Indigenous peoples as political actors within the Arctic Council

A case study

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Abstract

Indigenous peoples as political actors in the Arctic Council is an understudied subject. Indigenous peoples have a unique status as Permanent Participants to the Arctic Council, enabling them to affect the policy-making and decisions made within the Council. There are concerns, however, to the level of Indigenous peoples’ inclusion. Research shows that the working relationships between the eight Arctic member states of the Council and the Permanent Participants creates dependency, among other things because the Permanent Participants rely on funding from the member states. This in turn questions the status of the Permanent Participants, and whether they are included into the Arctic Council as independent political actors. This paper aims to build upon research done by Michaela Louise Coote and Monica Tennberg, researchers whom both have contributed to this field of research.

Keywords: arctic council, indigenous peoples, political actors, framing
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1. Introduction

The Arctic was once referred to as *terra nullius* on the map, meaning “nobody’s land”. Be that as it may, today the region is inhabited by over four million people and around one-tenth of the inhabitants identify themselves as belonging to an Indigenous group (Evengård, Nymand-Larsen, Paasche 2015, p. 8). Indigenous peoples have lived in the Arctic region for thousands of years (Coote 2016, p. 30). For the peoples in the Far North, human rights do not only mean survival due to climate change, but the right to decide for ones’ own future. This include safe-keeping of culture, tradition and living-conditions (ibid, p. 3). The governance of such a region, that contains a wide range of different peoples and stakeholders, is set out to be a difficult task.

Nevertheless, an attempt to “govern” the Arctic is done by the high-level forum called the Arctic Council. The forum is unique as it involves both the Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States of America, also known as the “Arctic Eight”) as well as the regions’ Indigenous peoples through their overarching organizations\(^1\). In addition to the member states and the Indigenous groups, the Council exists of observers\(^2\) as well as intergovernmental organisations or inter-parliamentary organisations and non-governmental organisations (Nord 2016, p. 38–39).

Instead of being represented by their national states at the forum, Indigenous peoples are allowed to participate as so called “Permanent Participants”\(^3\) within the Council. Their status gives them full consultation right on all proposals set forward by the member states, even though final decisions are made by the Arctic states. This gives the Permanent Participants close to *de facto* power of veto in the Arctic Council, should they all reject a proposal (Koivurova and Heinämäki 2006, p. 104). This structure can be viewed as a challenge to the traditional

\(^{1}\) These six organisations are Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich’in Council International (GCI), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and the Saami Council (SC).

\(^{2}\) These are China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Spain.

\(^{3}\) I will use the terms *Permanent Participants* and *Indigenous peoples* synonymously throughout the study.
The state-centric understanding of political rights and democracy (Mörkenstam, 2015, p. 634). The Arctic Council’s policy-making process, using norm-making tools, have even been called revolutionary (Koivurova and Heinämäki 2006, p. 104).

1.2 The Ottawa Declaration

The founding document of the Arctic Council, called the Ottawa Declaration, was created with the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in mind. There are three key paragraphs concerning the Indigenous peoples. The document states that the Council shall:

“(…) provide means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities (…)” (Ottawa Declaration 1996).

“The category of Permanent Participant is created to provide for active participation and full consultation with the Arctic Indigenous representatives within the Arctic Council” (ibid).

“(…) desiring further to provide a means for promoting cooperatives activities to address Arctic issues requiring circumpolar cooperation, and to ensure full consultation with and the full involvement of indigenous peoples and their communities (…)”. (ibid).

1.3 Research problem

Active participation and full involvement in order to engage in full consultation processes requires capacity measures from the Permanent Participants. However, research shows that Indigenous peoples have difficulties to fully engage as independent political actors into the work of the Arctic Council. In research done by Sebastian Knecht of the Berlin Graduate School of Transnational Studies, stakeholder participation in the Arctic Council meetings was examined. The findings show that Permanent Participants lack both the financial means and the human capacity needed, to participate into the Council meetings to the same extent as the
member states and the observers (Knecht 2016, p. 219). Instead, the Permanent Participants rely on the member states as well as the observers for contributions in order to participate (Coote 2016, p. 43). Furthermore, research shows that the working relationships in the Council between Indigenous groups and their respective home states can be difficult. According to findings by Michaela Louise Coote, from the University of Iceland, it is easier for Indigenous peoples to pursue their political agenda if it is in line with the agenda of their home states. Her research show that a good relationship to the home states facilitates Indigenous peoples’ politics (Coote 2016, p. 39). Coote’s research indicates that such structure creates a form of dependency to the home states, which in turn challenges the level of independent involvement of Indigenous peoples to the Council (Coote 2016, p. 39).

The findings by Knecht, Coote as well as Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen could be indicating that Indigenous peoples’ involvement to the Arctic Council is undermined. These findings together raise concerns over whether Permanent Participants indeed are included into the Arctic Council as independent political actors. The meaning of the term political actor builds upon a theory of what a polity is and can be described as having capacity to govern and the term will be used in the question formulation, and throughout the study (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996, p. 35). Frame analysis will be used when formulating the aim of the study. The approach focuses on the construction, conveying and interpretation of meaning in a text (Brisard, Östman and Verschueren, 2009, p. 74). Both frame analysis and the term political actor will be further introduced in chapter three.

1.4 Aim of the study and research questions

The aim is to examine how the framing of Indigenous peoples, also known as Permanent Participants, in the Arctic Council influence their possibilities to participate as independent political actors. Two perspectives will be studied and then compared. One is the framing of Indigenous peoples by the Arctic member states and the other, the Permanent Participants framing of themselves. By studying to what extent the Indigenous peoples are included into
the policy-making of the various subject matters within the work of the Council, my aspiration is to answer the questions below:

- How are Permanent Participants framed by the “Arctic Eight”?
- How do Permanent Participants frame themselves?
- To what extent are Permanent Participants included into the Arctic Council as independent political actors?

1.5 Outline of the study

This study is comprised of seven chapters and references. The first chapter briefly presents the Arctic Council as well as the research problem, followed by aim of the study and research questions. Chapter two presents a more thorough background of the Council, where each Permanent Participant are presented. Chapter three offers an insight to previous research on Indigenous peoples as political actors as well as some conceptual explanations used in the thesis. Chapter four accounts for the methodology, i.e. research design and empirical material. Following chapter five presents the findings. Chapter six offers a discussion of the findings. The last chapter, chapter seven, presents the authors’ own conclusions.

2. Background

2.1 The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council was founded in 1996, on the basis of the Ottawa Declaration (Nord 2016, p. 24). The Council is the only one of its kind and a unique venue for dialogue between the eight Arctic States. These “Arctic Eight” are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States of America. The Arctic Council is also where the six organisations for Indigenous peoples operate on matters of the Arctic. These six organisations are Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich’in Council International (GCI), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Russian Association of
Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and the Saami Council (SC). The Council also consist of twelve states with observatory status. These are China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Spain. In addition to these, the Council consists of nine intergovernmental organisations or inter-parliamentary organisations, and eleven non-governmental organisations (ibid, p. 38–39).

