3. Cultures and Identities

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3.1 Introduction

“Culture” and “identity” are two highly contested and debated notions, which permeate current public and political discourses throughout the Arctic. They also refer to features by which individuals, groups and peoples claim, negotiate or assert their differences in the context of national or ethnic frameworks. To share a culture or share an identity (national, ethnic, class or otherwise) implies that one shares certain features with members of that group. Since these features can be easily essentialized and rigidified in political and nationalist discourses, notions of “culture” and “identity” can lead to political exclusion, alienation, tension or conflict.

In order to avoid deterministic views of culture, we define it as a non-static, creative process that imbues people’s actions with particular meanings, saturates their words with distinct sounds and frames their relations within certain logic. All the configurations of meanings, sounds, relations and logic change over time but what remains is their embeddedness in socio-economic environments and systems of adaptations to the Arctic landscape. We also accept the view that often people’s identities are not fixed but are fluid and open to change.

This chapter sees itself as a successor to the first AHDR’s on Societies and Cultures. The title change – to Cultures and Identities – indicates a shift of emphasis toward cultural dimensions of circumpolar life and away from its social aspects. Given the significance of culture in the realm of identity politics, we decided to focus on these two elements of
Arctic human development. The topical field of societies is addressed in Chapter 11, *Community Viability and Adaptation*.

Discussions of identity, cultural identification and ethnic affiliation are often embedded in colonial discourses. In wider contexts where Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities overlap, Arctic Indigenous groups are often marginalized and labeled as suicidal, dysfunctional or dependent on the welfare state (Fienup-Riordan, 2000; Morrow, 1996; Vitebsky, 2005). Although these discussions demonstrate that culture and identity are highly contested and heavily influenced by the politicized world, they still play a crucial role and remain as critical components in the ways Arctic communities construe their relations with the outside world and position themselves in the global arena of human rights. Both “culture” and “identity” are often invoked when Indigenous peoples’ groups try to establish and uphold legal frameworks for their rights. Therefore, in this chapter we find it necessary to present an updated view on what constitutes “culture” and “identity” for the people and peoples of the Arctic.

We proceed with a brief overview of the historical interactions of different groups of population in the Arctic, important to an understanding of the genesis of contemporary group identities and cultural practices. Such a historical overview was not provided in the first *Arctic Human Development Report*. Culture and identity are interdependent, but we will treat them in separate sections, distinguishing them for analytical purposes. The section on cultures addresses languages and language vitality, spirituality and worldview, and arts and sports as aspects of circumpolar cultural practices. Under the section on “Identities” we provide a theoretical discussion of facets of identity, followed by reflections on “Indigenous identities”, “mixed identities” and “Arctic identity” as categories of identification in the North. We next offer a brief deliberation on “quantifying ethnicity”, and then discuss subsistence, landscape and globalization in relation to identities. The final section of this chapter summarizes its findings and identifies the major trends regarding Arctic cultures and identities over the last decade.
3.2  Brief historical background to circumpolar cultures and identities

The diversity of the Arctic is well illustrated by its spectrum of cultures and historical experiences. Recognizing the processes of historical change occurring across the Arctic regions is important for a proper understanding of the current situation. Contemporary cultures and identities are products of the past.

Human habitation of the Circumpolar North extends over several thousand years. In the north of Eurasia, the earliest traces of settlements of modern humans during the Paleolithic are in continental Siberia; modern humans expanded above the Arctic Circle between 12,000 and 7,000 years ago (Hoffecker, 2004). Starting with the earliest phases of human habitation of the Arctic, processes of interaction, exchange, and displacement among northern groups are recognizable. The direct presence of European colonial powers in the Arctic is a relatively recent phenomenon, but findings of iron and of other items that were not produced locally attest to long-standing connections with trade centers to the South. The territory of the Sámi has a history of more than 2,000 years of interaction with southern agriculturalists (Hansen and Olsen, 2014: 39–44), as the Norse pushed north along the western coast of contemporary Norway and Finnish-speakers moved into the southern and western parts of contemporary Finland. While the expansion of farming as well as economic exchange seemed to drive the process in northernmost Europe, the quest for marketable resources alone seemed to fuel European expansion into other parts of the North. From the 17th century onwards, the rich boreal forests of Siberia and Canada became staging areas for the fur trade. The areas north of the tree line were little affected by fur trapping prior to the 20th century, but the coastal areas of the Arctic close to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans became important destinations for the Euro-American whaling industry in the 18th and 19th centuries.

3.2.1 Alaska

The Indigenous peoples of Alaska are generally divided into six major groupings: Unangan (Aleut), Sugpiaq (Alutiiq), Yupik (Central Yup’ik and Siberian Yupik), Iñupiaq (northwest Alaskan Inuit), Athabaskans (Interior Indians) and Tlingit and Haida (Southeast Coastal Indians). These peoples share linguistic and cultural similarities as a result of a long presence in different parts of the region. When Russian explorers en-
tered Alaska in the mid-18th century, they found it occupied by approximately 80,000 Indigenous people (Langdon, 2002).

After several decades of uncoordinated exploitation of southern Alaskan human and natural resources by Russian fur traders, the incorporation in 1799 of the Russian American Company (RAC) – a state-sponsored company that held a trade monopoly similar to the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Royal Greenland Company – marked the beginning of a regulated colonial administration of the region. In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, leading to the establishment of a new colonial order, which differed in its attitude toward religion and native languages (among other things) from the previous one. While Russian rule was in no way idyllic, U.S. American rule was characterized by even less tolerance toward Indigenous languages and belief systems. It took many decades for the territory of Alaska and its (Indigenous) inhabitants to receive full recognition of their citizens’ rights and achieve political representation. For the non-Indigenous inhabitants of the region, Alaskan statehood in 1959 marked the major achievement along that way; for the Indigenous peoples, the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971 was the main event. ANCSA was triggered by the discovery of oil on Alaska’s North Slope and addressed Indigenous land rights in an unusual way, by giving cash and land titles to newly formed “Native corporations” (on the regional and local level). ANCSA has been controversial since its passage, but Alaska’s history of the last 40+ years was impacted significantly by it (Berger, 1985; Mitchell, 2001).

### 3.2.2 Canada

Across present-day Canada, settlements and trade routes had been established by Indigenous peoples by 500 BCE – 1000 CE. Communities developed, each with its own culture, customs, and character. Cultures varied markedly across this expanse, from Tlingit and Athapaskan in the northwest to Innu and Abenaki on the Atlantic Coast. Various Inuit groups inhabited the Arctic coast (Damas, 1984).

After the short-lived settlement attempts by Vikings to establish a presence on the eastern shores of what is now Canada c.1000 CE, the next European exploration dated to the late 15th century, followed by settlements on the Atlantic coast and the St. Lawrence River in the 16th century. Northern and Arctic aboriginal groups, however, experienced European contact much later. This led to a very different dynamic between aboriginal groups and settlers in the North than in the South of
Canada, a difference that continues to shape the North-South politics of Canada to this day (Freeman, 2000).

With few exceptions, the Inuit are coastal people. They are descendants of what anthropologists call the Thule culture, which emerged in western Alaska around 1000 CE and spread eastward across the Arctic. Inuit who migrated east from Alaska possessed a sophisticated technology enabling them to hunt whales. They were highly adapted to the environment, and a rich material and spiritual culture. During the Little Ice Age (1600–1850) scarcity of game challenged the nomadic Inuit, who also experienced increased external pressure as the Canadian government began to put more focus on the Arctic (Creery, 1994).

From the late 18th century, European settlers in Canada pressured Aboriginals to assimilate into European, and later so-called “Canadian” culture. These attempts reached a climax in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with forced integration (Creery, 1994).

3.2.3 Greenland

Paleo-Eskimo groups of nomadic migrants arrived in Greenland about 4,500 years ago, from the Canadian High Arctic. They mainly hunted musk-ox, caribou, seals, whales and walrus. In 985 CE, the first European settlements were established in the southern parts of the island. These settlements lasted for 500 years, subsisting on farming and livestock husbandry (cattle, sheep and goats). At about the same time that the Norse arrived in Southern Greenland, a new influx of Arctic people from the west, the Late Dorset culture, entered the extreme northwest of Greenland.

