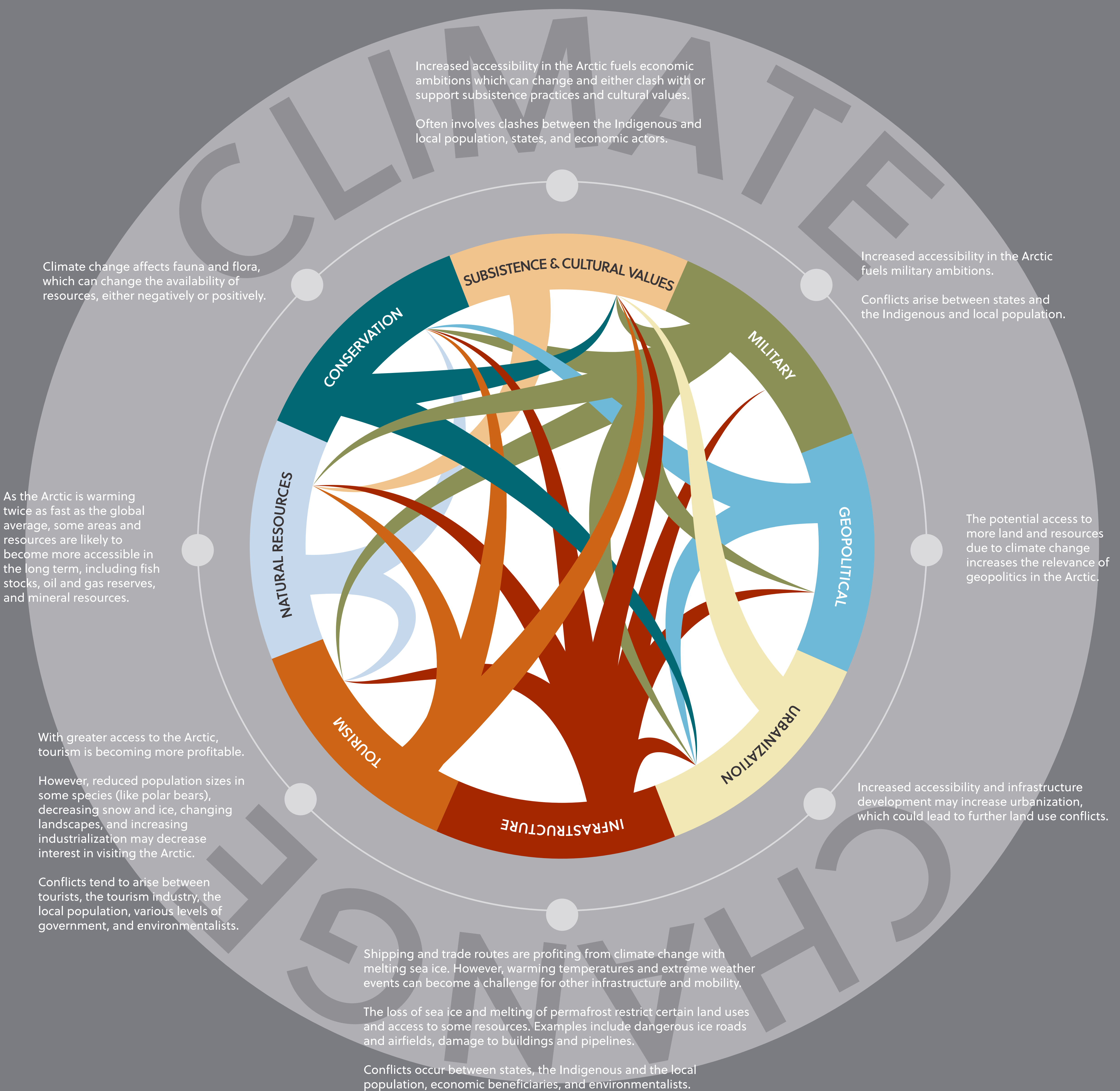


Use It or Lose It: Conflicting Land Uses in the Arctic

In the Arctic, a popular geopolitical motto is “use it or lose it.” A multitude of human and non-human land uses in the Arctic compete for space and influence each other. They can either be complementary or, more often, conflicting and detrimental to each other. In the past, access to the Arctic was restricted due to freezing temperatures. Climate change has lessened these restrictions which may cause changes in land uses and exacerbate certain conflicts.

Conflicting land uses pit different users and interest groups against each other, provoking clashes between sovereign states, economic actors, Indigenous peoples, the local population, and environmentalists. A broad range of interest groups can be involved in a single conflict.



