

RECONFIGURING ARCTIC GOVERNANCE: LAW, IDENTITY, AND EUROPE – KOREA COOPERATION

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Abstract

This study examines the structural transformation of Arctic governance through a constructivist lens, focusing on the strategic roles of discourse, identity evolution, and performance-based contributions. Climate change and escalating geopolitical rivalries—particularly post-Ukraine war—have exposed the institutional limitations of the Arctic Council and eroded the traditional "low-tension cooperation" paradigm. In this shifting landscape, geographic proximity is giving way to functional, contribution-based participation as the primary source of legitimacy. Within this framework, this paper analyzes the complementary trajectories of European and South Korean engagement. While Europe provides normative leadership grounded in environmental regulation and multilateral institution-building, South Korea has steadily expanded its role from a "responsible observer" to a technological and operational "enabler," backed by its robust domestic legal frameworks, shipbuilding capacity, and polar research infrastructure. The study argues that integrating Europe's normative sophistication with Korea's industrial and technological expertise offers a strategic pathway to overcome existing governance deficits. Ultimately, Europe-Korea cooperation represents a model for a more inclusive, adaptive, and resilient multilateral architecture capable of balancing sustainable development with environmental stewardship in a rapidly changing Arctic.

Keywords

Arctic Governance, Europe-Korea Cooperation, Enabler, Identity Transformation, Normative Power, Constructivism.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a transformação estrutural da governação do Ártico através de uma perspetiva construtivista, centrando-se nos papéis estratégicos do discurso, da evolução da identidade e das contribuições baseadas no desempenho. As alterações climáticas e as



rivalidades geopolíticas crescentes — particularmente após a guerra na Ucrânia — revelaram as limitações institucionais do Conselho do Ártico e minaram o paradigma tradicional da «cooperação de baixa tensão». Neste panorama em mudança, a proximidade geográfica está a dar lugar a uma participação funcional e baseada na contribuição como principal fonte de legitimidade. Neste contexto, o presente artigo analisa as trajetórias complementares do envolvimento da Europa e da Coreia do Sul. Enquanto a Europa proporciona uma liderança normativa assente na regulamentação ambiental e na criação de instituições multilaterais, a Coreia do Sul tem vindo a expandir de forma constante o seu papel, passando de «observador responsável» para «facilitador» tecnológico e operacional, apoiada pelos seus robustos quadros jurídicos nacionais, capacidade de construção naval e infraestruturas de investigação polar. O estudo defende que a integração da sofisticação normativa da Europa com a experiência industrial e tecnológica da Coreia oferece um caminho estratégico para superar os défices de governação existentes. Em última análise, a cooperação Europa-Coreia representa um modelo para uma arquitetura multilateral mais inclusiva, adaptável e resiliente, capaz de equilibrar o desenvolvimento sustentável com a gestão ambiental num Ártico em rápida mudança.

Palavras-chave

Governança do Ártico, Cooperação Europa-Coreia, Facilitador, Transformação de Identidade, Poder Normativo, Construtivismo.

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Introduction

The Arctic is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the accelerating impacts of climate change, geopolitical competition, and expanding economic interests. Rapid ice melt is opening new maritime routes and increasing access to natural resources, thereby elevating the region's strategic importance. At the same time, these developments intensify environmental risks, including ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, and threats to indigenous communities. As a result, the Arctic is no longer a remote and peripheral space but has emerged as a critical arena where global environmental, economic, and security dynamics intersect.

These transformations have exposed significant limitations within the existing Arctic governance system. Traditionally characterized by cooperation and low political tension, the Arctic is increasingly shaped by strategic rivalry, particularly in the context of broader geopolitical conflicts. Institutional frameworks such as the Arctic Council face growing constraints in addressing emerging challenges, especially those related to security. This evolving context calls for a reassessment of how Arctic governance is conceptualized and practiced, moving beyond static institutional perspectives toward more dynamic and adaptive approaches.