Around 1200 members of the Thule Culture arrived from the west, having emerged 200 years earlier in Alaska. They settled south of the Late Dorset culture and ranged over vast areas of Greenland’s west and east coasts. These ancestors of the modern Inuit engaged in the hunting of almost all animals on land and in the ocean, including big whales. They had dogs, which the Dorset did not, and used them as work animals to pull sleds. They also used bows and arrows, contrary to the Dorset. Increasingly settled, they stored large amounts of food to avoid winter famine. The early Thule avoided the highest latitudes, which only became populated again after renewed immigration from Canada in the 19th century.
In 1721, two centuries after the Norse colonies disappeared from Greenland, the Norwegian-Danish priest Hans Egede arrived in Greenland and began missionary activities. Within a few decades, a colonial structure was established, and the presence of inspectors, traders and others had an overwhelming impact on the Inuit culture (Gad, 1973).

### 3.2.4 Russia

The Russian North has been occupied by different ethnic groups for several thousand years. Traditionally, they were either hunters and gatherers or reindeer herders. Before the 16th century they had no contact with Europeans. At this time the interest of the Russian state awoke. By the time of colonization, the Indigenous peoples of the North had already developed subsistence patterns in accordance with their natural environment, as well as regulations concerning social relations, mutual aid, public support of the disabled, orphans and widows, regulations of collective use of certain territories (hunting grounds, fishing sites, reindeer pastures), property relations and inheritance. Most of the Indigenous nations led a nomadic life and were organized in autonomous clans or territorial communities based on common law. Under these circumstances, the Tsarist policy towards the Indigenous population rested on indirect control through the traditional institutions of the community (Vakhtin, 1994).

Although military governors collected tribute, they interfered little with native Siberian customs and religions; while the smaller nomadic groups of hunters and reindeer herders (e.g., Chukchi, Koryak, Eveny, Evenki, Nenets, Khanty) formed ambiguous relations with Russians, larger stationary, cattle-breeding groups (Sakha, Buryat) submitted to Russians swiftly and were henceforth subjected to colonial relations with the Russian imperial center (Fisher, 1943; Slezkine, 1994). Siberian furs constituted an important source of wealth for Russia and figured prominently in Russian trade with Europe and China. These furs, along with customs duties levied on all Siberian raw materials acquired by Russian entrepreneurs, more than reimbursed the state for the costs of its Siberian acquisitions and administration (Forsyth, 1994).
Russian settlement of Siberia on a large scale began only with the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad between 1892–1905, after which the eastward migratory movement reached major proportions. Russia made efforts to reduce rural overpopulation in European Russia by encouraging Siberian colonization. The railroad’s needs spurred the development of coal mining and the opening of repair shops. Before the Russian Revolution, however, Siberia contributed only a minute fraction of Russia’s industrial output, mainly in the form of gold (Thompson, 2008).

### 3.2.5 **Fennoscandia**

The Sámi were traditionally hunters and gatherers in Fennoscandia and the Kola Peninsula. Historically they inhabited great parts of northern Russia and Finland. In Sweden and Norway, their traditional area was more extensive than the area used for reindeer pasture today. It is believed that since the Viking Age, the Sámi culture has been driven farther and farther north.

Along the Northern Norwegian coast, the Sámi culture came under pressure during the Iron Age by expanding Norse settlements and taxation from powerful Norse chieftains. In the early Middle Ages, the centralized Norwegian state broke the power of the chieftains. The fish trade in the 14th century triggered another wave of Norse settlement along the coast of Finnmark province (Hansen and Olsen, 2004).

In the mid-16th century, Swedish governmental interest in the northern region arose and it was not unusual that the Sámi paid taxes to three different kings, most commonly in furs and dried fish. There was an increasing demand for furs in Europe, so the Crown also traded these products. Dried fish was used as payment for the soldiers who were constantly involved in different wars. The Sámi also sold fish, and purchased food products such as butter and flour, which until then had been relatively rare in the Sámi culture. As a result of the improved nutritional supply, the population grew considerably. However, the fur market shifted and the lakes were soon almost depleted of fish, leading to a population crisis. Sámi society could not supply its increased population with sufficient foodstuffs when the import of butter and flour was stopped, and fish became scarce. It was around this time, in the early seventeenth century, that the Sámi became reindeer herders, which to a great extent can be seen as a response to the population crisis (Sköld, 1992).

At the end of the 17th century, the states of Fennoscandia encouraged settlers to move to the area, offering free land and generous condi-
tions. This had, however, a limited impact on in-migration, a trend that did not shift until the mid-18th century. From this time, however, the process of colonization began, and during the next hundred years, the ethnic balance in Sápmi (the Sámi homeland) changed, turning the Sámi into a minority, except for some parts of northern Norway and smaller areas in Finland and Russia (Axelsson and Sköld, 2011).

3.2.6 Iceland and the Faroe Islands

Settlements by Viking explorers from the east, particularly Norway and the British Isles, in the late 9th century mark the beginning of Iceland as a nation. By 930, the chieftains had established a form of representative governance (Althing) that was one of the world’s oldest parliaments. Towards the end of the 10th century, Christianity came to Iceland but the country remained independent. Internal conflict in the early 13th century weakened Iceland, and resulted in subjugation to Norway. Norway in turn was united with Sweden (1319) and then Denmark (1376). A strict trade monopoly imposed by Denmark in the 17th and 18th centuries caused Iceland to fall into poverty. Additionally, natural disasters forced a population decline. Iceland remained part of Denmark, but in the 19th century an independence movement emerged as a part of the rising nationalism around Europe. In 1844, the Althing, which had been suspended in 1799, was restored. Iceland gained sovereignty after World War I, on 1 December 1918 (Karlsson, 2001).

Irish monks and Vikings had visited the Faroe Islands before stable settlements. Christianity and Norwegian rule and laws were established in the 11th century. In 1380, the Faroe Islands followed Norway into the union with Denmark, and after the reformation, the Danish language and influence increased over time. Copenhagen monopolized and controlled foreign trade. Fishing and farming were the dominating industries. As a result of an increased movement of nationalism, Faroese developed into a written language in the mid-19th century. At this time, free trade opened and fishing was commercialized. The population numbered around 9,000 people. Danish was the official language until 1948, when extensive home rule was introduced, together with the position of a Faroese Prime Minister as head of the government. The Faroe Islands is still part of the Danish Kingdom but together with Greenland, they often enjoy a special status within the Kingdom, and neither has joined the European Union (Wylie, 1987).
3.3 Aspects of circumpolar cultures

Cultures in the Circumpolar North are complex and dynamic systems of meaning and identity. Given the encompassing definition of culture presented above, many facets of everyday life – from subsistence practices to religious beliefs, arts and music – could be presented under that rubric. In order to increase comparability with the first AHDR, we look at some of the same issue as in 2004 while adding some new components. We review language and language vitality, spirituality and worldview, and the arts and sports. As in the first AHDR, we begin with an overview of language.

3.3.1 Language and language vitality

Language is arguably one of the most important aspects of human culture(s) and a vital factor for the survival of culture. It is not just a means of communicating information, but also contributes to the preservation of memory, involves specific terminologies and the traditional knowledge encoded within, and articulates a world-view. Each language develops its own expressions that reflect areas that are important to the speakers (see Chapter 9, Education and Human Capital). In the Arctic, an area with great linguistic diversity (see below), colonial and assimilatory pressures against Indigenous language use and the small demographic numbers of many Indigenous groups have created difficult situations for many languages.

Attention to the dire prospects of Arctic languages has significantly increased in recent years. Ever since the Alaskan linguist Michael Krauss (1992: 10) urged his fellow language specialists toward a “serious re-thinking of our priorities, lest linguistics go down in history as the only science that presided obliviously over the disappearance of 90% of the very field to which it is dedicated,” the magnitude of the problem has been recognized by academics and practitioners alike. Thus, the Arctic Social Indicators report (ASI, 2010), which follows from the first AHDR, elevated “language retention” to the single best indicator of cultural vitality. Arctic Social Indicators II (ASI, 2014) addresses language retention in each of its case study applications.

