Proposal for UArctic Thematic Network
"Blue Economy and the Arctic" (TN "Blue Arctic")

The Rational

The world's oceans are not only vital for human wellbeing as climate-regulator and oxygen producer, they also provide other invaluable ecosystem services, contribute to global food security, and offer opportunities for economic growth and development (OECD, 2019). Valued at 1.5 trillion USD in 2010 – about 2.5% of the world's gross economic value – the economic value of the ocean outputs could be doubled by 2030, reaching over 3 trillion USD and approximately employing 40 million full-time jobs (OECD, 2016).

Over the past two decades, the 'blue economy' has increasingly captured the increased awareness of the role of the oceans in national economies. Moreover, it has also slowly but steadily emerged as a concept that captures the goals of sustaining economic development opportunities emerging from the oceans' wealth while also aiming to maintain ocean ecosystem health. As such, the term 'blue economy' aims to combine the multifaceted economic, environmental and social importance of the ocean along five key components: ecosystem resilience, economic sustainability, community engagement, institutional integration and technical capacity (Keen, Schwarz, and Wini-Simeon, 2018). It shares the idea that economic activities/growth are not antithetical to ecological conservation but are rather complementary, or even reinforcing (Boonstra, Valman, and Björkvik 2018). However, many interpretations of the blue economy are more an aspiration than a blueprint with the term predominantly being used as a catchy buzzword by a variety of actors for a variety of purposes (Keen, Schwarz, and Wini-Simeon, 2018). Moreover, the commonly used 'win-win-win' rhetoric of blue growth – emphasizing gains for coastal communities, the environment and investors at once – undermines progressive and transformative solutions to the disadvantage of small-scale users (Barbesgaard 2018), with blue growth agendas (often) only producing environmental and social injustices rather than also minimizing environmental and social harms (Bennett et al. 2021). Similar to the concept of sustainable development, the blue economy stands the risk of becoming a cliché with no definite meaning or an adjusted meaning only, used and deployed to a stakeholder's specific needs. As any other buzzword it initially represents a general agreement in the abstract but in the end generate endless disagreements about what it might mean in practice (Cornwall 2007). As such, it risks masking political and economic interests and underlying ideologies, and says little about what is actually done in its name.

Given this inherent conceptual ambiguity and confusion over its social and environmental sustainability (Germond-Duret, Heidkamp, and Morrissey 2022), one wonders how the evolution of a newly envisioned management and governance concept – the blue economy – can serve as an internationally recognised blueprint for the sustainable development of our oceans. How can the blue economy retain its alleged credibility that is currently undermined by contradictions between economic growth and capital accumulation on the one hand, and narratives on environmental and social sustainability on the other (Germond-Duret et al. 2023)?

To answer such fundamental questions, we need to know more about the various blue steps taken, identify how different blue initiatives conceptually addresses the tense bioeconomic relations of protection, growth and equity, and assess how/if the oceans are (able to) contributing to national economies in a sustainable way, or if rapid and unchecked blue growth is only to produce numerous environmental and social injustices (Bennett et al. 2021; Germond-Duret, Heidkamp, and Morrissey 2022). Given the broad variety of interpretations of the term/concept 'blue economy', it is necessary to examine how different stakeholders, with their varying expectations and concerns may be influenced by, and in turn influence, the interpretations and operationalizations of the blue economy – states as well as blue private sector stakeholders, large or small, in aquaculture, fisheries, marine biotechnology, renewable energy, manufacturing, tourism, commerce, as well as shipping, port and maritime logistics.