This study approaches Arctic governance through a constructivist lens, emphasizing the roles of discourse, identity, and performative contribution. In multilateral governance systems, states do not simply act based on material capabilities; they also construct their roles and legitimacy through diplomatic narratives and sustained practices. From this perspective, the Arctic is not merely a physical region but a socially constructed political space in which influence is shaped by how actors define themselves and are recognized by others. Accordingly, legitimacy in Arctic governance increasingly depends on contribution-based participation rather than geographic proximity alone.

Within this evolving framework, Europe and Korea represent two distinct yet complementary trajectories of engagement. European actors have played a central role in shaping Arctic governance through scientific research, environmental regulation, and



institutional development, establishing a form of normative leadership grounded in sustainability and multilateralism. Korea, by contrast, has expanded its participation through technological capacity, industrial strength, and growing involvement in scientific and diplomatic initiatives. In particular, Korea's transition from a "responsible observer" to an "enabler" reflects a broader shift toward functional contribution as a basis for legitimacy.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the transformation of Arctic governance and explores the strategic potential of Europe–Korea cooperation. It argues that the integration of Europe's normative and institutional strengths with Korea's technological and operational capabilities offers a pathway to address existing governance limitations. By analyzing legal frameworks, evolving state identities, and patterns of cooperation, the study aims to demonstrate how a more inclusive, adaptive, and contribution-driven governance model can emerge. Ultimately, it seeks to highlight the broader implications of Arctic governance for global order in an era of increasing complexity and interdependence.

Reconfiguring Arctic Governance: Legal Transformation, European Engagement, and Korea's Expanding Participation

Structural Transformation and the Crisis of Arctic Governance

The Arctic is undergoing profound structural transformation driven by the accelerating impacts of climate change. The rapid melting of sea ice is no longer a seasonal anomaly but a systemic shift, raising the possibility that the Arctic Ocean may evolve from a periodic passage into a more stable maritime transportation corridor. At the same time, increased accessibility to oil, gas, and rare minerals has significantly heightened global economic interest in the region. These developments, however, are accompanied by serious and interconnected challenges, including marine ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, and growing threats to the livelihoods and rights of indigenous communities. In particular, methane emissions released from thawing permafrost pose long-term and potentially irreversible risks to the global climate system. As a result, the Arctic is emerging as a complex geopolitical and environmental space where economic opportunity, ecological vulnerability, and security concerns intersect on a global scale.

Geopolitical tensions are further undermining the stability of Arctic governance. The intensifying rivalry between Russia and Western countries is transforming the Arctic from a zone traditionally characterized by cooperation into one marked by strategic competition. Military buildup, competing claims over maritime control, and expanding resource development have escalated tensions across the region. These developments are gradually eroding the long-standing model of "low-tension cooperation" that once defined Arctic relations (Ingimundarson, 2014). At the same time, energy security and control over emerging shipping routes have become central to national strategies, reinforcing competitive dynamics. Consequently, the Arctic is being reshaped into a complex geopolitical arena in which cooperation and conflict coexist.

In this evolving context, the Arctic Council has increasingly revealed its institutional limitations. Heightened political tensions have constrained its ability to function



effectively as a cooperative platform. Although the Council has historically focused on environmental protection and sustainable development, it remains structurally ill-equipped to address security-related issues (Kim & Kim, 2022). As a result, critical concerns such as military tensions are often excluded from formal deliberations. This institutional gap risks further fragmenting Arctic governance. In response, alternative approaches including minilateral cooperation and more flexible partnership frameworks are gaining increasing attention.

The legal architecture of the Arctic reflects a layered and adaptive system (Kim & Shim 2022). Arctic-related treaties can be broadly divided into two categories: those that apply generally to global maritime affairs but are also relevant to the Arctic, and those specifically designed for polar regions. Foundational agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) were originally intended to govern global maritime activities, yet they play a crucial role in Arctic governance. In particular, Article 234 of UNCLOS, addressing “ice-covered areas,” provides a legal basis for coastal states to adopt stricter environmental regulations tailored to the unique conditions of polar regions (Gudev, 2020).

