

THE NORPAK REVIEW

Rethinking the North:
An Introduction to The NORPAK Review

Editorial Introduction

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Suggested Citation

Kunze, S., & Berrada, I. (2026). Rethinking the North: An introduction to The NORPAK Review. *The NORPAK Review*, 1(1), 1–4.

Keywords

Northern and Arctic studies; circumpolar studies; Indigenous sovereignty; environmental justice; sustainable development; Arctic governance

Published: October 2026



The NORPAK Review

The NORPAK Review is published by the Northern Research, Policy, and Arctic Knowledge Hub (NORPAK) and the Department of Sociology at Northern Arizona University. NORPAK and the Department of Sociology hold membership in the University of the Arctic (UArctic), an international network of universities, research institutes, and organizations engaged in northern and Arctic research and education.

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Publication Platform

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Rethinking the North: An Introduction to The NORPAK Review

Stefanie Kunze[‡] & Ibrahim Berrada[§]

Arctic regions are warming at approximately four times the global average, intensifying the effects of climate change across northern environments (Rantanen et al., 2022). Indigenous and rural populations who have called these Arctic landscapes home since time immemorial are often among the first to experience these changes and their most immediate consequences. Their warnings have gone unheeded for many decades. Today, global outlooks have shifted to climate impacts in the Arctic, fueled by extreme weather events and unprecedented heat waves. Alongside climate events, research funding has increased substantially, along with policy-driven investment in resource extraction, renewable energy development, and requests for consultation with Indigenous communities on projects proposed on Indigenous lands. The number of stakeholders, in addition to Indigenous rights holders, is staggering, as industry representatives, politicians from local to state and international levels, and academics show interest in Arctic development.

Similarly, desert regions, such as the American Southwest, have attracted increasing attention from policymakers, industry stakeholders, and developers. Rising demand for copper, lithium, and rare earth metals, specifically for battery production and micro- and semiconductors, have fueled the push for mining in sparsely populated lands. The American Southwest, with its vast landscapes, is often the focus of such projects. However, as in the High North, vast landscapes and sparse populations do not mean that they are uninhabited or insignificant. Beyond mining projects, large-scale solar and wind farms, data centers, and high-tech manufacturing are also seeking space in these deserts. To the economic observer, large undeveloped spaces may seem like ideal locations for such space-consuming, large-scale operations. On the ground, however, real communities are affected, livelihoods threatened, and environmental destruction is imminent.

Arctic and desert populations occupy a front-row seat to the effects of climate change. While some regions face the growing threat of rising water levels, others confront increasingly severe water scarcity and the disappearance of reliable water sources. In the North, thawing sea ice, lakes, and permafrost create significant economic challenges (Schuur et al., 2018; Welch, 2019); in desert regions, prolonged drought, extreme heat, and sandstorms generate a distinct but equally consequential set of pressures. At this juncture of rapid change, the Arctic and the desert meet. Indigenous and rural populations have lived in these spaces for centuries and are the most adept and resilient in facing unprecedented change. However, this change also brings heightened attention from outside stakeholders who increasingly seek

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Arctic and desert regions for development, contributing to the repeated marginalization and encroachment experienced by some of the populations who call these regions home.

At the Northern, Research, Policy, and Arctic Knowledge Hub (NORPAK), we focus on some of these topics that affect Indigenous and rural populations in the Arctic, as well as in desert environments. Our affiliates encompass a wide range of experts, scholars, and practitioners who examine the complex dynamics unfolding across Arctic and desert regions and collaborate to identify solutions to many of the pressing concerns facing these areas. Housed at Northern Arizona University, NORPAK is situated on traditional Indigenous homelands significant to many tribal nations in the region. NORPAK's mission and vision center on developing reciprocal partnerships with rural and Indigenous communities across the American Southwest and the Arctic through knowledge co-production, applied research, and experiential learning grounded in community-defined priorities.

The NORPAK Review is a cross-disciplinary, editor-reviewed, open-access journal dedicated to advancing research, dialogue, and knowledge exchange across the fields of circumpolar studies, critical Arctic studies, Arctic social sciences, and desert studies. The journal was launched as a platform to reduce barriers to knowledge sharing and expand opportunities for exchange beyond conventional disciplinary and academic boundaries. It highlights scholarly, practitioner, student, and community-based work, including research articles and notes, conference presentations, methodological papers, community studies, and applied research that connects knowledge to practice, policy, and lived experience. In doing so, *The NORPAK Review* provides space for diverse forms of knowledge production that engage with the social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic realities shaping northern, Arctic, and desert regions.