Hitherto, the focus for the Arctic Council has mainly been on environmental matters. Nota bene, the Council excludes all matter related to military security (Ottawa Declaration 1996). The Arctic Council operates through Working Groups, Task Forces and Expert Groups. The Working Groups covers everything from subjects such as sustainable use to emergency response. Each Working Group has a mandate under which it operates as well as a Chair and a Management Board or a Steering Committee (Arctic Council, 2015). The Task Forces are appointed at the Ministerial meetings to work for a limited amount of time, on a specific issue (Arctic Council, 2018). At the moment, the Council consists of two Expert Groups: The Expert Group in support of implementation of the framework for action on Black Carbon and Methane and the Ecosystem-Based Management Expert Group (Arctic Council, 2015).

It must be noted however, that the Arctic Council is not a decision-making organisation, rather it is a decision-shaping such, based on consensus (Haftendorn 2013, p. 19). It creates declarations, agreements and policies using various soft-law methods (Koivurova and Heinämaäki 2006, p. 102).

2.1 The Permanent Participants

The policy for becoming a Permanent Participant to the Arctic Council consists of the requirements that the Indigenous people in question for membership represents a single Indigenous people in one Arctic state, or constitutes of an Indigenous people in more than one Arctic state (Coote 2016, p. 31). The number of Permanent Participants to the Arctic Council
must always be less than member states to the Council. Below follows a short introduction to each Permanent Participant to the Council.

**Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)** was founded in 2000 and works as an international treaty organisation. It represents approximately 32,000 peoples of Athabaskan descent; peoples from the Alaskan, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. The Arctic Athabaskan Council does not state any particular priorities for the Arctic Council, instead the organisation is said to be engaged in various issues (Arctic Council, 2017).

**Aleut International Association (AIA)** is an Alaska Native not-for-profit corporation, founded in 1998. The AIA represents both Russian and American Aleuts. The AIA have representatives at the Arctic Council in Working Groups, Task Forces, as well as in various programs of the Arctic Council (Arctic Council, 2015).

**Gwich’in Council International (GCI)** is a non-profit organisation for Indigenous peoples in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Alaska. It was established in 1999 and represents approximately 9,000 peoples of Gwich’in descent (Arctic Council, 2015). As stated on their website, the priorities of the organisation are sustainable development and the environment for Gwich’in. The *Sustainable Development Working Group* (SDWG) and the *Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group* (CAFF) are where most efforts are put concerning the Arctic Council. Another priority issue that is addressed through the Council is renewable energy (Gwich’in Council International, 2015).

**Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)** was founded in 1977 and is a major actor in regards to the international fora of Indigenous politics. It holds approximately 160,000 Inuit in Alaska/United States, Canada, Greenland/Denmark and Chukotka/Russia. The ICC works on many issues within the Council, and states on the Arctic Council website to consider the Arctic Council to be the premier international forum dealing with Arctic policy issues (Arctic Council, 2015).
Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) represents Indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation, approximately 270,000 people. It was established in 1990 but was shut down in 2012 due to a new law in Russia on NGO’s. However, in 2013 RAIPON was re-launched after negotiations and amendments to the organisation’s statutes (Arctic Council, 2016).

Saami Council (SC) is a NGO, representing Indigenous peoples from Finland, Russia, Norway and Sweden. It was founded in 1956 and is therefore the oldest of the six Permanent Participants (Arctic Council, 2015). The primary issue for the organisation is said to be to promote Saami rights (Arctic Council, 2015).

2.1.1 The Álgu Fund

As the Ottawa Declaration states⁴, there is a desire to engage Indigenous peoples into the Council, through “active participation and full consultation” (Ottawa Declaration, 1996). The need for a joint effort to secure financial support has been recognised in every Ministerial declaration since the establishment of the Council. However, the member states have not acted in the matter. Consequently, the Álgu Fund was created by the Permanent Participants themselves to allocate contributions primarily from the observers of the Council. The fund was launched in 2017 during the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Fairbanks in 2017 (Álgu Fund, n.d.).

⁴ See chapter 1, “Introduction”.
3. Theoretical approach
3.1 Indigenous peoples as political actors

Previous research on the topic of Indigenous politics has been covered by scholars such as Karena Shaw and Sheryl Lightfoot, among many others. The studies are often drawn on theories such as International Relations (IR) or post-colonial theory. Together, these different scholars highlight certain traits that complicates the involvement of non-state actors in a state-driven environment. This study will not account for any of these theories alone. Instead, with assistance of the previous research, this study will try to illuminate some of the issues Indigenous peoples have faced, and still faces, in the role as political actors today. This chapter aims to explain how the evolution of territory and sovereignty have shaped the current inclusion of Indigenous peoples as political actors into the international policy-making arena. It concludes with an account for Indigenous peoples as political actors within the Arctic Council.

3.1.1 Indigenous peoples and the state

Some of the identified traits mentioned above, descend from the idea of the Westphalian state model, which dates back to 1648 and the Peace Treaties of Westphalia and Osnabruck. The treaty, which gave states authority to practice legal and political power within their territory, is the normative structure of the modern-day world. How much the Westphalian state model continues to impact today’s society can be discussed5 but the legal basis of statehood has stayed much the same since the seventeenth century (Baylis, Smith and Owens 2011, p. 23–24). Furthermore, in the Westphalian international society, three institutional underpinnings rule. These are the balance of power, diplomacy and international law (ibid, p. 44).

As described by the authors Andrew E. G. Jonas and Andrew Wood, territory is often referenced to the ways in which human society organizes and controls space (2012, p.3), and

the ‘space’ can be understood as the extension of the state’s power (Elden 2013, p. 322). Territory or ‘space’, is more than simply just land, according to Stuart Elden, author of *The Birth of Territory* (2013, p. 322), thus latching on to the Ferguson and Mansbach-discussion of ‘space’ which will be further introduced in the next section. However, the actual concept of territory has been under-examined (2013, p. 3). Elden claims that when trying to explain the term territory, either the historical dimension is neglected, or the conditions of possibility of such a structure are assumed rather than examined (Elden, 2013, p. 3). For many years, states did not examine the meaning of territory in regards to their Indigenous peoples (Lennox and Short 2016, p. 7). As Indigenous peoples have become bereaved of their territory, and consequently sovereignty, they have also lost many of their legal rights. For even though there are indications of a demise of the Westphalian state system (Ronen, 2013, p. 23), due to the emergence of a more liberal approach to the meaning of statehood (Cohen 2012, p. 159), the states are yet the dominant actor in the international legal order (Ronen, 2013, p. 23) and the ones constituting laws (Cohen 2012, p. 160). Whether international law shall protect the individuals – under international human rights law – or primarily the state’s interests, is up for debate. Those who believe firmly in state sovereignty argues that international law shall remain protective of the state sovereignty, of domestic jurisdiction and of the principle of non-intervention (Cohen 2012, p. 160). The opponents, however, see international law as based on consensus and justice to persons (Cohen, 2012 p. 159). Some scholars within the field of Indigenous politics argues that states should safe-guard the rights of their Indigenous peoples. Monica Tennberg, for example, argues that “the recognition of the political rights of Indigenous peoples should be understood as a practice of state power” (2010, p. 265). Sheryl Lightfoot agrees, arguing for state-protection against discrimination towards Indigenous peoples as well as protection for their cultures and ways of life (2016, p. 21). Protection – or inclusion for that matter – by the state seemingly does not always work. According to scholar Audra Simpson, instead of safe-guarding Indigenous peoples’ interests, national states have a tendency of making Indigenous peoples ethnic minorities of that same state (ibid, p. 21). This causes problems as states tries to