This framework is further complemented by polar-specific legal instruments. The International Maritime Organization’s Polar Code establishes mandatory safety and environmental standards for vessels operating in polar waters. The Svalbard Treaty, in turn, provides a distinctive legal regime governing sovereignty and economic activity in the Svalbard archipelago. Arctic agreements may also be categorized as multilateral, regional, or bilateral. While UNCLOS, MARPOL, and the Svalbard Treaty represent multilateral frameworks, regional arrangements often involve European actors, and bilateral agreements such as the maritime delimitation treaty between Norway and Russia play a critical role in stabilizing legal relationships (Yoo & Lee, 2020).

Despite the development of these legal frameworks, significant challenges remain. The Arctic is among the regions most severely affected by climate change, making international cooperation and continuous environmental monitoring essential for global policy responses. At the same time, expanding resource extraction and tourism increase pressure on fragile ecosystems. These dynamics underscore the need for more refined and adaptive legal standards that can balance environmental protection with sustainable development. Accordingly, Arctic governance frameworks are likely to continue evolving in response to emerging environmental and geopolitical pressures.

Finally, international law becomes effective only through its incorporation into domestic legal systems. States party to international treaties are obligated to implement these norms through national legislation, a process that functions not only as a legal requirement but also as a key policy instrument (Kim et al., 2023). Arctic coastal states, for example, have strengthened domestic regulatory frameworks governing navigation and territorial waters based on provisions such as UNCLOS Article 234. At the same time, many countries have been developing legal and institutional systems related to maritime safety, environmental protection, and polar research as their Arctic engagement expands. Ultimately, Arctic governance operates through a dynamic, multilayered system in which international and domestic law continuously interact.



Europe's Arctic Engagement: From Exploration to Norm-Based Governance

Europe has played a foundational role in the early exploration and conceptualization of the Arctic. Expeditions led by countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Norway transformed the Arctic from an unknown frontier into a more comprehensible geographical space. These explorations were driven not only by scientific curiosity but also by economic motivations, including the search for new trade routes and natural resources. In particular, the pursuit of Arctic sea routes was closely tied to imperial competition and efforts to establish faster maritime connections to Asia. The accumulation of navigational knowledge and advancements in cartography during this period laid the groundwork for subsequent Arctic research and governance.

In the contemporary era, Europe's perception of the Arctic has evolved in close connection with the global challenge of climate change. Accelerating ice melt has redefined the region as both a site of economic opportunity and environmental vulnerability. While new shipping routes and resource extraction prospects attract strategic interest, ecological degradation and biodiversity loss intensify the need for environmental protection (Cavaliere et al., 2021). In response, European actors have adopted a dual policy approach that seeks to balance economic utilization with sustainability, particularly through strategic assessments linking climate governance, regional development, and environmental stewardship in the Arctic (Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, 2021). Nordic countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Finland, in particular, perceive the Arctic as closely linked to their domestic ecological systems, leading to integrated policy frameworks that align climate policy with Arctic strategy.

The European Union has further strengthened its engagement by framing the Arctic as a key arena for global climate governance (Canova, 2025). By linking its carbon neutrality agenda with Arctic policy, the EU positions the region as a frontline for climate action (Shin, 2024). Concepts such as blue carbon and marine ecosystem protection have emerged as central elements of this approach. This reflects a broader shift in viewing the Arctic not merely as a site of resource exploitation, but as a domain requiring normative regulation and environmental stewardship (Jung, 2022). The EU's integration of scientific research with regulatory frameworks enhances the legitimacy of its policies and aligns with its broader identity as a "normative power" (Kuus, 2020). This process also demonstrates the EU's expanding capacity for Arctic actorhood beyond geographical constraints (Jouhier, 2025).

