its absence" (45). Thus, while many Arctic indigenous languages may lose some of their communicative functions to English, Russian, or other wide-spread languages, individuals and groups will continue to use language as symbolic markers of identity.

### ***Religions and world views: merger of traditions and Christianity***

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the vast majority of all Arctic residents are affiliated with some form of Christianity. Various Protestant churches dominate in northern Fennoscandia, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Alaska, and parts of northern Canada, while the Russian Orthodox Church is prevalent in the

Arctic regions of the Russian Federation and in addition has limited presence in Alaska and parts of Finland. Finally, the Roman Catholic Church is particularly strong in parts of Canada and Alaska. There is considerable variation as to when Christianity reached different parts of the Arctic. While it happened almost 1,000 years ago in northernmost Europe, the inhabitants of the Chukchi Peninsula in the Russian Far East had little first-hand experience with Christianity before the 1990s. Generally speaking, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were the major periods of religious conversion in the Arctic.

There have been various attempts to explain the rapid conversion of Arctic peoples to Christianity (46). Most authors agree that a combination of several factors is responsible. In some cases, such as the Lule Saami, (47) religious change was forced, but in many other cases indigenous agency was much more pronounced (48-49). The adoption of Christianity rarely, if ever, resulted in the simple replacement of one religious system by another. Instead, old and new beliefs were reintegrated within a new system that was both Christian and local (50). In

some cases, a religious tradition that was initially introduced through colonial expansion, not only became part of, but even reinforced the cultural identity of an indigenous people (51). One example of this can be found in the Aleutian Islands, as illustrated in the box on page 56.

Pre-Christian religious beliefs in the Arctic showed an abundance of local and regional variation. Nevertheless, two broad categories of belief systems – shamanism and animism – were characteristic of most of them (53). Shamanism, which is often perceived as the stereotypical “Arctic religion” by outsiders, was never a unified system of beliefs but a variety of localized practices with a limited number of common elements (54). Central was the figure of the shaman, sometimes male, sometimes female. Until recently, most Arctic communities had religious functionaries who were able to communicate with and “control” spirits. These shamans were engaged in healing and other activities aimed at improving communal and individual well-being. In the small-scale societies, these functionaries held extremely important social positions, which sometimes led to an abuse of power.

Animism is the belief that all natural phenomena, including human beings, animals, and plants, but also rocks, lakes, mountains, weath-

er, and so on, share the soul or spirit that energizes them. This notion is at the core of most Arctic belief systems (55), which means that humans are not the only ones capable of independent action. An innocuous-looking pond, for example, is just as capable of rising up to kill an unsuspecting person as is a human enemy. Another fundamental principle of Arctic religious life is the concept of humans being endowed with multiple souls. The notion that at least one soul must be “free” to leave the human body is basic to the shaman’s ability to communicate with the spirits.

Since the killing and consumption of animals provide the basic sustenance of circumpolar communities, ritual care-taking of animal souls is of utmost importance. Throughout the North, rituals in which animal souls are “returned” to their spirit masters are widespread, thus ensuring the spiritual cycle of life. While most animals of prey receive some form of ritual attention, there is significant variation in the elaboration of these ceremonies. One animal particularly revered throughout the North is the bear (56). Religious beliefs and practices in the Arctic have always been tied to the land and other aspects of the visible and invisible landscape and “sacred sites” are of particular importance for many Arctic residents (see box below).

#### *The conservation value of sacred sites: a case study from northern Russia*

Sacred sites are frequently located in regions where nature preservation has a high importance for the indigenous peoples: on highly efficient hunting grounds, in regions with rich biodiversity, along migration routes, in areas populated with rare species, as well as in areas with unique landscapes. The Program on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) recently supported a proposal by the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) to implement a pilot project in Russia to protect indigenous peoples’ sacred and ritual sites. The aim is to promote the preservation of indigenous cultural and spiritual heritage in the Arctic in sites that have sacred significance and enjoy high biodiversity and nature value, in order to demonstrate the necessity to incorporate sacred sites into the network of protected natural territories.

