

Imagining the future: Local perceptions of Arctic extractive projects that didn't happen

External imaginings of the future Arctic range from protected wilderness to booming oil and gas province, and proponents of different visions frequently clash in global public arenas. At the same time, external perceptions, whether pro-development or pro-conservation, frequently fail to reflect the realities of living in the Arctic, or to incorporate the views (and imaginings) of local inhabitants – those most affected by Arctic resource projects. The Arctic region does have significant resource potential. The United States Geological Survey estimated that 25 per cent of the world's undiscovered petroleum reserves were to be found in the Arctic.¹ The Arctic also represents around 10 per cent of the global nickel, cobalt and tungsten markets, 26 per cent of diamond gem stones and up to 40 per cent of the global production of palladium.² Yet uncertainty about the viability of natural resource projects is ever-present. Companies may be highly visible and a project intensely debated long before it is clear whether natural resource deposits, national-level negotiations and global markets will result in actual extraction for the market. Often local communities have very little information available at this point and yet the very prospect of an industrial project can transform the way a local community imagines – and prepares for – its own future.

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