Apart from the AHDR (2004) and ASI (2010, 2014), it is notable that Arctic Council Working Groups are paying increased attention to the situation of Arctic languages. An example is the chapter on linguistic diversity in the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment, which provides a good treatment of the subject matter (Barry, 2013).
Most importantly, Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council spearheaded two important initiatives on Arctic languages in recent years. The “Arctic Indigenous Languages Symposium” was organized by ICC Canada and held in Tromsø, Norway, in October 2008 (ICC – Canada, 2008). ICC-Canada’s *Assessing, Monitoring and Promoting Arctic Indigenous Languages* project was approved by the Arctic council’s Sustainable Development Working Group in 2011 as a direct follow-up to the recommendations of the 2008 symposium. The Research Development Workshop “Assessing the Vitality of Arctic Indigenous Languages” was organized by the same organization and held in Ottawa in June 2012 (ICC – Canada, 2012), and a second Arctic Indigenous Languages Symposium is scheduled to take place in 2015.

Despite all this attention, the general tendency continues to be a reduction of the proportion of speakers of most languages of the North. One example of this trend is Alaska. As Figure 3.1 shows, all but one Alaska Native language had a lower proportion of speakers in 2007 than in 1997. At the same time, we see that most Alaskan languages – with the exception of Siberian Yupik and Central Yup’ik – had already a rather low retention during the 1990s.
The Icelandic language has changed very little from when the country was settled, and therefore a text from the 12th century is still understandable to Icelandic schoolchildren. The Icelandic language is considered a cornerstone of Icelandic culture, in large part due to a strong literary heritage. Icelandic does not usually adopt foreign words for new concepts, opting instead to coin new words, or give old words new meaning (Jóhannesson, 2007).
The language of the Faroe Islands, Faroese, derives from the language of the Norsemen, who settled the islands some 1,200 years ago. Today, Faroese is spoken by approximately 75,000 to 80,000 people. It was established as a written language in 1854, and accepted as a national language by the Danish authorities in 1948. The Faroese language is considered an important aspect of cultural identity and the Faroese are conscious of the need to preserve and develop their language in the face of global influences. Research and development of the Faroese language is thus a high political priority of the Faroese government (Nauerby, 1996).

There are other positive language-related developments elsewhere in the Arctic. For example, 50,000 of the 57,000 residents of Greenland speak Greenlandic (Lykke Thomsen, 2013); that is, almost 88% of all people living in Greenland – whether of Inuit descent or not – speak this Inuit language. Such success is the result of decades of attention to language issues, crowned by declaring Greenlandic (Inuit) as the official language in the Greenland Self-Government Act of 2009. Inuit in the neighboring eastern Canadian Arctic also continue to keep native language retention at relatively high levels, while the western Canadian Arctic and the Subarctic are characterized by more substantial losses.

For many parts of the Arctic, data on language use and retention is absent or hard to access. However, the Russian Census provides figures regarding language retention in the northern parts of the Russian Federation. During the recent censuses of 2002 and 2010, people were asked about the languages they speak; at the same time, respondents self-identified with a particular ethnic group. For example, 482 individuals declared themselves as Aleuts (Unangan) in 2010, while 45 respondents claimed to know the Aleut language. We can thus assume that we are dealing with a proportion of Aleut speakers of slightly fewer than 10%. It should be pointed out, however, that we do not know with certainty whether the 45 speakers come from the group who identified themselves as Aleuts. Notwithstanding these and other issues of enumeration, a comparison of results for 2002 and 2010 shows a clear downward trend in the proportion of speakers: of 21 languages, only one (Siberian Yupik) claims a higher proportion of speakers in 2010 than in 2002.

The absence of enumeration of the population by ethnicity in Fennoscandian statistics makes the assessment of Sámi language retention difficult (see Chapter 2, Arctic Populations and Migration). In addition, the multitude of Sámi languages and dialects make generalizing statements on the vitality of language retention impossible. As depicted in Figure 3.2, Northern Sámi – spoken primarily in northern Norway, as well as in parts of northern Sweden and Finland – is the least vulnerable of all Sámi lan-
These ambiguous developments are best expressed by Figure 3.3, which we borrow from the *Arctic Biodiversity Assessment* (CAFF, 2013). It shows that most of the 46 languages captured in the graph experienced declines in the proportion of speakers between 1989 and 2006. Nine languages, however, saw an increase in the proportion of speakers during that same period. Thus, we can conclude that while the vitality of many Arctic languages is threatened some languages enjoy a stable position, and a few are even gaining in strength. Given that most parts of the Arctic saw the establishment of language revitalization programs in recent years, it is thus doubly important that such positive developments can be reported. It is to be hoped that these successes will stimulate the reversal of language loss in other parts of the Arctic as well.
In recent years, new laws (e.g., in Fennoscandia) have given speakers of certain minority languages the right to use their language in public offices, in preschools and in geriatric care (Elenius, 2008). On one hand, this provides important recognition of the minority languages and cultures. On the other hand, not all minority languages are nationally protected and questions of which variant or dialect of a language is chosen as the standard adds further complications to language retention and vitality.
3.4 Spirituality and worldview

“Traditional” forms of spirituality and worldview among Arctic Indigenous peoples need to be seen as part of their productive and reproductive relations with the land, its animals, and the spiritual and ancestral beings that affect the well-being of human communities in the Arctic region. Shaped in response to Arctic social and material ecologies, these systems involve complex and sophisticated religious forms, ideologies and practices that revolve around the activity of hunting. The concern over the necessity “to kill in order to live” expressed in the animist beliefs about return of animal souls and ancestor spirits in charge of souls of animals has remained a significant feature of the worldview of many Indigenous groups within the region (Willerslev, 2007). The practice of hunting which required intense human contact with the animal spirit world entails specific perceptions of “animals as persons” (Bird David, 2006; Scott, 2006; Descola, 2006). Personhood is attributed not only to humans but also to certain non-human beings, such as animals, plants and “things”. Such concepts and practices form the basis of animist beliefs among Indigenous hunting groups in the Arctic.

Recent research on human-animal relations points to the common elements present in animist societies such as continuity between humans and non-humans, shamanist cosmology, egalitarian or semi-egalitarian ethos and unbounded potential for identification (Descola, 2006; Pedersen, 2001; Willerslev, 2007; Brightman, et al, 2012; Ulturgasheva, 2012). For example, bears are closely associated with shamans: they may be said to “be” shamans themselves, or to be able to transform themselves into humans. Shamans are likewise said to be able to transform themselves, or parts of themselves, into bears (Hallowell, 1926: 86; Kwon, 1999: 373-87). Perhaps most importantly, bears play key roles in the symbolic organization of society. As both powerful ancestors and significant actors, they participate in the reproduction of kinship patterns and in this mode of human-animal relations.

Among Iñupiat and Yup’ik of Alaska, and the Inuit of northern Canada the question about the identity of a child and a child’s personhood cannot be considered without naming practices and Indigenous ideas about the circulation of souls between the living and the dead (Bodenhorn, 2000; Bodenhorn, 2004). The beliefs in reincarnation and rebirth among Inuit groups and some Siberian groups, e.g. Chukchi, Koryak and Itel’men, are most eloquently expressed in the system of naming children.

Shamanic and animistic practices, consistent with the everyday engagement with the animals and spirits of the land, persist, especially in
rural areas, through small rituals, such as the feeding of the fire and the interpretation of dreams and omens practiced by the hunters and reindeer-herders in the Siberian forest (Vitebsky, 2005; Lavrillier, 2012). For those inhabiting the Siberian taiga and moving around vast areas of land, animistic worldview and the principles of sociality are rooted in legacies of accumulated ecological experience and interaction with the environment. For the urban nationalists, the current fad of a “shamanic renaissance” functions as a convenient and flexible metaphor for nation-building aspirations (Balzer, 2011; Vitebsky, 2005).

The first AHDR contained a box about sacred sites authored by RAIPON. If at the time, attention to the conservation of such sites was especially notable among Russian Indigenous peoples, over the past decade we have seen expansion of this interest. For example, the conference “Protecting the Sacred: Recognition of Sacred Sites of Indigenous Peoples for Sustaining Nature and Culture in Northern and Arctic Regions,” held in Rovaniemi in September 2013, confirmed this increased interest. The conference approved a draft declaration that called for promotion of awareness of sacred sites, stronger mechanisms for consultation of Indigenous groups, and enforcement of effective measures to protect them from damage and destruction (Arctic Centre, 2013). A parallel movement deals with cultural heritage sites in the Arctic (Barr and Chaplin, 2004), which are overwhelmingly non-Indigenous in origin.