In addition to literature and archive reviews on topics such as indigenous culture, spiritual and religious representations, traditional knowledge, resource use, and environmental protection, experts from CAFF and the Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat have developed a questionnaire that regional researchers and local, indigenous assis-

tants have used to identify sacred sites. The results of the field studies were presented after discussions with the communities involved and the idea is to develop detailed recommendations to governmental authorities in Yamal and Kamchatka.

In the Tazovsky district of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, 263 sacred sites were identified, described, and mapped from interviews with indigenous elders. In the Koryak Autonomous Okrug, interviews in villages of the Oloyutorsky district helped describe and map 84 sacred sites. All questionnaires are archived in the RAIPON office and can be used for further research. The project will also identify ways to improve the protection of sacred sites. In conclusion, it seems that modern civilization is finally learning from indigenous peoples, who still worship Nature as a living being and consider contacts with the land to be the primary factor of survival. One of the project participants expressed it as follows: “Sacred sites mean environment, morality and veneration for life.”

*Mikhail Todyshev, Tamara Semenova et al.,  
RAIPON*

World views are not limited to the religious sphere. In fact, Arctic indigenous worldviews are characterized by their holistic nature, which means that they cannot be easily compartmentalized into religious, economic, social, or other components. Still, those aspects of Arctic world views such as “ecological” practices and beliefs that seemed non-religious to outside observers, faced less opposition from missionaries and state agencies than those more obviously

directed toward supernatural forces. While it would be naïve to assume that ecological beliefs and practices have not changed over time (57), the persistence of “subsistence ideologies” (58) is noteworthy. Contemporary Gwich’in thinking on “subsistence” illustrates how changing economic and religious conditions become integrated, as is described in detail in the box below.

### ***Art: functional beauty and commercial commodity***

Art in the Euro-american understanding of the term – objects made solely for aesthetic purposes – did not exist in the Arctic until recently. However, an archaeological record with wonderful sculptures and drawings shows that peoples in the Arctic have been making objects that were functional and aesthetically pleasing from time immemorial.

The first encounters with outsiders provided new possibilities for artistic expression, for example by the introduction of iron tools. However, Christian missionaries and government officials were often responsible for undermining the religious basis on which most of



PHOTO: SHARON

The Nenets sacred site Numt' khantorma.

#### *The worldview of Gwich'in subsistence*

Subsistence, narrowly defined, means to survive. To the Gwich'in, it means far more. Besides our spiritual relationship with God, the Creator of all that is, subsistence is the essence of the Gwich'in Nation. It is how we are sustained physically. It serves to support us economically and spiritually and is a key to our sustainability as a people. We are fed by plants and animals of the water, air, and land. Wood provides warmth and housing and the raw materials for tools and transportation devices, such as boats, snowshoes, and toboggans [runnerless sleds widely used by Native Americans].

The cash component of our economy is a small but important element of our subsistence lifestyle. We harvest wood, fur, and wildlife for barter or sale, mostly locally, but occasionally abroad. While some have assumed the role of full-time workers, many rely mostly on natural resources they catch or cut to meet their economic needs. Our spirituality is tied inextricably to the water, land, air, and resources within them. Our relationship to the spiritual realm has always been conducted through the beauty and awe of nature around us.

We are sustained as individuals and as a people through our subsistence lifestyle. Our resource-dependent culture is sustained by unfettered mobility and access to the resources we depend on. Unfettered mobility means that we pursue resources where they are most abundant and

where there is easy access. Unfettered access means that we gather resources when we need them and in the most economical and feasible manner possible. As we continue this lifestyle, we build and maintain our close and interdependent ties to the resources around us.

Gwich'in identity is a picture of integration with the land and resources. We see ourselves as an integral part of the diversity of the landscape. We believe that we would not be whole if we were separated from this land. We also believe that this land would not be whole without our presence. Our well-being is linked closely with our ability to live on and adapt with the land. Our family and land-based bonds are strengthened, restored, and invigorated as we continue our subsistence lifestyle. A tremendous sense of belonging and purpose is experienced as we survive on the land.

Subsistence encompasses all areas of Gwich'in life from the cradle to the grave. Gwich'in youth are trained early on the intricacies of our relationship with the natural environment and the harvesting, processing, and distribution of wild resources. These relationships are strengthened when our youth mature into leaders. The cycle of life continues as they pass what they have learned from their elders and through trial and error to their children and relatives.

