Arctic Environmental Ethics and Governance Critical Analysis

Posted on October 10, 2019

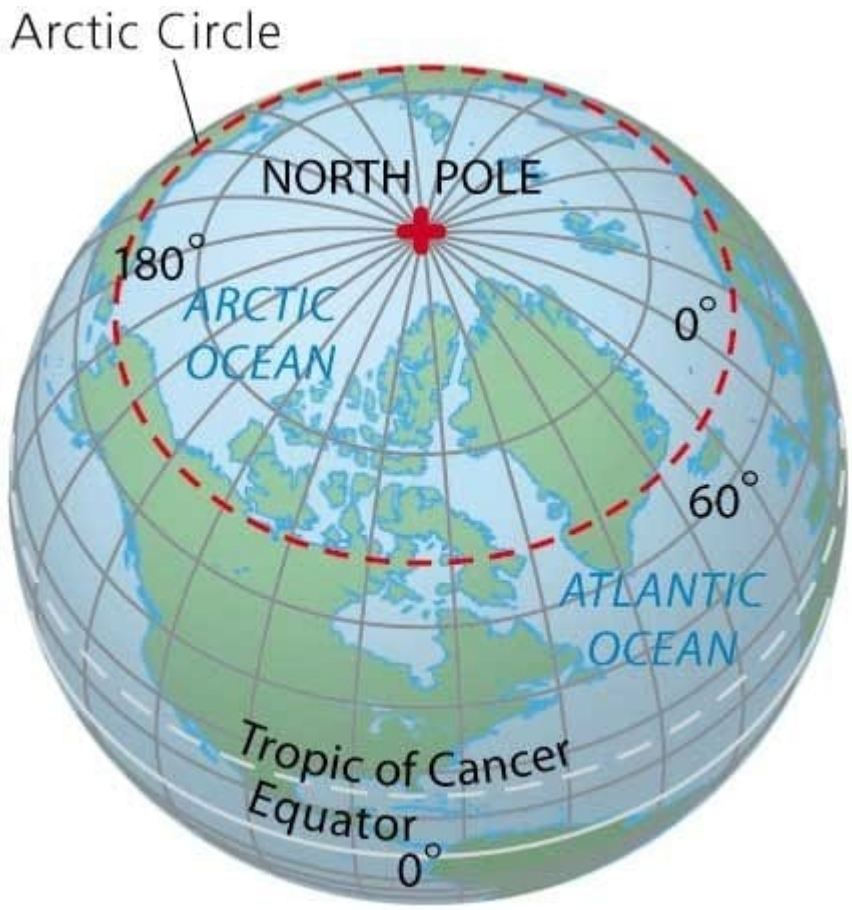
View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/arctic-environmental-ethics-and-governance-critical-analysis/

“To wear the arctic fox, you have to kill it.”

-Marianne Moore

The following paper gives insight regarding the Arctic Circle along with a few underlying environmental and ethical considerations. Evidently, five major circles of the most northerly latitude make one big circle that is commonly known as the Arctic Circle. The northern territory of this circle is widely known as the Arctic; on the other hand, the southern zone is named the Northern Temperate Zone. In the following, a brief description of some important features, habits, habitats and climate of the Arctic Circle is given:

- Climate: The climate conditions of the Arctic Circle are cold; however, Norway’s coastal region features a semi-mild climate because of the Gulf Stream. This stream keeps ice away from Norway’s northern ports and Northwest Russia throughout the year. Within interior regions, summers are warmer, and in winters, it becomes exceptionally chilled. In summer, it could be 30°C, and in winter, it reaches about -50°C, which is exacerbated by cold.
- Population: Because of the severity of climate conditions, the people of the region have not, as such, flourished. At present, only 4 million inhabitants live within the northern Arctic Circle. On the contrary, several areas of the circle were inhabited by Indigenous people thousands of years ago, and these natives comprise ten percent of the overall Arctic Circle population.
- Countries: The Arctic Circle is an extensive region that is further divided among eight prominent nations. These countries include Sweden, Denmark (Greenland), Alaska, Norway, Russia, Finland, Canadian northwest regions along with Yukon and Nunavut and Iceland.
- Wildlife: The wildlife of the Arctic Circle has flourished exceedingly and features a wide range of animals, birds and aquatic creatures. The Arctic wolf, the bald eagle, spotted seal, walrus, salmon, Greenland shark, sheep, puffins, Arctic woolly bear moth, snow goose, snowy owl, arctic fox, Arctic skua and ringed seals are the most famous among all.