Another interesting development is the revitalization of certain aspects of shamanism in the Circumpolar North. This can happen at the grassroots level, in the form of northern residents actively trying to re-engage with shamanism as a set of beliefs and practices. Even more powerful, however, is a situation in which there is encouragement and recognition from above, from state or regional authorities. In the Arctic, we are aware of two regions in which shamanism is an officially recognized religion: in the Sakha Republic (Russian Federation) it is a form of Tengreism (the Turkic version of shamanic beliefs with the god Tengri), which is mainly spread among urban Sakha, and the New Age form of shamanism emphasizing its healing aspect in the north Norwegian county of Tromsø (see Textbox 3.1).
Shamanism as an officially recognized religion

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Shamanism as a worldview of people living in close connection to the environment with all its animate features including spirits is gaining popularity among indigenous and settler populations in the Arctic. In the European and Russian Arctic, particularly in Siberia from where the word "shaman" originates, the revival of shamanism has had also an identity-forming influence for several societies in the Arctic. For that purpose of identity building there have been cases where shamanism has been recognized as a religion alongside other main religions such as Christianity, while some scholars refer to shamanism more as a worldview in animist societies (Vitebsky, 1995, 2012) than a religion. In the East Siberian Sakha Republic, for example, an officially recognized association of shamans (then called "people’s healers" (народные целители)) has been active since 1990. In May 2014, shamanism was recognized by the Ministry of Justice of Russia in the Sakha Republic as a religion, after three local religious groups had united into a regional religious denomination (Ministry of Culture, 2014). The decision was made after an expert review in September 2011 (Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, 2011) had concluded that the specifics of Sakha Ar Ayuy (Ау Айыы, the official name of the religion) including 16 directions of the most influential rituals and prayers (Алгусу-Доммы Алгусу-Доммы) qualify for official recognition as a religion according to point 1, Article 6 of the Russian Federal Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Unions (Russian Federation, 1997). The expert statement specifically highlights the importance of the shaman as mediator between the spiritual and the material world. Such officially recognized religious practice qualifies for support by the state. Although there is no state salary for religious practitioners, through an especially established regional ministry for culture and spiritual development (министерство культуры и духовного развития), this support plays an important role in promoting not only the identity of the Sakha people, but also their well-being through connection to their land and its spirits, which is seen as a guarantor for a healthy lifestyle in an Arctic environment.

In the European Arctic, shamanism has also been recognized as a religion, where, like in Siberia, people can get ritual services such as marriage ceremonies, funerals, and baptisms. The first official decision in this respect was taken in the North Norwegian county of Troms in 2012, where the governor recognized the regional Shamanic Association as religious denomination (Shamanism, 2012).
3.5 The arts and sports

The arts are booming in the North. Be it a new concert hall in Reykjavík, the Greenland Eyes International Film festival, new choreography by the Yellowknife Dance Collective, or the opening of an art show in Anchorage or Arkhangelsk, the production, marketing, and consumption of northern art seems to be a growth market. Interestingly, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous art productions are sought after, as are creations consciously marking mixed identities. All art genres seem to be involved. While music, literature and fine arts have been prominent in the North for a while, Arctic film productions and film festivals are fairly new and successful phenomena.

The global language of hip-hop music, and related breakdancing found in almost any corner of the Arctic, provides an excellent example of adoption and adaptation of exogenous cultural forms for local purposes. We provide two examples of local applications of this music style (Textbox 3.2). As the cases illustrate, hip-hop is used to increase awareness of and pride in local cultures. Far from being a destructive aspect of globalization, locally produced hip-hop music appears to be a vehicle of cultural revitalization.
Hip Hop in the Siberian and Canadian Norths: contributing to cultural vitality and physical well-being

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the largest republic of the Russian Federation, and famous for its diamond production, contains 140 different ethnic groups, including the dominant two: Sakha and Russian. Since the Russian Federation’s declaration of sovereignty in 1991, the region has undergone several changes. The increase of the rural migration into cities, especially into the capital city Yakutsk, changed the ethnic and linguistic situation in urban centers. Post-Soviet transformations also initiated the emergence of new youth styles, such as hip hop.

There is an interesting correlation between growing rural-urban migration and evolution of local hip hop, including its language. The first hip hop artists or ‘crews’ appeared in Yakutsk at the end of the 1990s. They were mainly Russian speaking, urban Sakha. This was the period when the first substantial urban-born Sakha generation came into their teenage years and looked for cultural expressions that reflected their urban experience. Sakha pop and rock music was rooted in the village – the most popular songs romanticized rural life as the cradle of Sakha culture, and most of the musicians were of village origin. Hip hop thus embodied a counterpoint to the rural and manifested a new urban Sakha identity.

In contrast to this Russian speaking Sakha generation, by around 2005 a significant Sakha speaking urban youth community had developed; these were the children of village Sakha who moved to Yakutsk and sent their children to Sakha-language schools. This “youth market” was the target for Sakha-language youth radios, TV-shows and glossy magazines. As a result, Sakha-language media helped to promote Sakha hip hop, which developed as a distinct genre from local Russian-language hip hop. Currently Sakha-language hip hop enjoys support from media and state institutions, reflecting a general power shift in local politics that becomes increasingly dominated by ethnic Sakha.

In the last decade, hip hop has also found a prominent place in the Canadian Arctic. Hundreds of youth in dozens of communities across the Canadian North have connected to the music, history, art, and culture of hip hop, which is being used in a range of programs to promote health, prevent suicide, support youth leadership, and reduce crime. An active group in the movement has been Blueprint for Life (http://www.blueprintforlife.ca/), a southern-based organization offering social work and healing to youth through hip hop. In many cases, after introducing hip hop in northern communities, local schools and organizations have established clubs or programs to support the youth to continue. Through hip hop dance, art, and music, youth have found a powerful outlet for expressing themselves. In many communities Elders have joined the activities, lending their support, and youth have used hip hop as a means to strengthen connections to their own culture, for example mixing traditional throat singing with “beat boxing”, rapping in Inuktut, or creating dance moves based on imitations of seal hunting, dog teaming, or Arctic animals.

Textbox 3.2
Spontaneous hip hop break dance event in the Ordzonikidze Square, Yakutsk, Russian Federation, during a summer youth festival (June 2013)

Credit: Aimar Ventsel (permission received)
While singing, dancing and poetry are always recognized as part of culture, a sometimes less recognized component of culture is sport. Yet sports are cultural practices, and team sports are ideal vehicles for the expression of group identities.

When looking at Arctic sports, rather than be tempted to focus only on winter sports that seem to fit the Arctic’s climatic conditions (such as skiing, ice hockey, etc.), we note that a number of other sports have recently become prevalent in the North. As one example, we cite the popularity of basketball in rural Alaska. Michael D’Orso (2007) followed a winning high school basketball team from Fort Yukon, Alaska for a season and provided evidence for the link between community resilience and team sports. Another example is the importance of football for the Faroe Islands. Admitted to the international football association FIFA in 1988, the Faroe Islands have since surprised a number of bigger football nations – such as Austria, which they beat in 1990. Likewise, handball has developed as a national sport in Iceland since the 1950s, and the team won silver medals in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Greenland handball has been represented in the World Championships.

*Hockey Game in Makkovik, Canada*

Credit: Rudy Riedisperger.

Canada and Russia are great winter sport nations with extensive records of internationally successful athletes from northern regions, with ice hockey and cross-country skiing as notable activities. The Arctic Winter Games (AWG) were established as collaboration between Yukon, Northwest Territories and Alaska, with the first games held in Yellowknife in 1970. Every two years, a Canadian or Alaskan city hosts the
event, with the games traveling to Nuuk, Greenland in 2002. The AWG subscribe to the core values of "cultural awareness and understanding" (Arctic Winter Games, n.d.).