*Craig L. Fleener, Gwich'in Council International*

Arctic artistic production was based. In certain areas, such as Greenland, art came under direct influence of European traditions early on. The Greenlander Aron of Kangeq (1822-1869) became known throughout Greenland and Denmark for his lively watercolors of Inuit village life and tales. In other areas, such as Alaska and many parts of Arctic Canada, handicraft items for trade provided a venue for “native art.” For example, delicate Athabascan beadwork on moose and caribou skin was popular throughout the Canadian and Alaskan Arctic and sub-arctic (59).

The entry of Arctic art into international markets is recent. One of the best-known examples is Canadian Inuit printmaking. In 1948, James Houston, a young non-Inuit Canadian artist, traveled north to the Nunavik village of Inukjuak for a sketching trip. Houston befriended the local Inuit, who coveted imported commodities. In trade, the Inuit brought him small



soapstone models of animals. Houston persuaded the Canadian Government to subsidize soapstone carving, which eventually became a multi-million-dollar enterprise for the Inuit. A decade later, Houston had moved to Cape Dorset on Baffin Island and repeated the same success story with printmaking. There, local Inuit artists submitted drawings for print making. The prints were marketed in North America and Europe, and the demand soon outstripped the supply. Thanks to worldwide media coverage, artists such as Kenojuak Ashevak and Pudlo Pudlat became famous with Inuit art collectors. Their works are in museums, art galleries, and private collections around the globe.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, indigenous art in the circumpolar North is thriving. Cruise-ship passengers and other tourists are eager to bring home objects which signify the exotic Arctic. In Alaska and coastal British Columbia, gift shops routinely sell copies of native art mass produced in Asia where labor is cheap (59). The authentic-

ity of indigenous art is to some extent protected by subsidized programs that provide artists with a sticker guaranteeing the authenticity of their work (60). However, more and more artists in the Arctic do not want to be seen as representatives of a particular ethnic tradition but as active participants in a globalized art scene. Whatever the position of the individual artist is, the fact remains that almost all indigenous art from the Arctic is today created for consumption in a culture that is economically and politically more powerful than theirs (61).

In recent years, the development of Arctic arts has gone far beyond the confines of what have been traditionally considered the fine arts. New art forms, such as literature and filmmaking, have become prominent. For example, the critically acclaimed film *Atanarjuat* (“The Fast Runner”) – written by Paul Apak Angilirq and directed by Zacharias Kunuk – is the first feature film made in Inuktitut. Moreover, writers such as the Chukchi novelist Yúriy Rytkeu have successfully transformed oral traditions into books which are read throughout the Arctic and non-Arctic world. Finally, new forms of Arctic music are developing, which incorporate traditional elements, such as the Sami *yoik*, and elements of western popular music.

### Similarities and differences with non-Arctic areas

Many of the cultural trends in the Arctic are the result of an unbalanced encounter between the cultural traditions of small-scale, hunter-gatherer societies and large-scale agricultural and industrial states. What is peculiar for the Arctic is that these encounters occurred relatively late, and that agricultural/industrial cultural values were imposed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The similarities to non-Arctic areas are greatest with those of other hunter-gatherers pushed aside by agriculturalists

‘The Enchanted Owl’  
Stonecut, 1960 by  
Kenojuak Ashevak.  
Reproduced with permis-  
sion of the West Baffin  
Eskimo Cooperative,  
Cape Dorset, Nunavut

Dawi Šuwá (The North  
Sings) in 1993



PHOTO: JORMA LEHTOLA

relatively recently, as in Australia and Amazonia. However, the indigenous groups in the Arctic are generally less impoverished than in their third-world counterparts. And even more important, they are part of larger societies that have come to support – by and large – a fuller implementation of civil and indigenous rights.