In this inaugural volume engages with several of these important concepts and areas of inquiry. The two featured research articles tackle settlement from relatively different angles. Jessica Louise Hall (2026), in "The Language of Conquest: The Role of Linguistic Weaponisation in the Establishment of Settler Colonial States" explores linguistic weaponization, specifically towards environments and Peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as well as settler colonialism. Hall introduces a three-step process that is separate from physical and violent colonialism but rather employs a quiet form of colonialism based in language, morality, and the creation of the settler colonial state.

Dilraba Anayatova and Arina Melkozernova (2026) shift our focus to other parts of the world. In their work "Cat's Cradle as a Relational Framework in Mapping Traditional Knowledge: Herders of Kazakhstan, Farmers of the Italian South, and Tribal Communities of the US Gulf Coast," they move Traditional Knowledges and reciprocal relationships from three different locations, rural Kazakhstan, the Italian South (Cilento region), and tribal communities in the U.S. Gulf Coast (MOWA Choctaw Tribal Band of Indians, Alabama), into focus. The three case studies highlight the depth and significance of Traditional Knowledges and their deep connection to land and people.

John W. Bessai's (2026) contribution, "Experiential Archives and Northern Policy: A Counter-Policy Method for Community-Centred Research," offers us a glimpse at how Northern policy is operationalized at the individual level. It can affect people in ordinary ways, from travel arrangements and institutional permissions to policies and processes, as macro-level policy designs are put into practice by individual families, researchers, and, more broadly, members of society. As Bessai writes, "The term experiential archives refers to a method of research that focuses on the experience of policy in scenes of institutional life" (p. 46). The archival process reserves guiding roles for Indigenous, Northern, and rural communities, among others.

In the featured student research article, “The Paradoxical Relationship Between NATO’s Operation Arctic Sentry Securitization Discourse and the Environmental Effects of Russian Shadow Fleets,” Evan Davis, Eric Hardwick, John Reznicek, Baibhav Saraf, and Roderick Toms (2026) examine NATO’s Arctic Sentry program in relation to Russia’s shadow fleets. Davis et al. are graduate students in the MA in Applied Sociology program and researchers in the Laboratory for Applied Northern Research at Northern Arizona University. Specifically, they analyze official narratives from NATO member states used to justify the program, including concerns related to environmental degradation in the Arctic. They identify a central paradox: many of the surveillance and logistical tools associated with Arctic Sentry may themselves contribute to some of the environmental harm invoked in the discourse used to justify the program.

This volume also features three research notes, each engaging with a current area of inquiry through a distinct disciplinary and methodological lens. Laetitia Barbu and Yang Jiang’s (2026) “Digital Imaginaries, Lived Experiences, and Arctic Ocean Futures: Between Global Representations and Situated Knowledges,” examines how digital representations of the Arctic shape understandings of Arctic Ocean futures while considering the relationship between globally circulating imaginaries and locally situated forms of knowledge. Henri Keskinen’s (2026) “Frozen in Time: The Un-Sustainable Development of the Hawaiian Tourism Industry and its Effects on Indigenous Hawaiian Sovereignty” analyzes the historical development of Hawai‘i’s tourism industry and its relationship to economic stagnation, cultural commodification, and sovereignty. Michael Laiho’s (2026) “The Art of Writing Environmental Myths in the Arctic: Resilience and Meaning-Making at the UArctic Congress” considers the UArctic Congress as a site of Arctic meaning-making, examining how environmental narratives, institutional resilience, and competing forms of knowledge shape and reproduce understandings of the Arctic.

Together, these scholars share a critical analytical approach to examining how narratives surrounding nature, Indigeneity, development, and place are produced, represented, and contested. Their contributions foreground questions of who gets to define, describe, own, govern, and represent lands and oceanscapes, particularly when visitors, researchers, and institutions become narrators of places that are not their own. This creates a complicated relationship among visitation, extraction, support, and the rewriting of place-based narratives, dynamics that Indigenous and rural communities in regions such as the Arctic and Hawai‘i continue to navigate.

The inaugural issue of *The NORPAK Review* marks the beginning of an annual publication series, with occasional Special Issues appearing throughout the year. This issue also includes a Call for Papers for the forthcoming Special Issue, Student Voices: Emerging Scholarship on the North, as well as the Call for Papers for Volume 2 of *The NORPAK Review*, scheduled for publication in Fall 2027.

Stefanie Kunze & Ibrahim Berrada
Editors of *The NORPAK Review*

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