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The Arctic: the new business hotspot or a sustainable prosperity project of co-management?

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Abstract: The Arctic plays a key role in the global climate. As the ice retreats the current challenges concerning the environment, maritime safety, tourism and oil and gas activity will intensify even more the effects of climate change on Arctic ecosystems and communities. Climate change and modernization have thus become two intrinsically linked forces that severely alter the context in which the indigenous populations of the region sustain a livelihood (van Voorst, 2009). Local animal and plant species are of dietary importance, while hunting, fishing or foraging are all of cultural and social value. The availability of many species that the Arctic indigenous people rely on for food has become limited due to climate change and the receding ice cover. The assessment of potential impacts of resource development should to some extent rely on traditional knowledge and could benefit climate change researchers in Western academia and policy-making circles as well as help the indigenous communities to tackle the difficult task of promoting their local adaptation. A joint assessment and management on impacts issues must be performed based on mutual consent, information exchange, responsible coordination and cooperation. Social impact assessment (SIAs) serve as means of determining how and to what extent specialized social groups will become better or worse off as a result of certain externally generated actions. Assessments have been largely about indigenous people, not by them (Cochran et al, 2013:558). This is why it becomes crucial to enrich SIAs with detail and context that focus on the indigenous perspective, in which economy and culture are more closely intertwined. The benefits of the Arctic emerging economy may be seen in the creation of economic development, but it must be part of a sustainable prosperity project of comanagement with triple gain to economy, environment and communities.

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