### *Variations within the Arctic*

Various parts of the Arctic came into intense contact with cultural agents from the outside at different points in time, which in turn often determines the extent to which non-Arctic elements have been incorporated into local cultural traditions. An example is the almost complete erasure of shamanistic elements from Saami worldviews as a result of almost 1,000 years of Christian influence. For current cultural processes in the North, government policies are among the most important variables. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the policies implemented by the Soviet Union differed most from other Arctic countries. Moreover, the cultural trajectories of Iceland and the Faroe Islands are noticeably different from the rest of the Arctic, primarily because of their different settlement history. While the cultural background of the ancestors of the contemporary Icelanders and Faroese was undoubtedly non-Arctic and agricultural, their descendants can point to over 1,000 years of cultural development in the Arctic.

### *Trend summary*

Outsiders and Arctic residents have been bemoaning “culture loss” for decades. This kind of judgment fits with the measurable decline in linguistic and religious knowledge, the fact that certain songs, dances and other art forms were pushed out of use, that languages became extinct, and worldviews replaced. However, “culture gain” and “culture creation” are also part of the cultural realities of the Arctic. Vocabularies, dialects, and languages were replaced by others, as were religions and art forms. Also, many aspects of Arctic worldviews have persisted despite processes of change and replacement. In the final analysis, the most important factor is whether the local community in question identifies with the cultural bricolage its residents hold today. Culture is intimately tied to identity and the major question is whether you can consider the language/s you speak and the spiritual entities you respect as “yours,” no matter where they “originated.”

## **Socialization, kinship, and new networks**

The accelerated change of recent decades has been accompanied by gaps in socialization and knowledge transmission between generations. Despite these difficulties, kinship and family relations, especially for indigenous peoples, have remained a central focus. This is true also in the growing Arctic towns and even in urban settings outside the Arctic homeland. Contemporary social networks also include connections between recent Arctic emigrants to more southerly cities and the Arctic communities they came from, as well as between southern immigrants to the Arctic and their social milieu of origin. This section highlights how current social change is shaped by relations between generations, kinship networks, urbanization, and the extension of local communities through emigration.

### *Social transmission of knowledge across generations*

Among indigenous peoples, recent changes have been so precipitous that they have been interpreted by outsiders as a break from the past, and in some cases even, as a breakdown of societies and cultures. In particular, transformations have been associated with major communication gaps between generations. These gaps were amplified by just as abrupt linguistic shifts, which are described in the previous section of this chapter. In many regions, children were in boarding schools where the only language they spoke was a language different from that of their people. Communication with their grandparents was thus often precluded. Arctic developments confirm the fact that minority languages can be dealt deadly blows in the space of one or two generations.

The break in socialization was accentuated when social changes and the school system disrupted important features of traditional education systems. For example, among many indigenous peoples, a great deal of learning occurs through observation and imitation rather than through the written or spoken word. Transmission of knowledge also takes place through the telling of myths and stories that implicitly teach lessons of life to those who are culturally trained to decode them (62-63). Furthermore, among Inuit for example, children are considered as autonomous beings, embodying the name soul of a deceased relative, whose

own volition should not be interfered with (64). These aspects of traditional culture have clashed with the recently introduced formal education and new role models. The introduction of culturally sensitive curricula should reconcile public education with other modes of socialization.

In some cases, parents thought they were improving their children's chances by letting them be educated in another culture and language, rather than encumbering them with a cultural heritage they were told was obsolete. Such a break in communication between generations, which was common in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues today in some regions, has created a bottleneck for social reproduction. Nowadays, parents struggle with the atomization of the household and the competition of television programs when they try to provide role models, while indigenous elders strive to reach out to youngsters. The box below illustrates this modern dilemma.

### ***Kinship and other social networks***

In the Arctic, kinship has for centuries determined the choice of marriage partners, where you live, and participation in subsistence and ritual activities. The definition of kinship and relatedness, however, does not give the same

emphasis to biological relatedness as exists in most Euro-american societies. Notions of kinship are flexible and in many cases, social relations are kinship relations. Kinship structures relations of cooperation and mutual aid, as well as those of avoidance and hierarchy.