European Arctic coastal states maintain a dual strategy that combines competition with cooperation. Countries such as Norway and Denmark (via Greenland) actively pursue maritime resource development and jurisdictional claims while simultaneously supporting international legal frameworks. They rely on mechanisms such as UNCLOS to manage disputes and legitimize their positions. Scientific data submissions and negotiated continental shelf extensions exemplify rule-based governance in practice. This approach helps mitigate tensions while preserving a cooperative regional order, allowing strategic interests and institutional stability to coexist.



Non-Arctic European states have also expanded their influence through active participation in Arctic affairs. Countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy primarily adopt science-driven strategies, utilizing advanced capabilities such as icebreaking research vessels, satellite observation systems, and long-term climate data analysis. These technological assets function not only as tools of scientific inquiry but also as instruments of diplomatic influence. By emphasizing their identity as “responsible stakeholders,” these states establish legitimacy in Arctic governance despite lacking direct territorial claims.

Other European countries, including the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland, have deepened their engagement through science diplomacy. Switzerland’s participation is particularly notable, demonstrating that Arctic involvement is not constrained by geographical proximity. Through polar research stations, international collaborative projects, and the production of scientific knowledge, these countries contribute meaningfully to policymaking processes. Scientific research provides the empirical foundation for governance decisions while simultaneously fostering international cooperation (Wood-Donnelly, 2023). As a result, Europe has developed a multilayered Arctic governance structure characterized by diverse actors and interconnected roles, supported by both international legal frameworks and regional policy initiatives designed to address emerging Arctic disputes (Kim & Ko, 2021).

Korea’s Participation in Arctic Governance and the Evolution of Its Legal and Strategic Frameworks

In recent years, the Arctic has emerged as a critical focal point of global environmental change, driven by the accelerating impacts of climate change. Rapid ice melt is expanding the possibilities for new maritime routes and resource development, thereby intensifying geopolitical and economic interest in the region. At the same time, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and challenges related to indigenous rights are becoming increasingly pronounced. These developments have introduced structural tensions into Arctic governance, further compounded by intensifying geopolitical rivalry particularly between Russia and Western countries—which is transforming the Arctic from a zone of low-tension cooperation into one of strategic competition. The disruption of cooperative channels following the Ukraine war has weakened institutional stability, including within the Arctic Council, which continues to face structural limitations in addressing security-related issues.

Within this evolving context, Korea has steadily expanded its engagement in Arctic governance. Since obtaining observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, Korea has pursued a more structured and proactive Arctic policy encompassing scientific research, maritime activities, and multilateral cooperation (Kim 2022). Its growing investment in research infrastructure and international collaboration networks reflects a transition from passive observation to active participation. In particular, the operation of the icebreaking research vessel Araon highlights Korea’s expanding capacity in polar research and science diplomacy. At the same time, Korea has sought to balance economic interests with



environmental responsibility, positioning itself as a constructive and credible participant in Arctic governance.

Korea's Arctic engagement is closely linked to the evolution of its domestic legal frameworks, which initially developed through its participation in Antarctic governance. Beginning in the late twentieth century, Korea joined the Antarctic Treaty system and assumed obligations to implement international norms domestically. This led to the enactment of the "Act on Antarctic Activities and Environmental Protection" in 2004, which incorporated the principles of the Madrid Protocol into national law. The legislation established a comprehensive regulatory system based on prior authorization of activities, environmental impact assessments, and strict environmental protection measures, while also promoting scientific research through national planning and institutional support. As such, it reflects a hybrid legal model that integrates regulatory control with policy support.