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See chapter 3, point 3.1.2.
include Indigenous peoples into the society like other citizens. However, citizenship does not guarantee inclusion (Anderson and Hughes 2015, p. 2).

3.1.2 Political actor

In order to explain the term ‘political actor’, I draw on Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach ideas of ‘polities’. The hallmarks presented below will be used in the analysis as a measurement in order to examine to which degree Indigenous peoples are included as political actors into the Arctic Council.

To understand global politics, Ferguson and Mansbach studies all polities in contrast to only states. Their theory is an attempt to understand the world of organised politics (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996, p. 32). Ferguson and Mansbach want to challenge the idea of the Westphalian state – or as they call it, ‘Westphalian polities’ – a state model that by many is seen anachronistic. They write: “A polity (or political authority) has a distinct identity: a capacity to mobilize persons and their resources for political purposes, that is, for value satisfaction; and a degree of institutionalization and hierarchy (leaders and constituents)” (ibid, p. 34). This in turn yields authority over a specified domain, i.e. persons and their resources as well as the space where those persons occupy. Space, accordingly to Ferguson and Mansbach, is another word for territory which they believe suits better the modern time as it includes phenomenons such as the financial market or even the “cyberspace” (ibid, p.35). Furthermore, members of a domain must perceive that they share trait(s) or quality(ies) that will separate them from others outside the polity. In full conclusion and accordingly to Ferguson and Mansbach, polities have the capacity to govern (ibid, p. 35).

To summarize further, a or polity shall be able to:

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• mobilize people and their resources for political purposes;
• constitute of leaders and constituents;
• authority over a domain, including people who identify themselves with it;
and if all criterions above are met;
• have capacity to govern

3.1.3 The right to self-determination

There are two treaties that compose the foundation of Indigenous rights internationally (Lennox and Short 2016, p. 5), but in total four key international treaties that exist on minorities and Indigenous peoples’ rights which are of concern to Arctic Indigenous peoples. These are the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), the ILO Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989), the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) (Lennox and Short 2016, p. 425). This chapter will focus on the two foundational treaties.

To explain the legal status of Indigenous peoples today, the term self-determination as explained within the treaties in regards to Indigenous peoples requires further explanation. As accounted for earlier in this study, Indigenous peoples often lack territory, and subsequently sovereignty. However, since the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, Indigenous Peoples now “(...) have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (Lightfoot 2016, p. 22). This rather recent recognition of Indigenous rights in an international context can be seen as a result of the persistent work of Indigenous movements (Mörkenstam 2015, 634). It took years of negotiations to realise the declaration and when it finally passed, it did so with objections from both Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA (Lightfoot 2016, p. 16-17). The four states all objected the terms of land-rights and self-determination, and precisely these two matters are the two recurrent issues
that have—and still do—create divides between states and Indigenous peoples. Recognition of land-rights and self-determination is seen as a threat to national sovereignty and territorial integrity (Lennox and Short 2016, p. 6). Be that as it may, the UNDRIP is not legally binding, even though it now serves a part in the international human rights consensus (Lightfoot 2016, p. 17). However, a mechanism for Indigenous rights that is legally binding is the ILO Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Out of 22 countries whom have ratified the treaty, Norway and Denmark are the only two of the “Arcti

c Eight” to have done so (ILO, 2017). As an effect of objection towards article 14 and 15 concerning land-rights, neither Finland or Sweden have ratified the treaty (Lennox and Short 2016, p. 425).

By entering the international policy-making arena, as in the case of the UNDRIP treaty, Indigenous peoples have found a way to secure their own interests. Marjo Lindroth and Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen explains that by doing so, the organisations for Indigenous peoples have become responsible for creating their own political agenda (2014, p. 188). Natalia Loukacheva whom have studied the grounds for legal justification of Indigenous peoples’ participation as international actors, writes in a similar manner that Indigenous peoples are making progress in attaining both greater legal and political status in the international arena (2009, p. 51). Nonetheless, legal clarity on the legitimacy for Indigenous peoples’ organisations in the global arena is, according to Loukacheva (2009, p. 52), insufficient, and so is the legal definition of self-determination (ibid, 2009, p. 53). Even though participation and representation in an international context extends Indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination, the legal capacity of Indigenous peoples’ organisations rights continues to be constrained, due to states’ regulations on different domestic legal measures and practices (Tennberg 2010, p. 265). It is a complicated matter altogether, as the national states cannot be expected to address questions related to its Indigenous peoples at the international arena if they have an agenda of their own (Lindroth and Sineevaara-Niskanen 2014, p. 188).
3.1.4 Indigenous peoples as environmentalists

At the international policy-making arena, Indigenous peoples are frequently consulted in matters related to the environment (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2014, 187). This is a policy-area wherein Indigenous peoples are often seen as experts by other stakeholders, due to their “close relationship with nature” (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2014, 183). Indeed, Traditional Knowledge is an important feature in the Indigenous advocacy. Traditional Knowledge is an aspect of the wider term Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and can be explained as a way of thinking and knowing, across biological, physical, cultural and linguistic systems (Coote 2016, p. 30). The knowledge is brought forth by cultural practices, lived experiences, lessons and skills (Arctic peoples, n.d.).

There are two dividing aspects of the matter of Traditional Knowledge which will be discussed. Traditional Knowledge can be seen as a gateway for the Indigenous agency, but it can likewise limit the Indigenous capacity as political actors, if they are consulted merely on issues concerning the environment. Political science researcher Elsa Reimerson discusses the space for Indigenous agency in the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). She claims that within the CBD, Indigenous peoples’ organisations shall “as far as possible and as appropriate”, be included into environmental policy-making, due to the fact that they are regarded as “holders of relevant Traditional Knowledge”. However, Reimerson concludes “(...) indigenous peoples not embodying traditional lifestyles, or not holding relevant Traditional Knowledge, are not relevant (in the role of ‘indigenous’) for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity (…)” (Reimerson, 2013, p. 1003).