The majority of indigenous Arctic societies (e.g., most Inuit and Yup'ik societies, the Saami, and the Chukchi) are characterized by bilateral principles of descent reckoning. This recognition of both the father's and the mother's kin provides ample means for including a wide range of people among those considered relatives. Patrilineal descent is found only among the Samoyedic, Tungusic and Turkic groups of northern and central Siberia, probably an influence from Central Asia. Matrilineal descent, on the other hand, is only prevalent in the northwestern part of the North American Arctic, among Athabaskan groups of Alaska and, to a lesser degree, Canada. Since matrilineal systems need fairly large groups of people to function properly, bilaterality among most Canadian Athabaskan groups could be due to resource pressures and population losses triggered by Euro-american expansion (67). Athabaskan kinship terminologies sometimes refer to particular cousins as spouses, thereby implying cultural

#### *Parenting and counseling the young: voices from Nunavut*

What child-rearing practices we follow are not that of our parents, as we were too young to have learnt it before we went off to boarding school. We did not learn to be parents from school either, because there was no parenting role model to follow. We have children who have grown up in the TV age. They are learning what families are "supposed to be like" from what they see: mostly TV sitcoms. In addition some of our children are affected by the abuse of alcohol and other substances. We are the only ones in our self-contained nuclear household trying to be mother or father who is supposed to provide affection, discipline, enjoyment time as well as getting them to help around the house [ . . . ]. These are the changes that have occurred in one generation. Who is raising the children? What parenting skills have they been given? What parenting skills are they passing along to their children?

*Alexina Kublu, Iqaluit (Nunavut) (65)*

"We elders are also to blame because we are not talking to young people as much anymore. We are relying on the teachers. Our parents did not have teachers or anyone else to rely on. [ . . . ] Some people think that because their children are able to

speak English, even though they can't understand them, they follow them, because they think they are more capable than they are. That is not the way it is. [ . . . ] People fluctuate in the amount of time they spend talking to young people. Sometimes they become too preachy and other times they totally neglect them. This, too, is not good for young people."

*Nunavut Inuit elder Itinnuaq (66)*

"We were advised from the time we were children to aim towards being good people. We have not done all that our ancestors did, but we have knowledge that our parents passed on to us. I think that if we were to impart this knowledge, it would really improve our young people's lives. I agree that we elders have not passed this knowledge on enough to our young people. If we started talking to them about what we know, I think the number of offences would go down. We seem to have been hiding our knowledge. We have based this on our thinking that it conflicted with [Christian] religion. We have a lot of knowledge that we should be passing on."

*Nunavut Inuit elder Angutinngurniq (66)*

expectations as to whom one is supposed to marry (68).

While earlier studies mostly paid attention to formal aspects of kinship systems, more recent investigations have focused on the cultural notions that underlie how kinship and other social relations work in practice. For example, in the everyday lives of Barrow and Kangarsuatsiaq residents, the flexibility of Inuit kinship makes relatedness negotiable and almost entirely independent from biological links (69-71), while among contemporary Dolgan and Nganasan residents of the Taimyr Peninsula, relatives still play a major role in food distribution, sharing, and other aspects of everyday life. (72)

The relevance of kinship has not diminished with urbanization. An illustration of this is provided in a case study from Greenland presented in the box below.

### *The extension of Arctic rural communities*

Urbanization is a universal and well-studied trend. In the Arctic, where living off the land dictated low population densities and scattered settlements, it is a relatively recent phenomenon, associated with the rise of welfare state policies, industrialization, and the spread of wage employment. The concentration of the population in permanent settlements took place

during the twentieth century. Many of the major Arctic towns have been growing at a rapid pace, and they are becoming increasingly multi-cultural (73-76). The figure on the following page provides an illustration of the rapidity of urbanization in Greenland since 1950.

In the past few decades, increasing numbers of indigenous people are also settling down in larger centers away from their home areas. For instance, Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki are playfully referred to as the largest Saami villages or *siidas* in the Nordic countries (77). According to a recent study (78), about 7,000 Greenlanders live in Denmark, which is equivalent to about 15% of the Greenlanders in Greenland. Two thirds of them are women, and they are spread throughout the country rather than concentrated in the capital. In 2001, about 10% of Canadian Inuit lived outside the Arctic (79-80). Among the recently better-studied Native urban communities are the Yup'ik and Iñupiat in Anchorage, Alaska (81-83). In 2003, about 10% of the 274,000 inhabitants of Anchorage were Native or part Native people, which corresponds to almost 17% of the total Native population of the State (84-85).