Over the past few years, discussions on the blue economy – both from a conceptual and an ocean management perspective – have also found their way into northern climes (Bogadóttir 2020; Kokorsch and Benediktsson 2018; Raspotnik, Rottem, and Østhagen 2021; Steinberg and Kristoffersen 2019). With rapid changes underway across the circumpolar north, questions are being asked both about the sustainability and profitability of northern economic ventures and about conditions for local and regional development (Larsen and Fondahl 2015). The Arctic is where we observe the strongest impacts of climate change. The region is rich in resources, but its unique ecosystem is fragile. As such, today's Arctic political agenda concerns how to govern best emerging disputes between the various industries and stakeholders involved. An interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder dialogue on the region's blue economy could be an important tool contributing to finding the most suitable approaches to best manage future activities.

Research and education play critical roles in developing and implementing sustainable practices and technologies that enable the growth of the blue economy. We need research to understand the ocean ecosystem and the potential impacts of economic activities on the environment, as well as to develop new models for blue growth and inclusive blue governance. Education is essential for fostering awareness and understanding of the importance ocean as an ecosystem and the importance of the Arctic social, economic, and political contexts and training the next generation of responsible professionals. Moreover, research and education are important for outreach and promoting innovation and collaboration among stakeholders in the blue economy areas. Through international cooperation in education, research, and outreach, we will contribute to capacity-building in the High North and promote sustainable approaches to Arctic blue economy growth.

Objectives

Our Thematic Network (TN) on the *Blue Economy and the Arctic* (*TN BlueArctic*) aims to uncover the conceptual and practical application of the 'blue economy', in particular, its regional sidekick: the circumpolar 'blue economy'. Thus, our TN should provide impetus to global blue economy discussions and related efforts to develop the blue economy as a novel concept for the sustainable governance and management of the world's oceans. As such, we aim to provide a better understanding of what the Arctic blue economy actually is and how the *blue Arctic* could serve as a potential blueprint for the sustainable development of our global oceans.

BlueArctic builds on the Arctic2030-project *AlaskaNor*[1] project idea of assessing blue economic collaboration potentials between Alaska and North Norway and the already established contacts made via this project. Later in 2022, *AlaskaNor* received further funding in order to continue with the *ArcBlue* project, now bringing ocean economy stakeholders from Greenland to the project team. However, *BlueArctic* aims to go beyond *AlaskaNor* and envisages to bring together academics and researchers from within and beyond the Arctic, as well as different academic fields to discuss and debate the 'blue economy' from both a conceptual and practical perspective. What is the blue economy? Who defines the blue economy? What are its Arctic specifics? What can we learn from the Arctic's blue example for the global implementation of the blue economy?

Therefore, **the main aim** is to develop, establish and promote a new UArctic Thematic Network, specifically dealing with *blue* questions and the Arctic: *TN BlueArctic*. The idea is to unite the efforts of the academic personnel from universities and research institutions as well as representatives from public sector institutions and businesses in the Arctic, who do not only share an academic/research interest in the concept but have already applied blue economic management ideas. Yet, we also aim to promote the TN outside the Arctic region and, for that reason, will further include and reach out to an international group of key experts in the broad field of ocean and blue economy. Moreover, *BlueArctic* will also build on the project coordinator's established contacts via his participation in the Arctic Economic Council Blue Economy Working Group.

Planned activities

In order to develop and establish the TN, we will introduce activities that will secure that the TN is not only formally established but also receives circumpolar attention from both academics and practitioners. As the TN will aim to develop, promote and disseminate knowledge related to the Arctic blue economy, we will establish a foundation for TN activities by first learning from existing experience by talking to academics who are involved in such projects in the circumpolar area, as well as internationally. Hence, we aim to establish a specific *Blue Arctic Dialogue*, as a workshop (side-event) of the High North Dialogue conferences in Bodø, Norway, in cooperation with the Arctic Economic Council's Blue Economy Working Group. This will allow to promote of academic interest to recruit a wide number of relevant institutional participants. Second, and based on an understanding on the current situation and needs, we will map the demand for new educational programs, courses and/or workshops (by conducting surveys and roundtable discussion/focus group interviews with practitioners/users in each country). Third, we will also analyse the potential sources of funding for joint research, education and development projects both internationally and in each partner-country related to blue economic developments. Fourth, and based on the discussion with the project partners, we will develop a TN strategy statement highlighting the focus areas/priorities of the TN – both in terms of development, research and educational programs.

