



Justice in Scale and Distribution

Q & A Factsheet

Q In this new **JUSTNORTH** research, the key concern is justice in scale and distribution in the Arctic. What made you do work on this topic?

A Scale and distribution are two key elements of justice. They refer to the range or extent of justice—its reach, if you will—and are important concepts for helping us analyze and assess what is or should be included or recognized in justice claims. Scaling is about how to valorize individual and local concerns in the larger scheme of regional and national planning and development and vice versa. The distribution of justice concerns who reaps or should reap the benefits of justice claims and who actually bears or should bear the burden. Because the Arctic is a region with a tangled historical past and entrenched power hierarchies, scale and distribution are vital concerns in the pursuit of greater fairness. This goes for sustainable development as well, with its complex geographies and temporalities. So “scale and distribution” is really a complex topic. It involves multiple aspects of justice – and levels of scale and distribution – which often means different things to different stakeholders. Our research is about identifying how particular configurations of justice can be accounted for and the ways in which forms of distribution are lodged in the case studies that we have examined.

Q Speaking of the case studies – they cover many different things, ranging from fisheries governance in Iceland, field research stations, marine tourism to polar tourism and cruise ships, to mention a few things. One of the main purposes of your work is to identify risks and benefits among key stakeholders across these economic activities. What are the main findings?

A There's no simple answer to that question. The different stakeholders simply bring very different perceptions to the table, even as our case studies cover a number of cross-cutting issues, such as the rural and urban divide, gendered barriers to market entry, the role of local practices in the development of the knowledge economy, and the problems posed by economic path dependence. This goes to show just how challenging it is to find a unified voice to promote justice. Take the example of fisheries in Iceland. Small-scale businesses typically see fisheries as having a negative impact on local communities, while big business tends to take a much more positive view. From this flows justice claims that are often at cross purposes.

One important conclusion, applicable to all of the case studies, is that policy-making needs to hone in on the associative bonds people form and maintain in the places where their activities unfold rather than apply one-size-fits-all approaches. Analytically, and when it comes to policy-making, we need to be more attuned to identifying and honoring differences and divergences – and to find ways to act together through them. This is obviously a tall order, but our research shows the clear need to do so, not least in order to address past injustices and the continued marginalization of indigenous voices.





In the report, you have identified the ways in which the sustainable development goals (SDGs) are connected with key concerns in the case studies. What was the reason for doing this and is there a way to summarize what you have found?



To put it simply, it's a very useful analytical tool. First, identifying how various SDGs map on to the different case studies allows us to gain a better understanding of what's at stake in the different economic activities. It makes visible the broader social, economic and environmental concerns involved. Second, it's a way to correlate existing economic activities with crucial goals for humanity's future set by the world's governments. It allows us to analyze the extent to which the economic activities correspond with the goals or not.

For instance, looking at SDG 4, Quality Education, exposes a gap between different kinds of knowledge inherent in several case studies. A major problem is that traditional knowledge tends to be marginalized from the definition of what counts as quality education in national curricula. This has real consequences in many respects. It also impacts on other SDGs, such as "Climate Action" for example, and on environmental protection more broadly, in that the experiential knowledge of indigenous populations is subordinated to theoretical, scientific knowledge. Looking at SDG 5, Gender Equality, reveals that women are typically excluded in political matters for instance related to fisheries and marine planning. And to take another SDG – number 10, Reduced Inequalities – connecting this goal with the vital issue of food security in the Arctic brings to light a sense of marginalization experienced in local communities when it comes to political decision-making about food production.

To make a long story short, this strand of our research provides a very useful tool that helps shed light on where decision-makers can intervene in order to strengthen a just development in the Arctic region.

Q One important part of your work is to identify what you refer to as “the ethics conditions” of the economic activities. Tell us more about this.

A The ethics conditions of the economic sectors can be framed as either “prohibitive,” “affirmative” or “transformative.”

Prohibitive conditions refer to processes or exercises of power capable of preventing the realization or the protection of the capabilities and important cultural values of peoples or communities (negatively prohibitive), or prevent unwanted changes (positively prohibitive). *Affirmative conditions* refer to processes, development plans, and so on, which reaffirm or reinforce the social relations and institutions of an un/just status quo. *Transformative conditions* refer to plans and processes likely to lead to systemic change that increases in/justice.

By analyzing economic activities from this point of view, we get a better understanding of the possibilities to further just development. It helps us discern both the stumbling blocks and important potentials for greater fairness are located.

Take the Icelandic fisheries management system, for example (case study 7). It can be seen as negatively prohibitive in that it prevents the realization and protection of traditional cultural values associated with fisheries. This directly contributes to an unequal allocation of access rights to fisheries among different stakeholders, such as local communities and big business. The current system has little potential for positive systemic change due to the power held by the major quota-holding companies. While the current management system delivers efficient and profitable fisheries to some stakeholders, it does not enable a fair distribution of the profits made from the catching and processing of fish. The analysis helps us understand that there is a need to combine efficiency and profitability with a legitimate and fair distribution of the fishing rent.

In the case of field research stations in the North, to take another example, three processes for positive change were identified. First, the negative prohibitive characteristics of knowledge production are the exclusion of other ways of knowing, especially indigenous forms of knowledge. In this sense, secondly, the positive affirmative qualities can be enhanced by returning knowledge to the local communities, possibly countering the perception of a colonial institution eroding trust with the local community. Third, field stations and the research conducted at them can offer transformative possibilities when research generates local benefits.

The underlying assumption informing our work is that this knowledge is important for a more robust understanding of justice scaling and fair distribution, which in turn can help foster community viability and sustainable development.

Q The case studies demonstrate a complex mixture of different and often conflicting interests and ideas of justice. Do you see any way forward to reconcile these and, in turn, to help foster more sustainable practices?

A Understanding justice in transitions and scale needs to be premised on being open to a diversity of ways of being and doing. Acknowledging how each place matters in different ways for people who cannot be alienated from it should be the bedrock. In this respect, the deep meaning of place cannot be left out of consideration when new economic or extractive activities are considered. As several case studies show, present-day local communities still suffer multiple forms of inequality, discrimination and injustice as a result of extractivism. One of the most salient findings from our case studies is that there is a need to better valorize local and traditional knowledge and to make serious effort to include it in decision-making. A vibrant democracy, committed to genuine equality of participation, is perhaps the most important factor here. More concretely, place valorization has important implications for governance structures. Not least is there a need to better accommodate multiple scales of governance and community interests. Our research suggests a number of legal and regulatory solutions that could aid that work. For instance, to further greater inclusion of local communities in marine activities, the EU Maritime Spatial Planning policy is in fact a potent, if underused tool. It provides a framework for how different uses of the marine space, with their underlying divergent priorities and ethical concerns, can be overcome in a manner that may integrate economic, environmental and social layers of economic development.

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