Thus, many international policy-making forums have the tendency to create political agency for Indigenous peoples for certain political purposes (Tennberg, 2010, p. 265). Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen claim that inclusion of Indigenous peoples is important and valorised in some matters, while in other regards they are ignored (2014, 183). Consequently, Indigenous peoples often feel that they have to emphasise their perceived close relationship to nature
when engaging in international politics, by e.g. dressing up in traditional garments for political engagements.

Sheryl Lightfoot goes so far as to call for so called post-colonial completion. She claims that the discourse of Indigenous inclusion and accommodation in the political and legal orbit needs to be completed. This requires rethinking of the state, decolonization, liberalism, diplomacy and last but not least, the Westphalian sovereignty (2016, p. 19). Karena Shaw, in a like manner, picks up on the impact of Indigenous politics and the traditional understandings of sovereignty and the state in her research. She argues that if we want to understand current world politics, then there is an urge to move the centre of analysis from ontologically given assumptions about authority to the ontological conditions of possibility (Shadian 2014, p. 11). However, this could require reconstructing the political status of Indigenous peoples’ organisations in the international political forum. An attempt to this could be the case of the Arctic Council, where a new sort of space for Indigenous’ agents could be emerging (Tennberg 2010, p. 267).

3.1.5 Indigenous peoples as political actors within the Arctic Council

When the Arctic Council was established in 1996, it was indicated that the most important actors were to be the Arctic Eight (Nord 2016, p. 24). It was well into the final stages of negotiations on the future structure of the Council, that the level of involvement of the Indigenous peoples of the region were discussed by the member states. The U.S. signalled that they would have preferred the Permanent Participants being equal to observers (Koivurova and Heinämäki 2006, p. 105). Today, the Arctic Council serves as a forum where awareness for Indigenous peoples’ politics is highlighted (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2014, p. 181). The Council is said by many scholars and practitioners to be a good example of how to include Indigenous peoples into the international policy-making arena (Koivurova and Heinämäki 2006, p. 101). According to Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, the Permanent Participants have expressed positivity towards “sitting at the same table” as the member states as well as
welcomed the partnership that it entails (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2014, p. 183). From the view of the other stakeholders at the Arctic Council, the Permanent Participants are considered to be experts on their own conditions (ibid, p. 183). Tennberg even suggests that the Arctic Indigenous peoples’ organisations are the most distinguished actors in the worldwide Indigenous political movement (2010, p. 264). However, the structure of the Arctic Council is different from other decision-shaping constitutions. The norm-making mechanisms used to achieve soft law regulations within the Council is said to make it easier for Indigenous people to engage, which is not often the case in other decision-shaping institutions (Koivurova and Heinämäki 2006, p. 101). Indeed, the Permanent Participants are invited to the negotiation table, as well as into the Working Groups, Task Forces and Expert Groups. Notable is that when it comes to legal and jurisdictional matters, the Permanent Participants are deliberately excluded. In May 2008, the “Arctic Five” (meaning Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States) met and signed the Ilulissat Declaration, an agreement which maintains continued cooperation between Arctic coastal states (Steinberg, Tasch and Gerhardt 2014, p. 8–9). Although Iceland, Finland and Sweden weren’t invited, they are not economically dependent on a coastal line, which many of the Indigenous peoples are. Permanent Participants’ interests were considered to be represented through their national government (ibid, p. 81-82). What Lightfoot accounts for as hard rights and soft rights for Indigenous peoples in a wider international context, seemingly works for explaining their position towards the Arctic Council too. She means that “while ‘soft’ areas of policy, such as cultural matters, are part of the valid principle of internal self-determination, ‘hard’ areas of policy, such as land ownership, are not” (Koivurova and Heinämäki 2006, p. 103). This form of prejudice makes Louckacheva draw the conclusion that norm-making processes limits Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples are, however, consulted on matters of environment and sustainable development, i.e. “soft” policy (ibid, p. 52). In conclusion, and as Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen point out, one of the conditions for Indigenous peoples to be a member of the Arctic Council is exclusion. They argue that even though the Permanent Participants are included in policy-making, they do not set the rules and procedures by which the forums operate. It could not be made possible, would they want to engage in matters of hard policy.
Limited research has undergone the topic of the status of Indigenous peoples as political actors within the Arctic Council. Much of the previous research produced on the subject, explains participation on a rather holistic level. Michaela Louise Coote, a masters’ student at the University of Iceland, conducted a study where she examined the role of the Permanent Participants in regards to environmental decision-making. Parts of her findings were published in the “2016 Arctic Yearbook”. Her study was built upon interviews with individuals representing Indigenous peoples, or whom had worked alongside with Indigenous peoples in the Arctic Council. The results help nuance the Permanent Participants’ views of the work conducted within the Council. For example, all of the Permanent Participants interviewed was said to think that “preservation of a subsistence lifestyle” (2016, p. 37) was their main priority in terms of environmental decision-making. Furthermore, one interviewee said that funding of ones’ Indigenous peoples varied a lot, “reflecting the national interest” (ibid, p. 38). Inclusion of Traditional Knowledge was another issue, as it wasn’t entirely sure by anyone interviewed, how or if Traditional Knowledge was implemented in the policy-making work of the Arctic Council (ibid, p. 41).

3.1.6 Frame analysis

As frame analysis will be used in the analysis of this thesis, the method need to be further introduced. The choice of using frame analysis as a tool for the analysis is based on suggestions made by scholars that it suits comparative analysis – an approach that will be used in this thesis (Kuypers 2009, p. 198). Frame analysis focuses on the construction, conveying and interpretation of meaning (Brisard, Östman and Verschueren, 2009, p. 74), and before noting these certain traits due to framing, they stay neutral (Kuypers 2009, p. 181). According to

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political communication researcher Jim A. Kuypers, frames filter perceptions of the world in particular ways, making some aspects of reality more notable than others (ibid, p. 181). To frame is said to be the process whereby communicators act, knowingly or not, “to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more or less noticeable than others” (ibid, p. 182).