As a part of the activities, we would apply for joint research projects. Such applications for circumpolar/national/international research and funding for development projects would be in itself an important declaration of commitment to work further with issues of Blue Economy in the Arctic. In

[1] www.alaskanor.com

Norway, for instance, there are opportunities related to the Research Council of Norway and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Arctic 2030 program); in the United States, opportunities are seen with the NSF *Navigating the New Arctic* programme. We would also appeal to practitioners in terms of providing funding and/or support (for example, project management staff) for transdisciplinary action research (Heidkamp, Garland and Krak 2021). This would require convincing arguments from the value academia can bring in terms of solving practitioners' dilemmas.

Quality control at the network

We will employ the following indicators to measure the level of activities and outcomes of the activities related to developing, establishing and promoting the TN BlueArctic: 1) number of institutional/individual members involved in the TN; 2) number of joint publications in newspapers; 3) number of joint seminars; 4) number of joint publications submitted and/or under review in peer-review academic journals, and 5) number of courses and joint educational program that is offered/can be potentially offered by UArctic institutions.

As such, our TN will feed knowledge directly into blue economy processes with the dissemination of newspaper articles (in various languages and across the circumpolar North), two academic articles, published in well-established journals, as well as one distinct Special Issues on the Blue Economy with input from early career researchers only.

For developing new programs and courses, especially in partnership with partner universities, we shall consider the institutions' quality assurance systems for educational activities. Here we will build on the partnership with the University Centre of the Westfjords and the network build by TN Member Heidkamp.

Beneficiaries

The target groups for the project, on the long run, are defined as a wide range of stakeholders: 1) academics/researchers at TN partner institutions and other universities/research centers in the UArctic but also on a broader scale; 2) practitioners and policymakers – from the industry and city/regional/national administrations; 3) students – full time as well as part-time, e.g. competence improvement programs; and 4) mass media, especially circumpolar ones (High North News, Arctic Today, The Arctic Institute, etc.)

A better understanding of what the blue economy actually is and what it entails is key for the further development and employment of the concept. This is relevant not only for academia or a small group of ocean-focused decision-makers: it concerns society at large. Avoiding another 'tragedy of the commons'-situation at sea, has never been more important than today. Moreover, through a clear TN strategy and a series of public events, the TN will engage not only policymakers and key stakeholders but also the broader public in a debate on the current status and future of the blue economy. As academic research often only (dis)satisfies its own ivory tower, researchers must step out of their comfort zone and engage more directly with the broader public through transdisciplinary engagement with the blue economy (Heidkamp, Garland and Krak 2021). The TN Blue Arctic will exactly do that.

Collaboration between thematic networks.
The blue economy encompasses various ocean-related fields and approaches sustainable and equitable blue growth/development in application to local, regional, national, and even global developments. TN Blue Arctic thus has connections – and relevance - to a number of established UArctic thematic networks which cover the sectoral or contextual components of 'blue economy'. These are such networks as Thematic Network on Ocean Food Systems, Thematic Network on Arctic and Northern Governance, Thematic Network on Arctic Sustainable Resources and Social Responsibility, Thematic Network on Circular Economy, Thematic Network on Sustainable Production and Foraging of Natural Products in the North, and others. The collaboration between thematic networks creates synergies that are beneficial for all parties. Also, a multidisciplinary approach and perspectives from different schools of thought are important to uncover the conceptual and practical application of the 'blue economy'. In practice, we shall facilitate collaboration with relevant networks by informing them of the network and our aims, seeking knowledge exchange and dialogue arenas, and inviting their perspectives and contributions to activities and projects of our network. At Nord University, there are at least two thematic networks that we have already established connections with: TN *SmartNorth*, TN *Arctic Safety and Security* and TN *Ocean Food System*.