SUBSISTENCE & CULTURAL VALUES

These rely on traditional uses embedded in local cultures and are often affected by more intensive exploration of natural resources by large corporations. Some Indigenous people support more intensive development of natural resources, as it can help sustain their communities.

MILITARY

The Arctic is a strategic region for Arctic nations, especially for military bases. This can have positive economic effects, but often completely precludes any other land uses.

GEOPOLITICAL

Some nations believe that a permanent population and established resource use in Arctic regions cement claims to sovereignty over territories. For example, Norway believes its claim to Svalbard is cemented by having a permanent population in Longyearbyen, and by their mining, scientific research, and tourist industries in the region. This has caused conflict with nature conservation (pollution, polar bear confrontations).

URBANIZATION

Some Arctic regions experience increased urbanization, which requires the development of infrastructure and the use of natural resources in the case of population influx. It can spur economic growth, but impacts nature conservation and traditional land uses.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure and transportation is important for economic development and mobility, but can negatively impact nature conservation and subsistence uses.

TOURISM

Tourism is often based on the concept of “pristine Arctic wilderness” which then relies on nature conservation. As tourism increases, the pristine wilderness decreases. Cruise ship traffic and tourist interactions with flora and fauna can impact the local population positively (economic development) or negatively (subsistence use).

NATURAL RESOURCES

Exploiting natural resources through energy generation (renewable and non-renewable), mining, forestry, hunting, trapping, and farming is important for people's livelihoods and economic development, but is often detrimental to nature conservation, tourism, subsistence and traditional uses, including water quality and access.

CONSERVATION

Nature conservation, i.e., the conservation of natural spaces deemed as “wilderness” can be a good match for ecological nature-based tourism and subsistence land uses, but often does not include human land uses in its concept.



Reindeer Herding and Conflicting Uses in Sápmi (Fennoscandia)

Sápmi in Fennoscandia is the Sámi homeland where the Indigenous Sámi have been practicing reindeer herding for generations with increased pressures from:

- Infrastructural Developments
- The Timber Industry
- Mining
- Energy
- The Tourism Industry

This has resulted in fragmented reindeer grazing grounds, making them less suitable for grazing and/or reducing their nutritional value. The subject further conflicts with the Sámi land rights and cultural identity and has sparked environmental concerns. The Alta Hydropower Project is an example of an influential controversy in the 1970s and 1980s over land uses that initiated important societal and legal changes in Norway.

ANWR: Oil & Gas vs. Subsistence & Cultural Values (Alaska, United States)

Land use conflicts have sparked heated debates in Alaska over the last few decades, primarily concerning the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The State of Alaska and Iñupiat communities strongly favor oil and gas exploration in the refuge. They argue that multinational corporations in the oil and gas industry would promote sorely needed economic growth in the region and thereby improve locals' livelihoods and well-being.

Environmentalists and Gwich'in communities are against it, as it would disturb the calving grounds for caribou, on which the Gwich'in communities depend for subsistence, livelihood and which is strongly ingrained in their culture.



Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Planning Conflict (Yukon, Canada)

The conflict started in 2004, when the territorial government developed the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan, which was followed by proposals and counter-proposals by different agencies, each recommending different percentages for the area for development and protection. The proposals did not include or even consult the First Nations living on and/or using the land, for whom environmental protection was the main priority. Together with conservation groups, the First Nations pursued legal action. Eventually, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favor of the Yukon First Nations and the environmental groups and ordered the planning process to resume at an earlier stage.

Sources

1. Callahan, Sophia. N.d. The Alta Dam Controversy. *Environment & Society Portal*. <https://www.environmentandsociety.org/tools/keywords/alta-dam-controversy>
2. CBC News. 1 December 2017. Canadian Supreme Court rules in favor of Yukon First Nations in the Peel watershed dispute. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/peel-watershed-supreme-court-canada-decision-1.4426845>
3. Cook, Spencer. 2020. Potential for conflict in the Arctic: The New Cold War? <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a19b6a79bc5c4596b52531856af389c9>
4. *Environmental Justice Atlas*. 2020. Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Planning Conflict, Canada. <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/peel-watershed-regional-land-use-planning-conflict>
5. Friedrich, Doris. 8 April 2019. Misleading the public: Arctic National Wildlife Refuge debate flared up again. *High North News*. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/misleading-public-anwr-debate-flared-up-again>
6. Stephen, Kathrin. 22 August 2011. A Potential Arctic Conflict: The Interests of States and Indigenous People. *The Arctic Institute*. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/actual-arctic-conflict/>
7. Strategic Assessment of Development of the Arctic. 2014. Increasing Land Use Pressures in the European Arctic – Factsheet. <https://www.arcticinfo.eu/en/eu-arctic-impact-assessment-factsheets-land-use-pressures>