Sports not only encompass the more "western" activities noted above. The town of Fairbanks, Alaska, has been hosting the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics (WEIO) annually since the early 1960s. The event showcases a variety of competitions based on demonstrations of traditional skills and endurance, such as the "greased pole walk," the "kneel jump" and the "ear pull". In addition, WEIO includes dance performances, a Miss WEIO pageant, and a best-dressed baby contest. Held in the summer months, the event has become a major attraction for locals and tourists alike.

*High school basketball: the State playoffs in Anchorage, Alaska, USA (Girls' teams, 2011)*

The Sámi have several sports organizations and competitions that serve as important meeting places – not least for Sámi youth – and are important contributors to identity formation. The Sámi Championships include cross country skiing, lasso, and shooting. Reindeer sledge races are frequently held. Several Sámi have been internationally successful in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, ice hockey and other less obviously northern sports, such as football.
3.6 Identities

One is not born with an identity: rather it is socially constructed, and is formed and reformed over the course of one’s lifetime. One’s identity depends on one’s experiences and one’s relations with other members of society – people need to know and understand their position in society. As well, one’s identity depends on one’s calculated, strategic decisions. Identity is the conception and expression of both individuality and group affiliations. Social, cultural and ethnic identities emerge in any given situation where social interaction, political formation or cultural meetings take place. Thus, identities are not easily classified.

Identity can be self-ascribed, defined by others, or both (Patrick, 2005; Kishigami, 2002). Olofsson (2004) states that it is possible to both identify with the ethnic group of biological heritage without being socialized into it, or, conversely, to perceive identity with an ethnic group where socialization has taken place but where biological relations are missing. She introduces a model that illustrates the complexity of identity formation (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Models of Different Aspects of Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ascribed</th>
<th>Experienced</th>
<th>Aspired</th>
<th>Recognized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>A person’s ethnic self-label</td>
<td>How a person experiences change in ethnic self-identity according to cultural content and personal circumstances</td>
<td>A person’s aspiration for recognition of ethnic self-label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Others’ ethnic label of that person</td>
<td>How others experience change in that person’s ethnic identity according to his cultural context and personal circumstances</td>
<td>Others’ aspirations for recognition of ethnic self-label</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Individuals can belong to several collectives or have several identities. Identity choices can be strategic. A person can change identity over time, but it is also possible to experience and be associated with different identities at the same time. Moreover, identities often have varying degrees of status. Consequently, the identity of a person from an older generation can differ from that of a person from a younger generation of the same family. These complex circumstances highlight the striking differences that can occur within groups that at first glance seem homogenous.
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(for a striking Evenki example of hybrid and complex identities see Chapter 5, *Governance in the Arctic*). Adequate data on ethnic identity (ethnicity) are often missing, and indeed hard to collect, in part due to the contextual and changing nature of a person’s ethnic identity.

The social sciences and humanities have been using a relational notion of identity for some time; that is, identity as being created by the tension between Us and Them (“Other”). Still, it seems that modernization and globalization threaten the continuation of these distinctions (see Chapter 11, *Community Viability and Adaptation*). The Internet’s rapid spread and the development of other communication systems present additional challenges to the adherence to cultural traditions. Nevertheless, these technological innovations have also contributed to the rapid spread of ethnopolitical mobilization (Southcott, 2005). Thus, globalization enables the development of new technologies and practices, which in turn offer opportunities to revitalize and strengthen cultures and identities in Arctic communities (see Chapter 10, *Globalization*).

### 3.6.1 Indigenous Arctic identities

Colonial and post-colonial experiences continue to be central to the discussions of the postmodern identity creation in the Arctic. For example, official descriptions and enumerations of Indigenous peoples, including their numbers, the geographical extent of homelands, social structure, etc., sometimes inform Indigenous peoples’ identity constructions – and sometimes clash with these identities, when they do not represent Indigenous realities. External definitions of who is Indigenous can result in exclusion of persons who otherwise would identify with a group, and their alienation from Indigenous culture. Acknowledging the negative effects that can be associated with exclusionary, ethnocentric perspectives, argues for an overwhelming need to integrate Indigenous perspectives when discussing “ethnic” categories based on demographic measures. Such perspectives provide a more culturally correct understanding and description of who is Indigenous.

Recent official definitions of “Indigenous peoples”, such as those coming from the United Nations, stress historical continuity with a territory, the experience of colonization and self-identifications as being universal to all Indigenous peoples worldwide. The most used and cited definition has long been that of the Ecuadorian diplomat and at that time UN special rapporteur José Martinez Cobo, who in 1986 introduced a “working definition” of Indigenous peoples:
Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (Martinez Cobo, 1987: paragraph 380).

Indigenous identities are more complex than Martinez Cobo’s working definition and there are additional problems that occur when trying to implement it in the Arctic context. The United Nations, national governments, and academic institutions have different perspectives on defining or characterizing Indigenous peoples. Certainly, Indigenous peoples themselves best define how they wish to be viewed and identified. Nevertheless, self-identification has practical, and sometimes ideological challenges (Beach, 2007). More extensive definitions focus on historical processes and relationships, the aim being to remain sensitive to the circumstances of local Indigenous societies where central characteristics are small size, attachment to the land, value system and culture rooted in the environment, commitment to a sustainable lifestyle, positioning, mobility and cultural conservatism. The definition also includes shared experiences of economic and political domination by outsiders, selected integration/participation with non-Indigenous societies, limited or non-existent power within the nation state, and emerging involvement in a local or international process of decolonization (Coates, 2004; Loukacheva, 2009). More recently, Indigenous activists from across the globe have insisted on self-identification and oppose exogenous criteria that determine who qualifies as “Indigenous” and who does not (Hodgson, 2011).

Indigenous identity, status and rights have been under debate in most parts of the world during the last decades. Hundreds of thousands of individuals in the Arctic identify as Indigenous. The lack of a general or even regional definition of who is Indigenous is a challenge for both demographers and other researchers (Axelsson and Sköld, 2011; see also Chapter 2, Arctic Populations and Migration). In modern society, where identity becomes an increasingly personal project and belonging is important, considering oneself as a member of a recognized Indigenous group (e.g., I am Sámi, I am Nenets) can be tempting for individuals searching for such belonging. Indigenous societies can, however, some-
times be exclusionary, valuing individuals differently, depending on heritage and levels of cultural competence (Åhrén, 2008).

### 3.6.2 Mixed identities

Most historical population records are based on rigid ideas of unchangeable cultural units. Prior to the 19th century many local peoples relied on very inclusive identity systems based on kinship, while governments increasingly relied on a race-based definition that focused on the individual’s blood quantum. “Full-bloods”, “half-castes” and “quadroons” and octoroons have all been official categories in the USA, Canada, Sweden and Norway, if different terminology is used in the different countries. This of course led to problems with “boundaries” (Olofsson, 2004). State definitions of whom to include as a member of a particular ethnic category, or national minority, were often based on certain stereotypes of cultural belonging or behavior that might have been well removed from the realities of life. “Pure” categories used for counting by necessity also created “mixed” categories, when enumerators discovered cases of “mixed marriage” or the accommodation of settler ways through the mastery of the languages of the incomers or their economic practices. In some cases the “mixed” cases cause indigenousness itself to disappear (as a case of assimilation). In other cases, entirely new peoples are created such as the Canadian Métis (ASI, 2010).

Studies on Indigenous societies in northern Sweden and Canada suggest that the ethnic formation of a person with mixed parentage can greatly differ from situations in which mixed parentage is not present or not problematized. Already in childhood there are different ways of managing the situation. Some children feel that they only belong to one ethnic group while others experience a more complex situation where they feel caught between two identities. Socialization including more persons than the parents is important for the self-experienced ethnic identity and the ethnic self-label, which nevertheless fluctuates and changes according to cultural context. A person can manage different self-representations attached to different cultural behaviors without getting confused in his or her personal identity (Olofsson, 2004).

Names and ethnic labels can have benefits and disadvantages depending on context. The descendants of the Old Settlers of Russian origin who married native women in northeast Siberia from the seventeenth century onward were never classified as a unique ethnic group and never received state recognition as a mixed group. Today, some of these groups have achieved Indigenous status with limited privileges, while
most of them are left with ambiguous social status and ethnic identity (Schweitzer et al., 2013). Since the Arctic is being influenced by extensive processes of change, including internet access, migration, and globalization, the complexity of identities increase correspondingly. Overall, a slightly improved understanding of mixed or multiple identities is a trend since the first AHDR.