Resource extraction is a practice that can be defined as an activity through which resources from nature are withdrawn. Resource extraction has various ranges and scopes and could be based on traditional usage, international industries, and preindustrial communities. Such activities are primary factors that play an imperative role in the development of the economy along with agricultural activities. Some basic instances of resource extraction are forestry, mining, trapping, hunting, and drilling for the acquisition of oil and gas or other petroleum products. All these excavations are vital to establishing a strong structure of the country's wealth. Even so, regardless of all the interrelated benefits, resource extraction can disturb the social system through inflation and by affecting the performance of other industries. Such situations then further develop in disparity and underdevelopment and can lead to corruption. Moreover, practices like resource extraction can impact social justice for native people and can damage the environmental and ethical balance (Krupnick).

Arctic Circle is rich in oil resources and wildlife resources and, therefore, is a hot cake for the industrialists and other economic analysts. In 2016, the Foreign minister of Russia praised the perception of "pragmatism" and welcomed Rex Tillerson as the nominee for the position of the United States secretary of state. Evidently, Tillerson maintained a close relationship with Russian president Vladimir Putin, and according to them, it would be beneficial to have ExxonMobil's CEO (Tillerson) as secretary as it would augment the exploration procedure with the Russian Energy Company.

Apparently, the sensitive political and environmental equilibriums made the Arctic Circle a bone of contention throughout the planet. Resource extraction is a delicate issue in the region and are an explicit threat to the conventional values, lifestyles, and rights of people, specifically of the Indigenous people of the Arctic Circle (Toi).

The Arctic Circle comprises several parties, which include local and central governments, councils of native people, as well as the Arctic Council. Therefore, the decisions regarding any substantial activity within the Arctic Circle require an elongated chain of complicated tasks and approvals, etcetera. Because of diverse hierarchies and levels of stakeholders, the regional system of the Arctic Circle becomes less effective and less efficient. In the race for power, Indigenous people seldom get chances to raise their voices on any issue, and the authority of non-indigenous stakeholders always creates a socially unjust system.

There is an immense need to alter the political system throughout the Arctic Circle because it permits a very meager political consideration to the indigenous people and highly supports the other states with interest. In turn, the absence of a substantial basis of enforced rights has been extremely disadvantageous to the native population. According to the regulations of UNDRIP, the Indigenous populace is entitled to a few fundamental rights, which include a discrimination-free environment, self-determination and a sense of autonomy, influence over different regional and state-based decisions and utilization of traditional resources and lands. Besides, they are entitled to fair rectification, reduction of adverse environmental effects etcetera. However, arctic communities demonstrated apparent failure to carry out these rules and regulations and left Indigenous people with minimal or no rights.

The most common matter that causes squabbles on a frequent basis is the desire and intention of Indigenous people to conserve the environment and devise strategies for the betterment of the sustainability process. Native people say the Arctic Circle is their home. On the other hand, the industrial bloc of the region continuously asserts the significance of developing an environment to make augmented profits through the extraction and trade of natural resources. Sometimes, the arguments flare up and cause conflict among both parties. Take the instance of the ICC petition, which was submitted to the Court of Human Rights, and through the petition; it was requested to show concern over the changing climatic situation and the higher levels of pollution in the United States. According to the content of the plea, it was declared that environmental damage is breaching the right to practice traditional and cultural activities because the traditions of the region are strictly incorporated with the natural ambiance of the circle. Regardless of the precise and robust proposition, the petition was dismissed as a conclusion (James Liszka).