4. Methodology
4.1 Research design

The choice of using the Arctic Council as object for a case study was not the initial idea. The intention was to examine the function of the Arctic Council, and not a specific group(s) within it. However, as the Council is a rather impenetrable institution to examine, due to its lack of transparency (such as limited access to documents), the initial idea had to be revised. The choice ultimately fell on studying one aspect of the Council structure, and that was the participation of Indigenous peoples to the forum. Soon, the focus shifted towards the inclusion of Indigenous peoples as political actors in an international policy-making arena rather than the Arctic Council per se. However, the complexity of the Council still made it an interesting case of study, only now from an Indigenous perspective. Moreover, using the Arctic Council made it easy to identify which Indigenous groups to study, as there is a limited number of six Arctic Indigenous peoples with the status as Permanent Participants. A difficulty that emerged during the construction of the thesis, was the difficulty to highlight the differences between the Indigenous groups of the Council, and to not treat them as one group, with one joint agenda. It did not help that updated and functional websites, literature and research on the various Indigenous groups, varies significantly in quality. As a result, it has been challenging to give an equally righteous account for all of the groups. Furthermore, believing that it would be more manageable to study the Indigenous peoples’ relations to the Council proved to an be inaccurate stance of mine. I thought it would be easier to facilitate interviews from representatives from the different organisations for Indigenous peoples. However, that was not the case. One possible explanation to why, is that these organisations operate on voluntary efforts and often lack
A qualitative content analysis was used to perform the actual analysis. Content analysis means to undertake systematic reading of for example, a body of text, although not necessary from an author’s or a user’s perspective (Krippendorff 2013, p. 10). Furthermore, qualitative content analysis can be explained as a way to quantify data for a specific research topic by systematically describing content of text. It is used in order to find patterns in a wide scope of material, or to compare content from different aspects of time. The main goal is to answer what the text in question is trying to convey (Bergström and Boréus 2012, p. 48–51). Even though the researcher is looking for manifests, it can be equally interesting to look for what is not expressed or what may be intentionally left out in a text by its author or authors. I found the method suitable as my empirical material is a diverse collection of material, from different points in time – however limited to present the present. Moreover, I wanted to explore possible themes, as explained by Hjerm, Lindgren and Nilsson among others, that are not evident (2014, p. 68-69) Lastly, the findings from the qualitative content analysis was analysed with a comparative analysis approach. I have wanted to display, and account for, both the Indigenous peoples framing of themselves as well as the framing of Indigenous peoples by the Arctic member states. Thus, using the comparative approach made it possible to conduct the analysis in the intended manner. The operationalisation of the qualitative content analysis is based upon the previous research on Indigenous peoples as political actors10, which produced the analytic scheme below.

10 See chapter 3.
### Analytic scheme: Framing of Indigenous peoples as political actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenon:</th>
<th>Questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of relationships</td>
<td>How is the relation between the member states and the Permanent Participants described? How is the identity Permanent Participants’ identity described? Are Permanent Participants framed as equal partners or equivalent to NGO’s? As having capacity to govern? As having a domain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational mechanisms to realise the ideal relationships</td>
<td>What are the operational mechanisms in the Arctic Council? How is involvement for the Permanent Participants expressed by the member states/by the Indigenous peoples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity/limitations to engage into the work of the Arctic Council</td>
<td>What does support for Permanent Participants entail? As expressed by the member states/the Permanent Participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.2 Empirical material

While there is no immediate choice of method in any form of research (Ahrne and Svensson 2015, p. 18), this study has benefited from the use of different kinds of sources, a procedure called triangulation (Hjerm, Lindgren and Nilsson 2014, p. 186). Although the objects of study are the same (i.e. Arctic Indigenous peoples), the wish to gain different perspectives on the same matter was best produced by various form of empirical materials. In full, the materials used were declarations, statements, interviews (both primary- and secondary sources) as well as national Arctic strategies.

To try and answer the question on how the Arctic Eight frame the Indigenous peoples, the
choice of data contains the most recent declaration of the Arctic Council, called the Fairbanks Declaration, signed during the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting in 2017. The declaration is constructed by the member states, and therefore reflects their stand towards the Permanent Participants. I have also studied the national Arctic strategies, for each individual Arctic state. Although the strategies are not documents of the Arctic Council per se, it is fair to assume that home state policies are reflected into the work of Arctic Council by its Arctic Council officials. Furthermore, interviews with representatives from the Permanent Participants represented to the Arctic Council seemed to be the best way to gain the desired knowledge of how the Indigenous peoples’ organisations view themselves. The interviewees were chosen through the Arctic Council website, under the tab ‘About Us’. Whilst all representatives were contacted, only two responded. These two were Sara French, advisor at Gwich’in Council International and Chief Bill Erasmus, Chair of Arctic Athabaskan Council. The interview with Ms. French was held over Skype and was conducted in a semi-structured manner. By using a semi-structured method, the interviewer asks the same open questions to all interviewees. The method enables the researcher to determine the structure of the analysis in advance (Hjelm, Lindgren and Nilsson 2014, p. 150-151). Unfortunately, only one interview was held. Even though a call with Chief Bill Erasmus was scheduled, it was not conducted due to lack of correspondence. Instead a secondary source was used, constituted of an interview with Head of the Arctic and Environment Unit, Gunn-Britt Retter, from the Saami Council. The interview was published in Northern Public Affairs in 2017 and conducted by David Roddick. The use of a secondary source, contrary to a primary source, is not optimal as it does not give the interviewer the possibility to ask her or his specific questions. However, the secondary interview proved itself informative and fruitful in the analysis. Moreover, statements by the Indigenous peoples’ organisations at Fairbanks, held in 2017 were used for the analysis. All of the documents from the Ministerial meetings can be found on the Arctic Council website, under the tab ‘documents’.
5. Findings
5.1 Framing of Permanent Participants by Arctic states
5.1.1 Nature of relationships

How the Indigenous peoples are viewed by upon the Arctic member states varies, which the presentation below will show. Canada is a salient example, where the Westphalian state-structure have given way for greater inclusion of sub-groups of the society. Canada emphasises the need for support towards the Permanent Participants’ inclusion to the Council, and as the example below will show, also equate the Permanent Participants to the other Arctic governments. The long-standing tradition of self-government agreements between the government of Canada and First Nations\(^\text{11}\), such as agreements of land claim, has developed a special bond between the state and the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Sara French; advisor at Gwich’in Council International. Interview 2018-04-11). Supporting Indigenous Permanent Participants is one priority in the Canadian strategy in order to fulfil its focus pillars for the Arctic region:

“Canada recognizes and values the important role Northern governments, Arctic Indigenous organizations at the Arctic Council (known as Permanent Participant organizations) (…) have played, and will continue to play, in shaping Canada’s international actions”. (Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy 2010, p. 22).

Likewise, Denmark’s policy too includes the Indigenous peoples as equal partners to the member states:

“As the only organization [the Arctic Council] that has all 8 Arctic states as members and additionally 6 organizations of indigenous peoples as equal partners, the Arctic Council is the primary organ for concrete cooperation in the Arctic.” (Denmark, Greenland and Faroe Islands: Kingdom of Denmark

\(^{11}\) The term First Nations is used in Canada, to denominate its Indigenous peoples (Government of Canada 2014).
In the Arctic strategies, the Indigenous peoples are frequently mentioned in the same context as the environment. In the Swedish Arctic strategy, the Saami identity is even explained as: “(...) inextricably linked to this [the Arctic] environment” (Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region 2011, p. 17).