3.7 An Arctic identity?

There are reasons to wonder if an Arctic identity exists at the individual level, and whether such an identity is similarly understood in all eight Arctic (Council) countries (Keskitalo, 2009). Still, sometimes a broader and more general definition of an Arctic identity – stretching over nations and regions – is used. It denotes a sense of shared interests within a geographic region and is understood in terms of how members connect to their linguistic, cultural, and social similarities, and their perception of common interests and threats regardless of state boundaries. Regionalized Arctic identity is being claimed by institutions and sub-national groups to strengthen their political legitimacy and mobilize people for collective action. The identity is geographically bounded in the sense of referring to the “natural” or self-evident Arctic that makes up this circumpolar region, defined in part by latitude, climate, ecology, and even oceans (Berkman, 2012; Gerhardt et al., 2010). Arctic regional identity is, however, also an outcome of institutional and intergovernmental co-operation. It is partly created through language, policy, and political action. National identity draws on and stresses valued characteristics that include resourcefulness and hard work in using nature to secure material wealth and prosperity, resilience and adaptability in thriving in a cold climate, closeness with nature and the desire to explore it, and commitment to protecting the Arctic and its natural beauty. This Arctic identity points to transnational problems and interdependencies, the importance of non-state actors, and the multiple and often competing layers of identities that exist in the Arctic (Williams, 2011; Thisted, 2012). Nevertheless, our impression is that a general Arctic identity is still weak, while regional, local and Indigenous identities have developed.

Within each Arctic country, northern identity varies. While Greenland and Iceland have an indisputable northern geographic location, only parts of the remaining six countries fall within the Arctic. The label “Arctic” when used for northern Canada, Alaska, Greenland and northern
Russia, is often understood in terms of “the frontier”, including specific notions of the environment, Indigenous peoples, and forms of subsistence. In Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland, nation states that have historically not been discussed as Arctic areas, such an “identity” seems less common. Keskitalo et al. (2013: 353) argue that “these countries have thus not necessarily been subject to processes associated with the term “Arctic”, and in Sweden, domestic research and discourse regularly use other terms. Discussions of regional “norths” exist in the area, but the language used exhibits none of the very strong and specific characteristics related to the term Arctic.” (See Textbox 3.3).

The North has served as an important and enduring imaginative resource in the construction of Canadian national identity. Arnold (2012) argues that the North is more an idea, a discursive formation, as a social and political place that has been “nordicised”. Canadian northerners feel largely ignored. They want to be recognized for their contribution to Canadian culture and identity, while remaining first and fundamentally northern (Robinson, 2012; England, 2000; Stephenson, 2012).

There is a complex interplay between Arctic identities and Arctic policy (see Textbox 3.4). The different countries’ Arctic resources and exercises of sovereignty are part of the historic importance of the Arctic in producing distinct national identities. At the same time, the development of shared values, ideas and ambitions have been emphasized in the establishment of the Arctic Council, circumpolar organizations, and in the International Polar Year. One intention these initiatives share is to grow a circumpolar identity based on values, ideas, and interests that these countries have in common. These two identities (national and regional), and the policy options and directions that emerge from them, are in tension. They might converge into unique national circumpolar identities by pursuing a multi-level identity framework, in which post-colonial values and institutions compensate for the limitations of the national, and vice-versa (Williams, 2011). The eight member states of the Arctic Council all claim to have Arctic identities in one form or another. The five Arctic Ocean coastal states, however, have made even stronger Arctic identity claims.
Originating from an idea of the former Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg the Kirkenes Declaration formally established the Barents Euro-Arctic Region in 1993, to further security objectives in the European North. In order to reach the superior goal of maintaining stability in the area, its declared aim to create a shared identity in the area. The common history of the populations in the area as well as their similar geographical frame of reference is emphasized as forces capable of enhancing such a process.

An urgent challenge for decision-makers lies in making the populations in the different states in the region feel that they have something in common with their neighbors across the border. To be more specific, the goal becomes one of urging a maximum number of people in the area to include Northerners from all the states in the region in their notion of a political self, that is to say, their identification of belonging to a group with specific common interests, prospects and threats, as opposed to other sub-groups in society. Region-building thus becomes a question of identity politics. This involves a view of identity as something flexible, a relation rather than a possession, a quality conditional to persons in different situations rather than categorical pertaining to persons as such. A person’s identity may thus change over time, and he or she may at one point in time have, or be related to, several identities. Overlapping identities are not only considered possible, from a security point of view, they may even be regarded as desirable.

Official statements stress that people in the area all live in a region characterized by a harsh climate, a vulnerable nature, long distances to national centers, and a sparse population, which allegedly gives them some kind of common worldview and a mutual understanding of each other’s situation, notwithstanding the state borders in the area.

However, in the cross-border region Karelia of Finland and Russia separation has been a more common historical state than community and interaction. Another factor that somewhat weakens the argument that a transnational Northern identity will easily develop - or is already in existence - is the fact that Northwestern Russia to a large degree is populated by “Southerners”. Hönneland (1998) claims that the historical transnational identity outlined in the “Barents rhetoric” has never existed, and that the new northern identity is so far a castle in the air; the Barents citizen an illusion.

Many who live in the area have only a vague conception of the Barents region, others have never heard of it. It seems all the more appropriate to ask whether the new transnational northern identity relates only to a very limited group of entrepreneurial people with particular interests in developing contacts at the other side of the border.

Textbox 3.3

The Barents region

Originating from an idea of the former Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg the Kirkkenes Declaration formally established the Barents Euro-Arctic Region in 1993, to further security objectives in the European North. In order to reach the superior goal of maintaining stability in the area, its declared aim to create a shared identity in the area. The common history of the populations in the area as well as their similar geographical frame of reference is emphasized as forces capable of enhancing such a process.

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3.8 Quantifying ethnicity

The Arctic countries differ substantially in their efforts to collect and share data on ethnicity. It is often very difficult to trace ethnicity in both the historical records and in the present-day population statistics, even where statistics are collected. Official and self-determined definitions have varied extensively over time, and between countries (ASI, 2010). Looking into the future, the descendants of today’s ethnic groups may or may not identify with the ethnic heritage of their ancestors. Cultural transition can threaten ethnic continuity, and thus Indigenous cultural persistence.

The incomplete inclusion and categorization of ethnicity in registers creates difficulties to estimate not only the population size and composition of different ethnic groups, but also specific features such as language spoken, educational attainment, occupations, and health status (Axelsson and Sköld, 2011) (see Chapter 2, Arctic Populations and Migration). The UN Special Rapporteur Paul Hunt has pointed out that it is practically impossible to improve the situation of Indigenous peoples if they are not visible through enumeration (Hunt, 2007). This was especially stressed for the Sámi in Sweden. All official estimations present a number of 20,000 Sámi living in Sweden. A genealogically based examination shows, however, that the number is probably almost three times as high (Hassler, 2005). This means that there are more or less 30,000 persons in Sweden with a Sámi background who are not aware of their ethnicity or for some reason have chosen not to identify with the Sámi culture. These persons can be said to represent transitions that threaten to undermine Indigenous identity: the threat is cultural rather than demographic (Axelsson and Sköld, 2006).

Language is one of those features of ethnicity closely tied to issues of identity and political rights. For example, in order to vote in the Sámi parliaments of Norway, Sweden and Finland, one must prove that either he or she speaks Sámi, or that it is spoken by a parent or grandparent (Keskitalo et al., 2013).