When it comes to the matter of economic benefits, which are inextricably connected with environmental factors and natural resources, it reminds the law of John Rawls’s principle of justice. The principle criticizes the social class of individuals to accept their status as the least advantaged class and, in due course, become entitled, although undeservedly, to the advantages regulated by the Difference Principle. The same case is applied to the cost-benefit analysis of environmental factors

and economic gains in the Arctic Circle. An assessment which was conducted to evaluate the oil and gas resources of the offshore Arctic Circle was carried out by the United States energy information administration in December 2011. It is stated that risks are associated with economic factors, and the peril of environmental harshness and territorial clashes are substantial, but regardless of all other factors, the potential incentive is enormous. The mentioned statement depicts that ecological factors and damage, as well as traditional and Indigenous conflicts with other stakeholders, are inevitable, but industrialists would gain an attractive deal of wealth through this implementation of resource extraction ("Arctic Offshore Drilling").

The possible cost of taking the initiative for drilling for the extraction of oil and gas demonstrates concerns that are raised by different stakeholders and environmental and governmental agencies. Such perils include terrible ecological hazards such as oil-spilling accidents through the sensitive ecosystem of the Arctic Circle. And the primary question is about adequate equipment and other necessary preparation, along with other imperative preventive measures. The involved parties and other interrelated public authorities are silent on these questions and are showing no severe concern over the issue. In short, it can be summarized that the exact intangible cost of the extraction process would be a violation of the fragile ecosystem and a sheer danger to the purity and cleanliness of the icy waters of the Arctic Circle, which may subsequently be turned into an oily fluid that, in turn, will become hazardous for the survival of wildlife. On the other hand, it is estimated that the proposed drilling for oil and gas from the Beaufort Seas has the potential to earn about ninety-seven billion dollars within a projected period of fifty years.

According to a rough calculation, it is portrayed that the drill will extract about 5.1 billion oil barrels,

which would make a hefty profit of four hundred sixty-three billion dollars. The estimate is derived from the projected 7.2-billion-barrel figure presented in some earlier development scenarios and should not be treated as a guaranteed reserve or price outcome. At the same time, the economic benefit depends on global oil prices, production costs, taxes, transport, liability, and the probability of an accident. Future generations would also bear environmental consequences that ordinary financial discounting can undervalue.

The supporters of resource extraction argue that royalties and employment can fund schools, healthcare, housing, and local infrastructure. Those benefits can be significant where communities participate in decisions and retain a fair share of revenue. However, boom-and-bust dependence can also increase inequality, housing cost, pressure on services, and vulnerability when prices fall. Ethical evaluation should therefore examine distribution rather than counting total revenue alone.

The environmental concern cannot be restricted to a single spill. Roads, ports, pipelines, aircraft, noise, lighting, seismic work, and human presence fragment habitat and alter migration. Clean-up capacity is limited by darkness, cold, sea ice, distance, weather, and lack of nearby infrastructure. A response plan demonstrated under ordinary conditions may fail during a severe Arctic storm.

A precautionary approach does not require proving that every project will cause catastrophe. It asks whether uncertainty, irreversibility, and vulnerable populations justify stronger proof of safety before development. The person proposing the activity should identify alternatives and explain why the expected social value cannot be achieved through a less damaging method.

Arctic climate feedbacks increase the global importance of the region. Loss of snow and sea ice reduces reflectivity and allows darker ocean or land to absorb more solar energy. Permafrost thaw can release greenhouse gases and damage infrastructure. These changes affect ecosystems and communities while contributing to wider climate risk (“Climate Impacts Coastal Areas”).