How are Indigenous issues included in TN's operation?

If properly established and promoted, the TN BlueArctic will be able to develop unique academic competencies and network capital that can later attract both circumpolar and global academic interest as well as funding and therefore secure long-term sustainability. As such, the TN will also specifically meet the UArctic values as also outlined in the Strategic Plan 2030. Consisting of many UArctic members at the time of application, our TN will promote northern voices in an open and collaborative way.

Nord University, the host of TN BlueArctic, has the national responsibility for research and education within Southern and Lule Sami language and culture. Nord University is the only university in the world that offers Lule Sami and South Sami primary school teacher training (GLU). In the autumn of 2021, the university expanded its portfolio of Sami-related educational programs even more, it now includes several unique programs. On the research side, there is the Sami research group at Nord University. Together with Nordland Research institute, the university has a number of employees who work with Sami issues, both academically and administratively, including employees with a Sami background. In its strategy towards the year 2030, Nord university states that it will strengthen Sami education and increase the scope of interdisciplinary Sami research.

Therefore, as Nord university's employees, we are much aware of our responsibility and extra obligation to take care of the Sami heritage and contribute to bringing northern Indigenous Peoples' perspectives in education and research activities.

In order to embrace the blue perspectives and knowledge of northern Indigenous Peoples, the TN will reach out to indigenous representatives/institutions in the participating UArctic countries to join the TN. At Nord, we closely cooperate with the Social Studies Department and our colleagues working with Sami research, engaging them in TN ArcBlue activities. We shall use the expertise from Nord University's

national and international relevant networks and research projects, for example, JUSTNORTH. We shall therefore secure that the indigenous people's perspectives and knowledge are included in the international scientific discussion on concepts, elements, and tools of the Blue Economy in the Arctic. This is essential as the commonly used 'win-win-win' rhetoric of blue growth – emphasizing gains for coastal communities, the environment, and investors at once – undermines progressive and transformative solutions to the disadvantage of small-scale users – a fact that our TN will aim to counter.

Initial academic members

- High North Center, Nord University Business School (Norway) - Project lead
- Fridtjof Nansen Institute (Norway)
- The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies, (USA)
- Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage (USA)
- Project Blue, Southern Connecticut State University

Initial institutional members – network co-leads

- Andreas Raspotnik, – Network lead, Senior researcher, High North Center, Nord University Business School; Senior Researcher, Fridtjof Nansen Institute, andreas.raspotnik@nord.no
- Elena Zhurova Sæther, Researcher, High North Center, Nord University Business School, elena.z.saether@nord.no
- Andreas Østhagen, Senior Researcher, Fridtjof Nansen Institute, aosthagen@fni.no
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- Diane Hirshberg, Director & Professor of Education Policy Professor, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, dbhirshberg@alaska.edu
- Romain Chuffart, The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies, romain.chuffart@thearcticinstitute.org
- Karin Buhmann, Copenhagen Business School, kbu.msc@cbs.dk
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- Dr. Maxime Geoffroy, Memorial University of Newfoundland - Fisheries and Marine Institute, Maxime.Geoffroy@mi.mun.ca
- Prof. Christian P. Heidkamp, University Centre of the Westfjords, heidkampc1@southernct.edu
- Michelle Voyer, ANCORS - Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources & Security, mvoyer@uow.edu.au
- Dana Eidsness, Arctic Economic Council (AEC) Blue Economy Working Group, eidsness@mitc.com
- Charles S. Colgan, CBE – Center for the Blue Economy, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, ccolgan@middlebury.edu
- Dr. Xu Guangmiao, ENCU – East China Normal University, 515431523@qq.com
- Bjørg Helene Jenssen, Innovation Norway, bjorg.helene.jenssen@innovasjonnorge.no
- C. Patrick Heidkamp, Southern Connecticut state University, USA and University Centre of the Westfjords, Icleand, heidkampc1@southernct.edu

Potential output

Development of the TN BlueArctic.