Overall, there is a great need for improving and integrating quantitative ethnic information at the individual level in official registers and statistics. This includes better coordination on the regional, national and international levels. Better information is a prerequisite for understanding the past and present situation, and thus for the long-term sustainability of Arctic cultures and identities.
3.9 Cultural identities and “traditional” activities

"Connection with nature" is a defining feature of Arctic identity (ASI, 2010). Traditional activities – such as hunting, fishing and herding – represent both sources of monetary income and cultural values, and are strongly linked to northern identities (see Chapter 4, Economic Systems). In a time when Inuit were solely living on the land and constantly travelled between locations, the sharing of food was important. The move to settlements has brought about changes in Inuit notions of sharing food, and – indirectly – in ideas about identity (Gombay, 2005). While traditional subsistence economies and the right to possess and occupy the land of their ancestors are intrinsic to the cultural identity of Arctic Indigenous peoples (ASI, 2010: 136; MacLennan, 2008), non-Indigenous hunting and fishing practices often follow a different (sport or hobby) logic. Still, in some parts of the Arctic (e.g., in the Nordic countries) hunting and fishing are seen as a part of one's livelihood among non-Indigenous persons and are strongly related to one's identity (Keskitalo et al., 2013).

In the Faroe Islands, local forms of agriculture and hunting have enabled the Islanders to maintain a relatively high degree of self-sufficiency in local food production. Mountain grazing sheep provide up to 60% of all locally produced meat as well as wool, while some limited catching of sea birds such as puffins and fulmars, and the coastal hunting of the abundant and regularly available pilot whales provide meat and blubber. Enough dairy cattle are kept to satisfy all domestic milk needs, and small potato crops are carefully cultivated by private households for their own use.
Young Eveny couple at annual celebration of Reindeer Herders’ Day, Russian Federation

Credit: Olga Ulturgasheva.

Nomadic reindeer pastoralism for some Sámi and many Indigenous Siberian peoples is a key feature of their culture. Extensive reindeer pastoralism depends on large areas for pasturing the deer. Reindeer herding is under pressure from extractive industries and other infrastructural initiatives. In Fennoscandia, many rivers have been dammed and large areas of pasturage flooded as a result of extensive water regulation. Valuable riverside pasturage, natural pasture boundaries, and migration routes have disappeared. The pasture areas have been replaced with paddocks, the natural migration routes supplanted by road networks. Through clear-felling, soil scarification and road construction, forestry has broken up winter pasturage areas and reduced the supply of winter grazing for reindeer in northern Europe. Peat-harvesting activities also have an adverse impact on pastures. Today, less than 10 per cent of the Sámi population are connected to reindeer herding, which requires membership in a Sámi village. This keeps a major part of the Sámi population outside one of the traditional economic activities and today also outside hunting and fishing privileges, and in the end from the possibility of using the traditional areas at all. This has severe consequences for the ethnic and cultural identity among the Sámi (Sköld, 2011).
A different, almost post-productionist, approach to reindeer herding can be observed in the Sakha Republic in Siberia (Aytalina Ivanova and Florian Stammler, personal communication, October 2014). There, a reindeer herding law passed in 1997 specifies the value of this livelihood as a “national property” that is worth of state support as such (Sakha Republic, 1997). Implementing this law, the region has introduced a guaranteed salary to herders of reindeer regardless of whether they are privately or publicly owned, paying them for just raising and keeping herds rather than producing meat or other agricultural output from these animals. The main condition for this is that they lead a nomadic way of life (Sakha Republic, 2002). Similar thoughts underlie support policies in other Arctic regions, such as in the West Siberian Yamal District, although there politics follow a double strategy of stimulating reindeer meat production alongside nomadic lifestyle (Stammler & Ventsel, 2003).

Throughout the Arctic, subsistence activities such as fishing and hunting have suffered greatly under the impact of mining industries and the construction of hydro-electric power stations. For example, the Inuit in Nunavik and the Cree First Nations of James Bay Region have experienced a dramatic loss of hunting grounds through flooding for hydro-electric purposes. While mining in the Arctic has impacted traditional economies, resource exploitation can also form the basis for the (re)construction of identities, where the links to traditional economies have transformed into new occupation and settlement forms (see Chapter 11, Community Viability and Adaptation). Still, as a general tendency, conditions for traditionally important industries such as herding, hunting and fishing have been deteriorating due to mining and large-scale development, which have negative impacts on culture and identities.
**Textbox 3.4**

**Arctic cultural representations in the interest of the nation**

Inuksuit are Inuit stone constructions stacked to resemble the human figure. They are strong cultural symbols embedded in songs, shamanism, myths, legends, and stories. In April 2005, the Vancouver 2010 Olympic committee presented their logo, an Inuksuk named Ilanaaq, meaning friendship in Inuktitut. The decision was controversial to some, and logical to others (Arnold, 2010). A notion was expressed that the Inuksuk was a symbol for the entire Canada, and it has been claimed that it has also emerged as the unofficial symbol of the Arctic (Heyes, 2002).

When the city of Umeå announced its candidacy for the European Capital of Culture 2014, the Indigenous culture of the Sámi was a prominent part of the application. The bid was said to be “an invitation to this magic and exciting borderless country, with the unique Sámi culture as one of its highlights.” It was stated that historically, the outside world has often varied in its descriptions of this borderless northern place, seeing it either as a country of the future, or as completely marginalized. Umeå claimed a strong northern identity that understands the north through every fiber of its being; an essential attribute, as the northern region rises to the top of the European agenda. 2014 would offer fabulous opportunities for Sámi to show their art, music, handicraft and other expressions of culture to a wide and global audience, and to put to the attention of an extensive audience the too often problematic situation of Sámi and other Indigenous peoples in the world. There are also reasons to critically scrutinize how they were integrated, engaged and empowered during the process, and to see how others represented their culture (Rönnmark and Björinge, 2014).
3.10 Landscape and place

Identity is certainly place-bound and time-bound, as well as relationally determined (Oosten and Remie, 1999). Relating to the landscape plays an important part in Arctic identities. The landscape is a source of collective (clan, family, national) history, which is captured through place names, monuments and oral tradition. It is on the land that the dynamics between humans, animals and the environment are experienced, and traditional skills learned and perfected (Anderson, 2014). Cultural traditions are most often communicated through physical activities on the land (and the sea). Through participation in these activities one learns how to behave properly. The capacity for deciphering and understanding landscapes can be developed over time (Patrick, 2005). Thus, respect for and knowledge of different places is an integral part of Arctic cultures and identities.

Place names (toponyms) for landscape features contribute to how a place is perceived. Place names may describe topographic features, draw attention to sites used by animals, provide directional/navigational references, or have religious/ritual significance (Collignon, 2006).

It is not economic motives that encourage many to continue with a traditional relation to nature, but the quality of life, the quasi-existential persuasion that the landscape contains the meaning of life. Or, as one Sámi put it to the historian Åsa Nordin:

Today it’s a lifestyle. So long as we carry on reindeer herding the way we do, with extensive herding, migrations and guarding, it’s a lifestyle. [...] Especially when reindeer herding doesn’t bring in most money, you factor other Sami values into it, values which cannot be stated in money terms, and when you assimilate and experience those values as well, it’s a lifestyle

(Nordin, 2007: 82).

Landscape is of pivotal importance to most Arctic communities and cultures. But Indigenous peoples are not alone in feeling strong ties to their home areas. One challenge facing tomorrow’s land use systems in the Arctic will be that of devising forms of co-management of resources, both within communities and between groups living in the Arctic. Place identity is not a given but rather an outcome of a continuous process of place-making. Still, place identity is perhaps even more important for Indigenous peoples than for other populations. Where non-Indigenous populations have occupied their territories, Indigenous peoples must confront the impacts of disruptive incursions upon their land-based way of life and upon their sense of identity.


3.11 Identities in a changing Arctic

The Arctic is constantly changing and so are the identities embedded in the region. Since identity is a way of relating with one’s human, social and political surroundings, it is continually constructed, and should be seen as a process rather than as a category. Identity is enacted and re-enacted every time one has to relate to someone else (Dorais, 2005). At the same time, the Arctic experiences a variety of change processes. Long-term socio-economic developments have major effects on cultural identities, not least among Indigenous peoples in the Circumpolar North (see Chapter 10, *Globalization*).

Climate change acts contributes to other factors of change that have far-reaching impacts. Changes to climate have a mostly negative effect on subsistence, travel on sea ice, reindeer pasture conditions, and thereby indirectly on cultural identities (ASI, 2010; Hovelsrud *et al*., 2011; Magraw *et al*., 2008). Community viability and a sense of common identity are challenged by changing environmental conditions and increasing competition over resources (see Chapter 11, *Community Viability and Adaptation*; Andrachuk and Smit, 2012; Keskitalo *et al*., 2013; Stepien *et al*., 2014). These challenges are especially keen among adolescents (Kvernmo and Heyerdahl, 2003; Caulfield, 2000). The loss of social identity resulting from these changes increases the risk for social alienation and destructive behaviours (ASI, 2010).