The Arctic strategies of the member states provides many different takes on the concern of environment changes to the Indigenous communities. Even though Sweden is the only country to link the environment to the Indigenous identity in its strategy, most Arctic states express concern for Indigenous peoples in regard to climate change. Below is an example from the Danish strategy:

“Cooperation between Denmark and Greenland helps in creating new opportunities for the Arctic indigenous peoples. Greenland’s self-government model, natural resource management, climate policy, environmental policy and preservation of its cultural heritage is a model of inspiration for many of the world’s indigenous peoples.” (Denmark, Greenland and Faroe Islands: Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020 2011, p. 10).

5.1.2 Operational mechanisms to realise the ideal relationships

Safe-guarding of the environment for the sake of Indigenous industries (e.g. reindeer husbandry) is expressed as a high priority for all of the Arctic states, as accounted for in the above section (with an exception of Russia). Words such as “protection” and “preservation” is often accounted for in this context. To achieve safe-guarding, protection and preservation, cooperation is key according to the Arctic states, and by most of the states, it is the Arctic Council that embodies the term cooperation.

“The Sami and the Kven people have an important cultural and linguistic heritage that is crucial to preserve.” (Norway’s Arctic Strategy – between geopolitics and social development 2017, p. 10)
“(…) Norway, Sweden and Finland are determined to preserve and improve the Sámi people’s ability to support themselves, their language, culture and way of life as well as to consider that the Sámi culture and livelihood are dependent on primary sources of income, including reindeer herding in traditional Sámi settlement areas.” (Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region 2011, p. 42).

How is cooperation and collaboration operationalised then? The Arctic states delivers different presents different takes on the matter in their respective strategies:

“Finland finds it important to guarantee that the organisations of the indigenous people represented in the Arctic Council are able to participate in the work of the Council at the various levels” (Finland’s Strategy for the Arctic Region 2013, p. 11).

“Sweden will consult with Sámi Parliament representatives prior to important Arctic Council meetings” (Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region 2011, p. 41).

“(…) promote cooperation between Indigenous peoples in the Arctic under the auspice of the Arctic Council (…)” (Norway’s Arctic Strategy – between geopolitics and social development 2017, p. 21).

Noteworthy is that under the section Cooperation forums in the north in Norway’s strategy, there is no mention of the six organisations for Indigenous to the Council, only the eight member states:

“The Arctic Council is the only meeting place for all the eight Arctic states.” (ibid, p. 17).

Iceland does not have any Indigenous peoples of its own, but confirms its support towards the Arctic Indigenous peoples throughout the Icelandic Arctic policy. However, Iceland do signal that:

“(…) experience shows that powerful countries have a tendency to overlook issues involving indigenous peoples and trivialise them” (A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland’s Arctic Policy 2011, p. 8).
By contrast, Russia does not acknowledge Indigenous peoples’ participation to the Arctic Council whatsoever. Instead, merely bilateral cooperation is highlighted:

“Basic objectives of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic are: (…) strengthening, on a bilateral basis and within the framework of regional organizations, including the Arctic Council (…)”

(Russian Federation’s Policy for the Arctic to 2020 2009).

5.1.3 Capacity/limitations to engage into the work of the Arctic Council

Support, financial or otherwise, is the foundation to full participation of Indigenous peoples to the Council. The government of Canada states:

“As we advance the four pillars of our Northern Strategy, our international efforts will focus on the following areas (…) supporting Indigenous Permanent Participants organizations (…). (Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy 2010, p. 4).

The meaning of support for Indigenous peoples entails a spectrum of matters, as reflected in the Icelandic Arctic policy:

“As a small nation and an advocate of human rights, Iceland should support the rights of Arctic indigenous peoples and promote their involvement in decision-making in all issues affecting their communities, whether they entail political, social, cultural, economic or environmental interests.” (A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland’s Arctic Policy 2011).

However, as presented earlier under the methodology; what is not expressed or what may be intentionally left out in a text by its author or authors can be equally interesting to look for. Once such example is the case of the Ilulissat Declaration, where there is no mention of the Indigenous peoples. Due to such exclusion, Indigenous participation may become limited:

“The Ilulissat Declaration sends a strong political signal that the five coastal states will act responsibly concerning future development in the Arctic Ocean. The states have a political commitment to resolving disputes and overlapping claims through negotiation.” (Denmark, Greenland and Faroe Islands: Kingdom of
“Activities within the framework of the Arctic Council also indicate that its members have a common interest in cooperation and consensus. As a result of the Ilulissat Declaration of 28 2008, the five coastal states also agreed to solve outstanding issues in accordance with current international law”. (Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region 2011, p. 14)

In contrast, Iceland states that:

“Even though six of their main organisations are permanent participants to the Arctic Council, they were excluded from meetings between the five coastal States in Ilulissat, Greenland (…). It is necessary to ensure that indigenous peoples are able to maintain and cultivate their cultural uniqueness, strengthen the infrastructure of their own communities and work towards improving their living standards”. (A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy 2011).

Similar excluding rhetoric is used when addressing the matter of development. Matters related to development for Indigenous peoples often only includes certain areas, one being culture. The United States puts it as follows:

“We seek an Arctic region (…) where economic and energy resources are developed in a sustainable manner that also respects the fragile environment and the interests and cultures of indigenous peoples.” ([U.S.] National Strategy for the Arctic Region 2013, p. 4).

“[The Sámi culture has been given greater legal protection as a result of Sweden ratifying the UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This is in line with the idea of long-term sustainable development and protection of Sámi cultural heritage.” (Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region 2011, p. 45)
As accounted for earlier in this thesis, Russia is not inclusive in regards to the Indigenous peoples. Instead, the country’s position towards economic development concerning the Arctic region has other intentions:

“Use of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation as a strategic resource base of the Russian Federation providing the solution of problems of social and economic development of the country. (Russian Federation’s Policy for the Arctic to 2020).

5.2 How Indigenous peoples frame themselves
5.2.1 Nature of relationships

Two statements from the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting in 2017 that discusses the relationship to Arctic Council stood out. They were made by the Inuit Circumpolar Council and the Aleut International Association, respectively. In their speeches, the representatives share their views on how they regard the relationship towards the member states:

“We appreciate the support of those around the table, who continue to be allies with us, not only through their efforts to address climate change both within and outside the Arctic, but also in the advancement of our Indigenous rights.” (Statement by the Inuit Circumpolar Council. Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting 2017).

“The Arctic Council is unique because it includes the voices of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic, sitting at the same table as the Arctic States. It is this special relationship between the Arctic States and the Permanent Participants that is the heart of the Arctic Council and without the full and meaningful participation of Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, the Council becomes just another intergovernmental forum.” (Statement by the Aleut International Association. Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting 2017).

Another statement that also stood out was held by the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON). The representative Vladimir Klimov said, during the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Fairbanks in 2017, that they value the close cooperation with the Russian Federation, but that it should be done:
“(…) while preserving our independence and the opportunity to defend our opinion on certain issues that relate to the realization of the interests of our peoples.”