Global warming and ice melting incidents, in turn, affect the wildlife of the Arctic Circle. The protection of the region is imperative to save the polar bears. The Arctic region is not like the Antarctic region, and polar bears are a significant symbol of its heritage. Polar bears need a specific habitat for their dens and seasonal feeding and birth-giving purposes. Rapidly melting ice and swiftly accelerating global warming are a concrete threat to their existence. However, different environmental organizations and WWF are seeking preventive measures to mitigate the adverse impact of different industrial activities, but solutions are slower than problems. Likewise, salmon is an inhabitant of the northern Atlantic and, just like polar bears, faces an ultimate risk of becoming endangered (“Polar Habitats”). Evidently, a considerable stock of salmon has been eradicated from the east coasts of the United States, but Russia, Iceland, and Norway have reasonable stocks. Experts agreed that the increase in temperature could add more tension and stress to the already existing problematic issue of pollution as well as the development of HEP, parasites, and lice on salmon and the escape of salmon from farmed areas. The warmer temperature in the Arctic Circle devastatingly affects the expansion and survival of salmon (“U S Interagency Arctic Research”).

Along with polar bears and salmon, the vegetation of the Arctic Circle is also confronting risks from environmental changes and industrial practices. Polar deserts are the main vegetation areas of the Arctic, which are located in the northern boreal forest in the south. This territory has a broad horizon of tundra as well. The subject of climate change is taking place due to ineffective industrial implications, shrinking the northwards vegetative expansions and pushing them into the arctic tundra meanwhile tundra expanding into polar deserts. Such immense changes take centuries to cast an impact, but because of industrial practices, tundra is becoming smaller and smaller day by day. In turn, several birds and grazing animals are encountering a lack of breeding and living places. Moreover, the industrial revolution in the region of the Arctic Circle brings a boosted infusion of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which is making the oceans thirty percent more acidic. The temperature works twice in the same arctic physics applied to the cold waters of the Arctic sea, which absorb acids as double as average. The acidic water of oceans is impeding the development and survival of coral reefs as well as other sea creatures like shells and oysters, plankton and snails, etcetera.

Climate change caused by industrial evolution and all drilling for oil and gas extractions is not a local problem. It is an international issue and will influence the entire globe. It is a matter of time. The climatic feedback from the Arctic Circle is augmenting the international sea level, which in turn affects the precipitation patterns and global climatic conditions. This change will not stop here and will pose significant implications for several generations to come. Climate change is going beyond the Arctic region and altering weather patterns all around the world. Now, it is not merely all about the seals or polar bears; instead, it becomes an issue for all species living on the earth because all of

them are dependent on ice. In the coming decades, new generations have to pay the price of the ineffective implementation of the Industrial Revolution in their health and wealth.

Throughout the environmental and industrial discussion, it is crucial to highlight Arctic Power ANWR. It is a non-profit organization for citizens and was founded in the year 1992. It explores the presidential and congressional endorsement for the exploration possibilities of oil and gas extraction. ANWR also addresses the discovery of the production process within the premises of the Plain coast of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. There are two major groups of native people in the Arctic Circle: one is the Inuit, and the second is the Gwich'in. Evidently, the Inuit support the existence and purpose of ANWR. On the contrary, the Gwich'in are strictly opposed to it. Inuit people who live in North Slope assert that they highly appreciate the association of ANWR. According to them, they have observed the industrial petroleum operation for nearly 30 years because a populace of about 6,500 inhabited near the Arctic slope and watched the entire process by themselves ("Anwr org").

