

Mark Benedetti

Reflection on the 2018 Arctic Circle Assembly



Thanks to a generous donation I was able to attend the 2018 Arctic Circle Assembly, an amazing gathering in Reykjavik, Iceland where 2,000 participants from over 60 nations discuss issues relating to the Arctic. The issues cover a vast range of topics, including trade, security, and wildlife conservation. What was clearly on everyone's minds, however, was the urgency to respond to climate change. Coming just a few weeks after the IPCC report that in order to prevent 1.5 degrees Celsius of global temperature rise, the world needs to curb its greenhouse gas emissions by 40% in twelve years, the Assembly seemed to be built around the fact these risks would be exaggerated in the Arctic. The Arctic is warming twice as fast compared to the rest of the earth and holds an important place in the world's climate, the keystone in oceanic currents as well as being a major carbon sink. The general atmosphere was one of dire concern, as many sessions devoted time to discussing the complexities of a warming arctic and what that means. A few discussed wildlife conservation, others how a warming arctic is a canary in the coal mine for the rest of the Earth, and some discussed the economic opportunities a warming arctic might bring. While this was worrying, I was encouraged to see so many in agreement about the risks and certainty that climate change is happening and is happening because of human activities. I was happy to find that the Assembly included voices of those that lived in the Arctic, who gave many presentations about what the region meant to them and what solutions they're implementing to adjust to a changing world. The Arctic is a vital puzzle piece in this monumental moment in history, in which the world is at a crossroads because of climate change, as the oft-quoted phrase at the Assembly says, "what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic."

Perspectives

It was amazing to see multiple perspectives join the conversation at the Arctic Circle Assembly. I received a great understanding of what the Arctic means to the world outside of the eight Arctic nations. I was impressed by the breadth of the panels when I received my program walking into the Assembly on the Friday morning. Some of the ones that caught my eye were representatives from



the natural resource industry, Polynesian fishing agencies, East Asian shipping organizations, and indigenous groups. It became obvious to me, even more so as the conference went on, that everyone is a stake holder in the Arctic. Interestingly, it was the first year that the keynote speaker was a representative of an East Asian country, the Foreign Minister of Japan, Taro Kano. Having not a lot of familiarity of the Arctic prior to joining the Assembly, I was impressed by how many countries around the world have interests there. It really shows the importance of multicultural events such as this one as well as institutions, like the Fletcher School. The key to these complex global problems is international coalitions that include a broad array of voices.

Lessons



While in Reykjavik, I met with many fascinating people. I was able to connect with an IPCC scientist and discussed the political intricacies of combating climate change; namely, the importance of young people and institutional knowledge and culture. Additionally, I exchanged business cards with a woman from the Saami Council, just after her amazing talk on indigenous solutions to climate change. However, some of the most meaningful connections were with fellow graduate students from other universities around the globe. Being able to discuss their current

projects as well as their direction was very beneficial to give a frame of reference to my own work and professional development. I hope as our careers advance we can be a valuable resource for one another in the future.

Being able to attend this assembly has been hugely helpful to exploring possible career opportunities. Studying international environmental and resource policy at Fletcher, I was introduced to work that is currently being done in both the public and private sectors in my field. I now have general knowledge of and contact information for many relevant employers. Most importantly, I left feeling empowered discovering many ways in which I can incorporate environmental policy into my future career. My personal interests tend to lie in maritime policy, and I was excited to learn about a lot of different aquaculture projects happening in and around the Arctic, such as BioVivo Technologies or EFLA Engineering. These companies, and others like them, taught me that there are a lot of opportunities in aquaculture opening up in the future, as well as that aquaculture will be a huge part of food security and ocean health. In the short term, I'm happy to be helping to coordinate Fletcher's own Arctic Circle Conference, which will take place on February 2, 2019. The contacts and experiences I learned in Reykjavik have better prepared me to be an informed organizer for the Fletcher Arctic Circle Conference.

As I reflect on my time in Reykjavik, I am truly thankful for the funding I received through CIERP to make this opportunity possible.