

# Sustainability in the City and Beyond

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## Sustainability in the Urban Arctic: Waste, Tourism, and other Contemporary Challenges

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Fifty years ago the North American Arctic was seen as a paradise for ambitious urban planners. Ralph Erskines' 1972 design of Resolute Bay brings the whole edifice of High Modernism to bear in the Arctic, for example, part and parcel of a modernizing and "totalizing transformation" of northern Canada through forced relocation practices (Tester 1994). Today, Arctic urban spaces are distinguished from those lying south of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel by what come call an urban paradox (Nyseth 2017) and others, more pessimistically, a "condition of permanent disaster" (Zamyatina and Goncharov 2018). While smaller than their more temperate counterparts, the challenges to sustainability that Arctic cities face include a host of issues that are either new or exacerbated by the geography, climate, and social valences of the Arctic. Even as the Arctic is often characterized as uninhabited, its cities are growing rapidly and in contexts of precarity and substantial inequality (Heleniak and Bogoyavlensky 2014; Duhaime, Caron, Levesque, Lemelin, Maenpaa, Nigai, and Robichard 2017). Canadian research in sustainability at a national level has a hard time capturing these complexities (eg. Roseland and Spiliotopoulou 2018). And although circumpolar reports on sustainability and resilience such as the *Arctic Resiliency Report* (2016) have focused on ecological change, they often downplay social drivers, contexts, and reactants.

I propose to discuss some of the contemporary challenges across the circumpolar Arctic, including challenges to sustainability such as logistics, waste, tourism, and food security. My discussion will focus on two in particular sustainability challenges: solid waste management and tourism. I will compare strategies for managing waste and tourism from a circumpolar view that includes visions of sustainability from indigenous organizations and states. I will argue that it is urgently necessary to consider both locally-adapted strategies of circular economic principles (cf. Ontario 2015) while also recognizing the geographic and social differences of the Arctic. As the challenge of growth imperils the sustainability of Arctic urban centres, community outreach and integrated circular waste management will be critical to future livability and adaptation.

The mixed-blessings of tourism, meanwhile, requires major investments of state and society-level resources to transform into a usable if parasitic influence on Arctic cities. While the seemingly "natural" qualities of Arctic urban centres attract tourists (Viken 2011, Nyseth 2017), this illusion obscures the weight of urbanization on Arctic environments already intensely at risk through climate change (IPCC 2018). This is demonstrated by Finland's and Norway's recent success in this area, even as local urban centres themselves demonstrate "conflicting discourses" about whether tourism should be developed (Makitie and Ylisirnio 2013). However, from a sustainability perspective, the benefits of tourism may not be worth the trade-off, as examples in Canada and Iceland demonstrate. Together, waste management and tourism's trade-offs exemplify two challenges of the contemporary urban Arctic.



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