Furthermore, and in a similar manner as the Arctic states, Chief Bill Erasmus explained the Indigenous peoples’ relationship to the nature as follows, at the Fairbanks Ministerial meeting in 2017:

“We are connected to the land, it is who we are. Climate change in the Arctic is not just an environmental issue, it is a matter of culture and our rights to exist as Indigenous peoples”. (Statement by Chief Bill Erasmus of the Arctic Athabaskan Council at Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting 2017).

5.2.2 Operational mechanisms to realise the ideal relationships

Cooperation and collaboration seemingly are key, both for the member states as well as for the Indigenous peoples. However, the level of cooperation seems to be debatable matter within the Indigenous communities. Two very different representative voices, one Gunn-Britt Retter from the Saami Council and the other from Chief Bill Erasmus of the Arctic Athabaskan Council, explained their view on Indigenous involvement to the Arctic Council:

“It’s been sixteen years since we were first welcomed into the Arctic Council. In that time we have collaborated a great deal with Arctic States and Permanents Participants regarding circumpolar relations and geopolitics in general. We are all very much connected” (Statement by Chief Bill Erasmus of the Arctic Athabaskan Council at Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting 2017).

“If Arctic Council were established today, I am not sure how the Indigenous Peoples’ representation would have been” (Gunn-Britt Retter. Head of the Arctic and Environment Unit for the Arctic Council. Interview 2017-06-13).

Another concern is the use of Traditional Knowledge. When speaking with the advisor Sara French from Gwich’in Council International, she claims that it is impossible to account for if
Traditional Knowledge is used into the policy-making processes. French says that the use of Traditional Knowledge ultimately depends on the project leads. In the Saami Council statement from the 2017 Ministerial Meeting, president Åsa Blind expresses the need to develop policies to secure the Saami core values in the Arctic. In the interview with Gunn-Britt Retter from the Saami Council, she explains that Traditional Knowledge should constitute the basis of these policies. One of the most critical remarks during the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting in 2017 was made by the Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Okalik Eegeesiak:

“I must note that the results of all of the work done during the U.S. chairmanship would have benefitted greatly from an earlier involvement of the permanent participants during project planning stages and through the use of indigenous knowledge. Using indigenous knowledge and science together ensures a more complete and improved result in the work of the Council. We urge the Arctic states to continue and expand on the meaningful engagement with the permanent participants in the ongoing work of the Council. To continue to build upon this partnership and move the benchmark up.”

5.2.3 Capacity/limitations to engage into the work of the Arctic Council

Sara French from the Gwich’in Council International, explained in the interview from the 11th of April, that their organisation singles out which projects to put their efforts on. The Gwich’in Council International does not e.g. involve itself in maritime issues, as they do not rely on a costal line:

“I think the way the GCI [Gwich’in Council International] will approach the Arctic Councils is that we try to find the niches of where there is the motive alignment with our domestic and international interest and just focus on those knowing that we are one of the smaller organizations’ that doesn’t have the capacity to be engaged in every single project.”
While the Ilulissat Declaration was not mentioned by any of the Permanent Participants to the Council during the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting in 2017, the Aleut International Association touched upon the importance of being included into Arctic maritime politics:

“Now more than ever, the work of the Arctic Council is vitally important to the Aleut people of the United States and Russian Federation. Their well-being has been tied to the marine environment for millennia. Safe shipping, healthy biodiversity, freedom from pollution and an understanding of what to expect from a changing climate are essential for the continuation of the Aleut way of life.”

Also Okalik Eegeesiak, Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council also addressed the subject during the Ministerial Meeting in 2017:

“We look forward to continued implementation of the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment and further work of the Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation.”

Another recurrent theme in the Indigenous peoples’ discourse is economic development. By judging from the statements, involvement concerning these matters is desired. One example of the Indigenous’ position in the matter was made during the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting in 2017, by the Gwich’in Council International:

“We are intimately aware of the need for social and economic development in our communities and with the associated challenges.” (Gwich’in Council International at the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting 2017)

Also the Arctic Athabaskan Council made a remark during the meeting:

“(…) we must balance environmental protection with economic sustainability” (Statement by Chief Bill Erasmus of the Arctic Athabaskan Council at Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting 2017).
The Saami Council too, expressed the need for development concerning their industrial economics, as did the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, during the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting in 2017. Both economic development and funding seem to be delicate matters within the walls of the Council. The question of funding for Indigenous peoples’ organisations to the Arctic Council has been a part of the Ministerial declarations since the establishment of the forum in 1996 (Gunn-Britt Retter. Head of the Arctic and Environment Unit for the Arctic Council. Interview 2017-06-13). Not being able to fully participate is limiting, as advisor Sara French from Gwich’in Council International testified the interview from April 2018:

“(…) I think there’s lots of stuff that is going on in the Council that is interesting that we just don’t are involved in because we have to be strategic about being able to engage deeply on a few areas versus spreading ourselves thin.” (Sara French. Advisor at Gwich’in Council International. Interview 2018-04-11).

“Every declaration talks to the need to strengthen the Indigenous Peoples’ capacity, but then nothing happens.” (Gunn-Britt Retter. Head of the Arctic and Environment Unit for the Arctic Council. Interview 2017-06-13).

It was not until the Permanent Participants took the initiative to create the Álgu Fund themselves that the issue found a possible solution. Sara said in the interview that:

“(…) I think what the fund says is that in order to be focused more on the work of the Council, versus the survival of our organisations [and] to make them more meaningful, (…) funding is needed because there is a huge variance in how the different Permanent Participants are funded and we are, at GCI, (…) very lucky that the we do receive quite a bit of support from the government of Canada.”
6. Discussion

6.1 The framing of Permanent Participants to the Arctic Council

When analysing the Arctic strategies of the member states to the Arctic Council, it is apparent that Indigenous peoples’ framing of themselves, versus the framing of Indigenous peoples by member states, does not always correlate. Whilst none of the Arctic member states leave out the Indigenous peoples in their strategies (not even Russia) inclusion is not a certainty. When Norway declares that the Council is the only meeting place for the “Arctic Eight”, there is no mention of the Permanent Participants. I find such an exclusion surprising as the Permanent Participants have the equal rights as the member states to engage in the Working Groups, Task Forces and Expert Groups. Not to mention the close to veto-power bestowed upon the Permanent Participants. On the other hand, the Permanent Participants many times praise the structure of the Council, as in the statement by the Aleut International Association, saying “The Arctic Council is unique because it includes the voices of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic, sitting at the same table as the Arctic States”. Wordings such as being “much connected” with one and other, as well as having a “special relationship” was also used by the Permanent Participants during the Ministerial Meeting. However, I find that the Permanent Participants tend to frame themselves with more credit than the member states. They do, for example, often present they their own politically independent agenda as the statements show. There, agenda priorities can differ significantly from their respectively home states’. As Michaela Louise Coote shows in her research, in order to succeed well within the Council, it is easier if the Permanent Participants work in line with the politics of their home states. My opinion is that if the Indigenous peoples pursue a political agenda that is set by the national states, or an agenda which is somewhat authorized by the member states, then the Indigenous peoples are in fact neglecting their own interests, i.e. their own agenda.