According to Fienup-Riordan, outmigration to cities does not mean the severance of ties with home communities: "Yup'ik communities are not disintegrating, their lifeblood gradually seeping away. Many can be seen as actually

#### *Kinship in urban Greenland*

In Greenland, family is important also for many people living in towns. For example, in Nuuk where family members have to work many hours during the week, it becomes important for kinsmen to spend time together in their spare time, during holidays, family celebrations, and times of crisis. Also, because people live in a large-scale society, they have a need to stick together to handle outside crises. Voices gathered in research on the role of kinship among families in Upernavik, with 1,218 inhabitants, and Nuuk with 13,884 inhabitants (2003 figures) illustrate this well:

"A family is a person whom you can get support from, I don't know what I should do without my family. I need my family – it can be my own family or my husband's family." (35-year old woman).

"Generally most of the families keep together, but a lot of the time they have to work. Your kinsmen give you strength and help you through crises, it is therefore important that families keep together. If families don't stick together it will be harder for them to handle crises, because they will

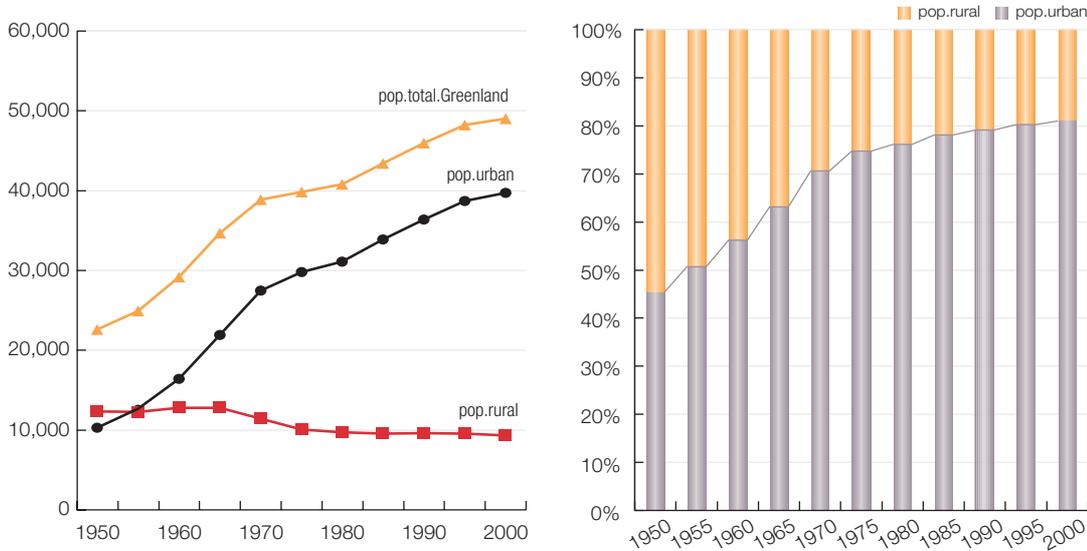
have no one to support them." (67-year old woman)

"I think families are more divided today maybe because they are so busy, but there are still families that are strongly connected. It is very important that families are connected [...] we teach our children to understand how important it is for us to keep together." (young mother, 35 years old)

Although urban kinship can be utilized in many different ways, the basic ideology is centered around expectations about moral and mutual obligations in the realms of sharing, naming, and adoption, among others. Relatives have many different kinds of mutual obligations in their lives and sharing defines the family. Family members strive to keep relatives together to avoid being isolated and having no one to support and share with. People have a choice as to whether or not to fulfill the mutual obligations of the family, and sharing does not always mean that kinship systems and forms of social organization are harmonic.