Urbanization has been a distinctive trend all over the Arctic during the past decades, involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups (Megatrends, 2011). For example, in the Canadian Arctic, recent demographic changes have made settlement patterns increasingly urban, with more and more people moving to larger communities. Despite these trends, Inuit cultural identity for many continues to be strongly connected to spending time out on the land, hunting, fishing, trapping and camping. Some Inuit indeed maintain a rather negative view of urban spaces in the Arctic, identifying them as places where non-Indigenous people have eclipsed Inuit values and practices (Searles, 2010). Many Inuit believe that living off the land creates intelligent and moral persons, and that individuals develop a capacity to think and reason through facing the elements of sea, snow, ice, and wind. On the other hand, an urban living has the potential to offer a new platform for identity building, where freedom, reflection and innovation are key elements (Kishigami, 2002; see Chapter 11, *Community Viability and Adaptation*).
3.12 Chapter summary and trends

As was stated in the first AHDR, resilient cultures and modernity do not have to contradict each other. That is, contemporary Arctic Indigenous peoples understand that the challenge is not to choose between “modernity” and “unchanging tradition,” but to find a livable combination of the two. Given the political sophistication of local communities, to work in the North has become a tremendously rewarding learning experience for scientists and other scholars. At the same time, there is an evolving self-consciousness in some areas of the North that goes beyond the (necessary) anti-colonial rhetoric of earlier years. There is also an increased awareness of “mixed” identities, and of the fact that many northerners have a mixed heritage. Still, these social realities are not always reflected in official policies and legislation, which tend to favor simplistic “black or white” identity categories.

There is an ongoing trend toward cultural and linguistic revitalization. Indigenous people are increasingly participating in academic and civil society discourses. This needs to be seen in the context of emerging northern identities and the positive valuation of regional perspectives.
We must not forget, however, that there are enormous differences within the North regarding cultures and identities. While these differences must not be left out of the picture, a few general developments are nevertheless traceable.

We observe an increased focus on “culture.” Culture, especially Indigenous culture in the North, has become more and more a resource, both in the sense of a commodity and in the sense of a tool that makes external recognition easier. Alongside this, there is a growing sense of the marketability of the North, which includes tourism but is not limited to it. So, it is not just “northern culture,” but the North as a whole that becomes more and more reified, be it as commodity, experience, state of mind, wilderness, resource base, and homeland. This leads to a kind of strategic advantage of being in the North. What used to cause isolation and marginalization – that is, Arctic identities – can be an advantage in contemporary identity politics.

_Gwich’in Moccasins, Canada, 2014_  

![Gwich’in Moccasins, Canada, 2014](image)

Photo credit: Christine Creyke.

Much has been written about climate change in the Arctic. It is obvious that the cultural impact of climate change across the Circumpolar North varies from place to place and region to region. Still, there has been an enormous increase in the overall amount of attention Arctic communities are receiving because of climate change. Thus, while climate change might or might not be a priority issue for a specific group of northerners,
the (southern) discourse about climate change and its impact on northern cultures has changed dramatically since the first AHDR. This emphasizes a clash between inside and outside perspectives, and indicates that parts of the Arctic have acquired a new stereotypical position, namely that of victims of climate change.

In focusing on specific characteristics of Arctic cultures and identities, one is tempted to overemphasize the differences with the outside world. There are, however, multiple vectors of similarities that tie cultures and identities of the North to other parts of the globe. On the one hand, many metropoles of Arctic states, to varying degrees, are geographically and culturally located far south of the Arctic Circle. Given the historical and contemporary connections between southern political centers and Arctic peripheries, it is not surprising that cultures of the North share many features with their respective dominant (southern) societies. On the other hand, northern identities also share similarities with those of other peripheral parts of the world (Brightman et al., 2006; Ulturgasheva et al., 2010). The transnational Indigenous movement, in which Arctic organizations are very active participants, is an example of this development.

Even today, however, Arctic cultures and identities remain different from southern counterparts in many respects. For example, Arctic cultures and identities have been characterized by tight relations with the natural and social environment. Kinship ties and networks continue to be valuable, not least in the urban context.

Some argue that there is a more general circumpolar “Arctic” culture, as the different identities share common characteristics. The development of communication technologies linking different parts of North has increased this trend, while at the time encouraging globalizing tendencies.

Gender, age and ethnicity – and their interactions – are important aspects and parameters of Arctic livelihoods. Of these, indigeneity has received the most attention in the literature. Arctic cultures and identities have not been sufficiently investigated through the lens of gender. While we know that traditional circumpolar cultures were characterized by gender-specific realms of activities, we know too little about the gender dimensions of contemporary cultural practices. Since we know that urbanization and other aspects of modernity affect men and women in the Arctic differently, we can assume pronounced gender differentiation, especially in urban contexts. While “traditional” notions of culture and identity are often tied to rural areas, 21st century Arctic realities include significant rural to urban migration movements, which are often more
difficult to align with male cultural practices and concepts than with those of women. The gender balance in the production of modern Indigenous cultural expressions is differentiated. Whether women or men are predominant in culturally important activities depends on a variety of local and regional factors. More gender-sensitive research on cultures and identities in the Arctic is much needed.

Likewise, the rapid changes of a globalized world are having and will have profound impacts on the younger generation (and future generations); thus, it is critical to understand the hopes and aspirations of Arctic youth. The future of Arctic cultures and identities will rest on the choices made by young people in the North today. These choices include – but are not limited to – decisions about where to live, which languages to learn and use, etc. Most important will be whether and to what extent Arctic Indigenous cultures and identities will be attractive for the younger generations. There are localized positive examples, as well as negative ones (Megatrends, 2011; Åhrén, 2008; Ulturgasheva et al., 2010).

There is great cultural variation and complexity in the Arctic, probably more so than recognized in the first *AHDR*. Even where forms of expression (e.g., drumming, story-telling, rituals) are similar, the underlying cultural ideologies can be different. Identities change over time and there are multiple identities, which further complicate a homogeneous understanding. There are, however, basic similarities in the worldviews and spiritualities of many Indigenous societies and cultures of the North.

So what other major trends concerning cultures and identities in the North can be found? To some extent, they seem contradictory. On the one hand, there is a trend toward revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures and the strengthening of northern identities. On the other hand, there is growing threat to circumpolar cultures and identities through modernization, globalization and (urban) migration. Only northerners themselves can decide where they want to live and work. As indicated above, this is hardly an either/or question but a situation of where both revitalization and modernization are necessary. In these decisions, however, “fate control” as defined by *AHDR* (2004) and *ASI* (2010), seems to be a critical indicator of positive change.

Finally, we want to conclude with what we see as the major changes since 2004, the publication of the first *AHDR*. Given that certain layers of cultures and identities are “slow-changing” entities, it could be argued that not much has changed in terms of cultures and identities during the past ten years. Trends that started long before 2004 are visible in 2014 as well: increased connectedness with the non-Arctic, especially with
national and international hubs and centers; decrease of local language use; and increase of cultural revitalization efforts.

However, there has been a marked growth in the global awareness of the Arctic between 2004 and 2014. This is primarily connected to the global climate change discourse and to anticipation of future economic development opportunities in the North. While these conversations typically originate in the South, northerners are active participants in them. The net costs and benefits for Arctic residents remain to be seen, not only in terms of economic development, but also whether the increased interest in Arctic cultures might cement old stereotypes rather than overcome them.

Still, it is clear that Arctic (Indigenous) “culture” has become an asset and a resource in many parts of the North. At the same time as indigeneity is being celebrated, cultural and social realities in the Arctic are increasingly characterized by “mixed” identities, whether or not they are socially and politically recognized. Parts of the Arctic show indications of increased strategic advantage of northern-ness and a growing marketability of symbols and things northern. Whether the interest in Arctic cultures and identities is a short-lived fad or not is a question for *AHDR-III*.

### 3.13 References