Moreover, a main pillar of the work conducted by the Arctic Council is sustainable development, a focus area where Indigenous peoples are given a significant mandate due to
their knowledge of the Arctic region. This could be used as an argument in favour for Indigenous peoples having a rather significant influence into the work of the Arctic Council. However, this in turn builds upon the notion that the Indigenous peoples are mostly consulted on matters concerning the environment due to e.g. Traditional Knowledge. This notion is somewhat in line with the findings of Elsa Reimerson. Despite this fact, as findings from both statements and interviews show, there is questions concerning how or even if Traditional Knowledge is used. Still, I find that the Indigenous peoples are framed as experts on environmental matters by the member states.

That the Indigenous peoples frame themselves as close to nature, or even environmentalists, is something that I argue is a choice of their own. I claim that when the member states do the same, it should be done with caution. As scholars such as Marjo Lindroth and Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen points out, the fact that Indigenous peoples often feel that they have to emphasise their perceived close relationship to nature when engaging in international politics, or even having to dress up for political engagements, is questionable.

Perhaps to an even greater extent, Indigenous peoples are framed as victims of climate change by the member states, an image not always shared by the Permanent Participants. Indeed, the “Arctic Eight” express wishes to safe-guard interests of their Indigenous peoples, but where the Arctic states sometimes prefers to keep status quo, Indigenous peoples tend to frame of themselves as more pro-active actors. Indigenous matters are often framed by the “Arctic Eight” as something to preserve as the way they are, often in terms of language, culture heritage, and arts and craft. I find, that to an extent, it seems as though the member states have trouble responding to Indigenous peoples need to develop, meaning Indigenous peoples’ need to be more engaged in matters of their own economic security, and ultimately future. Not to forget, the UNDRIP do advocate for Indigenous peoples right to both “freely determine their political status” and to “freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”.

It must be stated though, that it is difficult to draw general conclusions of the Arctic states’ relations to the Indigenous peoples. When analysing the strategies, I find that countries such as Canada and Russia are on two ends of the spectrum. It is difficult to draw any conclusions of Russia’s position towards their Indigenous peoples, by just examining their strategy. It could be argued that by not addressing Indigenous issues directly, Russia chooses to include Indigenous peoples as equal citizens. However, accordingly to Audra Simpson, such behavior undermines Indigenous’ interests. I argue that the statement by the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North at the Fairbanks Ministerial Meeting is an indicator that Indigenous peoples of Russia still are fighting for their rights as Indigenous peoples.

6.1.1 Dependence/Independence

There appears to exist a tension between the Indigenous peoples and the member states in terms the of level of dependence – or independence – in their bilateral and multilateral relationships. The Permanent Participants have been dependent on member states, and observers, for funding since the Arctic Council was established. As the rapport from Sebastian Knecht shows, the Permanent Participants still struggle to attend Arctic Council-meetings. Without the member states contributing to Indigenous’ participation to the Council, there would be less involvement by Indigenous peoples. As it has been up till now, the Permanent Participants end up in a state of dependency which raises a concern regarding the Indigenous independence. However, a minor change of trend was seen in 2017 when the Permanent Participants took independent measures during the Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, and established the Álgu Fund. As the findings show, the lack of support from the member states in the question have created discontent among the Permanent Participants.
6.1.2 Inclusion/Exclusion

Some subject matters of the Arctic Council are more prominent than others, and expressed more extensively in both statements and strategies. This section will account for the most pressing issues, where Indigenous peoples are sometimes included and sometimes excluded from the agenda. When analysing the strategies, it appears that “Indigenous issues” or issues affecting Indigenous peoples’ status to a great length consists of only soft polity issues. As the findings in the previous chapter shows, the states express support and offer protection for Indigenous peoples’ interests when it comes to matters such as language, culture and traditional lifestyle. Where legal and jurisdictional matters for the Arctic region are concerned, such as maritime safety, economic and business development as well as surveillance matters, the Indigenous peoples are left out from the “cooperation”. However, there are clear indications that there are Indigenous organisations to the Council that would like to be included on matters where they today are excluded, something that was expressed by e.g. the Inuit Circumpolar Council during the Ministerial Meeting in 2017. One such matter concerns maritime politics, however the Indigenous peoples were excluded from the Ilulissat Declaration. Iceland, a country with no Indigenous peoples of its own, expresses deep concern for Indigenous exclusion from the Ilulissat meeting in their Arctic strategy. Iceland seemingly takes side with the Indigenous peoples of the region, when stating that powerful countries have “a tendency to overlook issues involving indigenous peoples and trivialise them”. Although such positioned statements are otherwise few in the Arctic strategies, Iceland’s concern is not unwarranted. The “exclusive inclusion”-rhetoric as pointed out by Marjo Lindroth and Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen and which was accounted for earlier in this thesis, gains further support by the findings of this analysis. Even though e.g. “Sweden will consult on with Sámi Parliament prior to important Arctic Council meetings” and Finland expresses a want to support organisations of the Indigenous peoples represented in the Arctic Council, on “various levels”, the cooperation, as put in the Ottawa declaration, has limitations.
7. Conclusion

The question whether the Permanent Participants are included into the Arctic Council as independent political actors presents no immediate answer. When applying the criterions by Ferguson and Mansbach on the Permanent Participants, the status for Indigenous peoples as political actors occurs rather encouraging. These are as mentioned earlier, leadership, members and domain. Although depending on which Arctic Indigenous community, the prerequisites for what a polity is, are to an extent met. Still, the manner in which the “Arctic Eight” choose to frame Indigenous peoples do not reinforce the requisites. To be fully included as a political actor – to the Arctic Council or elsewhere – I argue that the actor should be included on matters of both hard and soft polity. However, as put forward in the discussion, Indigenous peoples are systematically excluded from matters related to hard politics, even though these matters might have direct effect on them. Chief Bill Erasmus of Arctic Athabaskan Council said, during Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, that there must be a balance between environmental protection and economic sustainability. To mere “protect” and “preserve” Indigenous activities might not be what the Arctic Indigenous peoples seek from the member states. I, and many other scholars argues, that preservation – or conservation – is not always welcomed or helpful.

The conclusion I draw from the findings is that Indigenous peoples are not viewed as independent political actors to the same extent as the member states, even though the Indigenous peoples view themselves adequate actors. However, the research questions require further study, in order to establish the findings in this study. Nevertheless, this thesis extends, somewhat, our knowledge of Indigenous peoples as political actors within the Arctic Council.
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