*Gitte Tróndheim, University of Greenland, Nuuk*

### Evolution of urban and rural populations in Greenland, 1950–2000 (population born in Greenland)



Source: J. Robert-Lamblin 2003 (96), with permission.

expanding and recreating themselves in unprecedented ways until today, when they are as strong and vital as at any time in their 2,500-year history. [...] Although geographically much farther-reaching than ever before, contemporary Yup'ik community continues to be characterized

by wide sharing throughout the extended family, with money from wage labor and commercial fishing used to support a variety of harvesting activities to fulfill extended family needs" (86). Also, Yup'ik identities are not abandoned, but reinforced in Anchorage, albeit in a modified

#### Rural-urban connections in Alaska

I became interested in urbanization while carrying out a study of the socio-economic dimensions of Yup'ik grass basketry. During the first few years of the study, when Annie Don, my Yup'ik collaborator, and I traveled frequently throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta villages, we often arrived in communities with no prearranged place to stay. Almost everywhere, there would be an older person living alone who was willing to take us in. Because it is unusual for Yup'ik / Inuit – especially older people – to live by themselves, I began to make inquiries. "Where's your daughter?" I'd ask. "Moved into Anchorage with the kids," would come the reply.

At the same time, I realized that Annie, who has lived in Anchorage since 1994, was part of this migration, as were her circle of mainly Yup'ik women friends. Furthermore, at the Alaska Federation of Natives Crafts Fair held in Anchorage each October, roughly 75% of the vendors are female. So I wondered if the migration was evenly distributed between men and women. Sure enough, this demographic reflects the gender breakdown of Anchorage-based Alaska Natives as a whole. In 2000, there were slightly over 7,000 Alaska Native women 18 years and above residing in Anchorage, but only some 5,500 men.

How does urban in-migration affect Alaska Native women? For one thing, they confront on a daily basis political issues that would be at greater remove from them in the village. Some 50-75% of

the urban-dwelling women support themselves through the sale of arts and crafts. These commodities in turn depend for their appeal on exotic raw materials such as seal hide, walrus stomach, and basket grass only obtainable in rural areas. The question of whether urban Native people will have continued access to these products on public land is at present hotly debated and since their very livelihood depends on such access, they are beginning to participate more actively in the political process than would normally be the case. In 1998, the Alaska Federation of Natives, its collective patience worn thin by the absence of resolution, called for a public protest, summoning Alaska Natives to a march and rally in downtown Anchorage. For Alaska Natives generally – and Alaska Native women in particular – direct confrontation such as a protest march, represented a lapse from culturally approved styles of conflict-resolution, which tend to favor settling disputes by negotiation. Among her circle of friends, the question of whether to participate was hotly debated. So as I circled by Annie's house to pick her up, I wondered if she would act. But there she was on the doorstep. "It's for my grandkids," she commented as she climbed into the car, "Anyway if I can't go home and pick grass, how will I make my baskets?" Her remark illustrates the urban and rural connectedness that characterizes so much about life for Alaska Natives today.

Molly Lee, University of Alaska Fairbanks

form emphasizing the common Yup'ik heritage rather than the local origin (87). Thus, outmigration extends the social network of homeland villages and gives rise to “translocal communities” – at least for a time (88). A similar case has been made for the Inuit in Montreal, where it appears that urban Inuit are using ethnic identity as an adaptive tool in a multi-ethnic city (89).

Due to the original vocation of anthropology as a “western” discipline striving to study “exotic others,” corresponding studies of southern immigrant communities in the Arctic are much less abundant. For instance, Danish identities in Greenland are only recently attracting the attention of researchers, one of them a Greenlander (90).

The persistence of kinship and community network among Arctic emigrants to urban areas is similar to recent observations in urban Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa. So far, the pattern is quite different from the developments that took place in Europe and in North America in connection with industrialization and urbanization.

### *Trend summary*

Most Arctic communities have experienced relentless and pervasive changes over the past decades. The disruption of communication between generations is as much a consequence as a cause of difficulties in social reproduction. Kinship ties and networks have not died out with urbanization but remain a focus for meaning and identity in the growing Arctic towns, and even in urban settings outside the Arctic homeland.

## **Key conclusions of policy relevance**

Arctic societies and cultures are highly adaptable and resilient and thus well-equipped for integrating change. The fact that they integrate modernity should be viewed positively rather than with nostalgia for traditions lost. The concept of traditions should be seen as a dynamic one: traditions do not and should not hinder development.