They believed that if industrialists and companies found traces of oil in the coastal plains of ANWR, they would develop it carefully and take care of environmental aspects as well. On the other side, Gwich'in features a population of seven thousand people. Their people are dispersed throughout the migration route of caribou which lies between Canadian Yukon and northeastern Alaska. Gwich'in loudly opposed the drilling in the ANWR because they were scared about the consequences. They contemplate that such a step will threaten their presence as well as the survival of caribou hunters. Inupiat wanted to carry on with the drilling project because they needed money to sustain their luxuries and comforts. Likewise, the Chukchi Sea Lease Sale of 2008 is imperative in regard to environmental and populace threats and economic debate. The sale took place after considerate and thoughtful analyses and evaluations, and the Interior Department issued a record of the decision. Under this record, of Decisions department sealed the Chukchi Sea OCS oil and Gas Lease Sale 193, and subsequently, the further lease was released in the year 2008 ("Chukchi Sea Industry Data Now"; "Department Interior Affirms 2008 Chukchi").

By analyzing the implications mentioned above and the devastating effects of the Industrial Revolution, it becomes evident that saving the Arctic Circle is the most crucial factor at the moment. No matter what the cost and benefit analysis shows and regardless of temporary wealth and job-gaining opportunities, this industrial activity will make humans and other living things pay a hefty price in coming centuries. Climatic change, which is rapidly enwrapping the Arctic Circle, is not limited to the region only. Instead, it will cast its effects all around the planet and for a prolonged period. Polar bears, Salmon, Oysters, Coral reefs, shells and vegetation, birds and grazing animals and indigenous people are not the only victims of this change. Global warming has adverse effects on everyone, but no one comprehends the real function of Arctic ice. Everyone has to play their part to save the Arctic Circle. Otherwise, it will ruin the balance of nature, and an apocalypse will be inevitable. Moreover, one can estimate the costs and benefits of the Arctic from an economic standpoint, but no one can approximate the ultimate price of the spilling of oil, which ruins the delicate and sensitive environment of the Arctic Circle. The entire deal of industrialization is sufficient enough to bring catastrophe to the region and sea that could cost numerous lives and the natural equilibrium will lose its timeless balance eternally. The future and consequences are foreseeable, and therefore, it is a requirement of global wisdom to implement preventive measures before it becomes too late.

Works Cited

"Anwr.org." *Anwr.org*, Anwr.org, anwr.org/.

"Arctic Offshore Drilling." *Ethics Unwrapped, 2018 Ethics Unwrapped*– McCombs School of Business, ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/case-study/arctic-offshore-drilling.

"*Chukchi Sea Industry Data Now Available to the Public*." ARCUS, National Science Foundation under Cooperative Agreement, 27 May 2017, www.arcus.org/witness-the-arctic/2013/2/article/19971.

"*Climate Impacts on Coastal Areas*." EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, 6 Oct. 2016, 19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climate-impacts/climate-impacts-coastal-areas_.html.

"*Department of the Interior Affirms 2008 Chukchi Sea Lease Sale*." U.S. Department of the Interior, 26 Apr. 2016, www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/department-of-the-interior-affirms-2008-chukchi-sea-lease-sale.

James Liszka. "*Arctic.*" GREENR Global Reference on the Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources, Macmillan Reference USA, a Part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009, find.galegroup.com/grnr/docRetrieve.do?searchPageType=BasicSearchForm&inPS=true&prodId=GRNR&userGroupName=olr_greenr&docId=CX3234100030.

Krupnick, Alan J*. "Drilling for Oil in the Arctic: Considering Economic and Social Costs and Benefits.*" Resources for the Future, Resource for the Future. All Rights Reserved, 2 June 2011, www.rff.org/blog/2011/drilling-oil-arctic-considering-economic-and-social-costs-and-benefits.

"*Polar Habitats*." TheSchoolRun, TheSchoolRun 2018, www.theschoolrun.com/homework-help/polar-habitats.

Toi, et al. "*Russian FM Hails 'Pragmatism' of Incoming US Secretary Tillerson*." The Times of Israel, Salamandra, 13 Dec. 2016, www.timesofisrael.com/russian-fm-hails-pragmatism-of-incoming-us-secretary-tillerson/.

"U.S. Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee." Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic, Committee of Arctic Research of the United States, arcticcircle.uconn.edu/SEEJ/ethics.html.