

Transboundary Governance Capacity (TGC) in the Arctic:  
Insights from the Laurentian Great Lakes  
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The Arctic is the prototype of a complex, multi-scalar, socio-ecologic system. Scholarly attention on Arctic governance generally has focused on either a single institution of Arctic governance (Koivurova, 2010; Axworthy and Koivurova, 2012), or a more descriptive and normative lens for those that have noted the complexity of Arctic governance (*Arctic Governance Project*, 2010; The Aspen Institute, 2011; Runnalls, 2014). For those who have examined Arctic governance within a theoretical framework (Stokke, 2011; Young, 2012) they have done so without attributes or measures of capacity. This lack of emphasis can be attributed to a general dearth of rigorous models or frameworks that are appropriate for explaining governance capacity in transboundary contexts. These conceptual problems have consequences for the study of transboundary governance systems around the globe.

This paper attempts to fill these gaps: it uses a framework on transboundary governance capacity (TGC) (indicators of compliance, functional intensity, stability and resilience, and legitimacy) that was developed in the context of another complex, multi-scalar socio-ecologic system – the Laurentian Great Lakes – as a tool to explore and explain Arctic governance, and serves as a modest attempt to develop core insights the TGC framework in a different context. These insights are critical, as the Arctic is viewed as a “governance barometer” for the world (*Arctic Governance Project*, 2010). A deeper understanding of the conditions that promote effective transboundary governance here could lead to on-the-ground governance innovations in this region and elsewhere.

After providing background on the Arctic and discussing some of the most significant transboundary institutions in the region, this paper evaluates these institutions using the TGC indicators of compliance, functional intensity, stability and resilience, and legitimacy. It concludes that the TGC framework provides keen insights into the broad mosaic that constitutes the Arctic transboundary governance system. Perhaps paradoxically, it also suggests that an institutional framework like the TGC highlights the importance of process to complex transboundary system governance systems. That is, in transboundary regimes such as the Arctic, which have legitimacy, stability, and resiliency, yet lack hard law and strong functional intensity mechanisms, a way to strengthen governance in the region is through process that brings these institutions to the table in a strategic manner.