If there is a political lesson to be learned, it is that paternalistic attitudes, top down approaches, and change imposed from the outside are counter-productive, even if they seem to foster social and cultural perseverance in the short run. In the long run, the transfer of decision-making powers from central to local authorities

might be the most important factor in helping reduce social and cultural problems associated with rapid change. To reverse negative trends that have their origins decades or centuries ago, however, requires a lengthy “normalization” period. Thus, one cannot expect things to improve immediately.

In each Arctic region, there is a feeling of being distinct from regions further south, even where those regions are adjacent. Globalization increases worldwide connections, but the information and communication technology that fosters it is also used to intensify circumpolar connections. The emergence of a pan-Arctic identity can be further encouraged.

Finally, decision makers should not overestimate the predictive power of social science data. The inherent complexity of social and cultural systems makes predictions that rest upon the extrapolation of particular factors or trends tentative at best. “Social planning” approaches of the past testify to these dangers. Only through further investments into the development of better datasets and methodological tool kits can these limitations be overcome.

## **Gaps in knowledge**

Most Arctic states do not keep separate statistics for their Arctic regions regarding key indicators of social and cultural change. For example, it is virtually impossible to determine numbers of speakers of particular languages spoken in the Arctic or to find reliable data about the religious affiliation of Arctic residents. We therefore encourage the Arctic states and Permanent Participants to actively assist in the compilation and distribution of Arctic social science data.

The study of social and cultural processes in the Arctic has been dominated by the discipline of anthropology. While this has led to a number of excellent studies on the local level, regional and national data are much rarer.

The anthropological heritage of Arctic social science research has led to a particular emphasis on indigenous groups and peoples, at the expense of “mixed” and “newcomer” groups.

Anthropological research in the former Soviet Union focused more strongly on processes of the past than in other Arctic countries. Thus, there is a lack of studies regarding contemporary trends in the Russian North, especially for the period between World War II and 1990.

The former Soviet Union is not alone in putting more emphasis on certain kinds of research than on others. Most Arctic regions have excellent data on one or another aspect of social and cultural processes at the expense of others. A circumpolar research agenda would overcome the limitations of these “national” research agendas and result in increased comparability of the acquired data.

While there is ample documentation of the effects of individual aspects of social and cultural change, there is little understanding of the cumulative effects of rapid change. This gap in knowledge adds to the weak predictive potential of current knowledge.

## Chapter summary

Arctic societies and cultures have been undergoing changes since time immemorial, but the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in an unprecedented amount and speed of social and cultural change. Still, even periods of rapid change have not eradicated traditional Arctic social and cultural systems. Rather, the contemporary Arctic is characterized by various combinations of “indigenous” and “western” elements. Alternatively perceived as “loss” or “innovation,” these social and cultural processes inevitably lead to new forms of mixing “old” and “new.” It will be up to Arctic residents to determine which kind of mix will best serve their future needs.

The Arctic has “grown” considerably during recent decades. Not only have contacts and levels of cooperation increased within the circumpolar North – especially since the opening of the former Soviet North – but the interconnectedness of Arctic and non-Arctic communities has become more apparent. While the impact of southern power centers on Arctic communities has long been noticed, Arctic communities are gradually expanding their reach south and thereby carrying Arctic social and cultural traditions into regions far removed from tundras and northern forests.

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  94. J. Robert-Lamblin, "Les Ammassalimiut émigrés au Scoresbysund: étude démographique et socio-économique de leur adaptation" *Bulletins et mémoires de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris, Cahiers du Centre de recherches anthropologiques* 11-12 (1971).
  95. This chapter follows the AMAP boundaries of the Arctic, because they fit better with cultural and linguistic units than the AHDR boundaries. The table of Arctic languages and the related map of Arctic peoples try to capture a circumpolar perspective and, thus, cannot aspire to do justice to local and regional variations in dialects and identities. For example, Meänkieli - which has the status of a minority language in Sweden since 1996 - is linguistically a dialect of Finnish and therefore not listed separately, and the Kvens who speak it are not distinguished on the map. We acknowledge, however, that even minor linguistic differences can be of major importance for local identities.
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