1. TN BlueArctic aims to incorporate at least one UArctic member from the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Canada, and Sweden and at least five institutional/individual members outside the circumpolar area by the end 2023.
2. TN BlueArctic aims to incorporate at least one indigenous representative/institution by the end of 2023, in addition to Nord University's Sami research group.
3. Publication of a TN BlueArctic strategy (documented by the UArctic web-page), including the list of potential funding sources for TN activities in the participating countries and the list of existing and potential courses/workshops on the blue economy in these countries.
4. Establishment of the TN BlueArctic reference group, involving representatives from both the academic as well as the stakeholder dialogue group at the end of the project period.

Development of BlueArctic arenas.

5. Establishment of a Blue Arctic Dialogue as a workshop (side-event) of the High North Dialogue conferences in Bodø, Norway annually.
6. Establishment of Blue Arctic Stakeholder Dialogue as part of the official program of the High North Dialogue conference 2024 in Bodø, Norway.

BlueArctic research and education.

7. Submission of at least one research application to the Norwegian Research Council, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or US National Science Foundation *Navigating the New Arctic* programme with TN participants as partners of the proposal.
8. Publication of two joint research papers within 2025, co-authored by TN participants.
9. Announcement, editing, and publishing of one Special Issue on the Blue Economy and the Arctic in Marine Policy (https://www.journals.elsevier.com/marine-policy). This Special Issue aims to predominantly publish articles from early career scholars from the TN partners or another peer-reviewed academic journal.
10. Develop a course/joint educational program on the *Blue Economy and the Arctic* issues in cooperation between the TN Blue Arctic members.

By aiming to bring together both blue academics and practitioners, the TN will serve as an influential hub that provides decision-makers with knowledge-based advice for the sustainable development of the Arctic.

Has the network already been awarded some funding? If so, for what activities?

Our application aimed at the establishment of the UArctic Thematic Network was granted in 2021; the project application sum was 400 000 NOK. The funding was primarily dedicated to project events concerning the TN initiation and building in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, three respective meetings were conducted:

- *From AlaskaNor to ArcBlue - Fisheries and Aquaculture from Alaska via North Norway to Northwest Russia,* a side-event at the High North Dialogue 2022 conference;
- *From Blue to Smart Research Collaboration between Norway and the United States*, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Washington DC, 26 September 2022;
- *Diverse blue economies in the Arctic - how to define and discuss?* break-out session on the Blue Economy concept at the Arctic Circle conference 2022.

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NORD University

BUSINESS SCHOOL
HIGH NORTH CENTER FOR BUSINESS AND GOVERNANCE

Kirsi Latola –
Vice-President Networks
UArctic

Date:
27.02.2023

Our ref:

LETTER OF SUPPORT

This letter of support is to express my full support for the establishment of a new UArctic Thematic Network on *Blue Economy and the Arctic (TN Blue Arctic)*. The thematic network initiator and lead at Nord University is the High North Center for Business and Governance, Nord University Business School.

The UArctic Thematic Network on *Blue Economy and the Arctic* will provide a platform for collaboration and knowledge-sharing among scholars, researchers, and professionals in the field of the sustainable governance and management of the world's oceans, in particular, the circumpolar 'blue economy'. Establishing a Thematic Network that focuses on these challenges will be an important step in promoting the sustainability of global oceans.

Education and research at Nord University is based on four core areas: blue and green growth; sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship; health, welfare and education; and societal security. Establishing of UArctic Network on *Blue Economy and the Arctic*, therefore, meets Nord University's key strategic research area – *Blue Growth*. Through joint research projects, workshops, and educational programs, TN BlueArctic will contribute to the university's goal to strengthen international collaboration in research and education.

Therefore, I welcome and support the establishment of TN BlueArctic and the planned activities.

Sincerely,

Hanne Solheim Hansen

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