Building on this institutional foundation, Korea's polar policy gradually expanded to include the Arctic, particularly as the region's strategic importance increased. Comparative analyses of polar legislation in Northeast Asia demonstrate that Korea has developed a comparatively comprehensive legal framework for polar governance, moving beyond Antarctic-specific regulation toward an integrated system covering both Arctic and Antarctic activities, while similar comprehensive legal arrangements remain more limited in neighboring countries (Kim & Kim, 2024). The acquisition of observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013 underscored the need for a more integrated legal and policy framework. In response, Korea enacted the "Polar Activities Promotion Act" in 2021, which functions as a general framework law covering both Antarctic and Arctic activities. This legislation introduced mechanisms for policy coordination, research and development support, professional training, and international cooperation, thereby strengthening the institutional basis for Korea's expanding polar engagement.

More recently, the growing strategic significance of Arctic shipping routes has led to the adoption of more specialized legislation. The 2026 "Special Act on the Promotion of Arctic Shipping Routes and Related Industries" provides a targeted framework for logistics development, industrial support, and international collaboration. Through institutional mechanisms such as dedicated committees, financial support systems, and research initiatives, this law enhances policy implementation capacity and reflects a shift in Korea's Arctic policy from a primarily research-oriented approach toward one that increasingly incorporates economic and strategic dimensions. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including potential overlaps among legal frameworks and the need for clearer coordination mechanisms.

Against this backdrop, Korea's expanding participation in Arctic governance carries broader implications. As a country that has achieved both rapid economic development and democratic consolidation, Korea enjoys a high level of international credibility and is well positioned to act as a middle power. Its technological expertise, maritime industry capacity, and diplomatic mediation skills represent important assets in navigating the complex dynamics of Arctic governance. In particular, Korea is well suited to assume an "enabler" role—facilitating cooperation, reducing tensions, and supporting institutional



resilience—thereby complementing existing great-power dynamics with a more inclusive and functionally oriented approach.

Ultimately, the crisis of Arctic governance reflects broader transformations in the global order rather than a purely regional issue. In this context, Korea's participation extends beyond the pursuit of national interests and contributes to norm formation, institutional adaptation, and cooperative problem-solving. By aligning its policies with the principles of sustainability and peaceful use, Korea can help strengthen the resilience of Arctic governance frameworks.

Looking ahead, it is likely to evolve from a responsible participant into a substantive contributor, particularly in the areas of scientific cooperation, environmental protection, and maritime governance (Østhagen, 2013).

Reframing Arctic Governance: Discourse, Identity Transformation, and Europe–Korea Cooperation

The Strategic Role of Discourse and Identity in Arctic Governance

In international relations, states do not assert themselves solely through material actions; they also define and legitimize their roles through diplomatic communication. Policy documents and official statements articulate not only national interests but also the institutional space states seek to occupy. In this sense, discourse is not merely descriptive but constitutive of policy itself. Particularly in multilateral governance systems, language and narrative shape the boundaries of participation and influence. Diplomatic discourse should therefore be understood as a strategic resource that constructs both action and status in the international system.

This perspective is closely aligned with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that international order is socially constructed through interaction. The Arctic, from this viewpoint, is not simply a physical region but a political space shaped by shared understandings and negotiated roles (Albert & Vasilache, 2018). A state's position is formed not only by its material capabilities but also by how it presents itself and is perceived by others. Through discourse and practice, states generate expectations and structure cooperation. As a result, identity and interaction become central to governance outcomes.

Traditionally, legitimacy in Arctic governance was based on geographic proximity, privileging Arctic coastal states. However, this standard has gradually evolved, allowing non-Arctic actors to gain influence through sustained engagement and tangible contributions. Scientific research, environmental protection, and institutional participation have become key sources of legitimacy. This shift reflects a broader transformation toward a more open and functionally driven governance structure. It also underscores the importance of performance over geography in shaping participation.

The experience of European actors demonstrates how legitimacy can be built through consistent contribution. Initial claims based on normative relevance were insufficient, but long-term investment in research and governance participation gradually strengthened credibility. This illustrates that legitimacy is accumulated through practice rather than



assertion. It also highlights that the quality and consistency of engagement are decisive factors in determining influence within Arctic governance.

Ultimately, effective diplomatic discourse must remain aligned with actual capabilities. Overstated narratives can weaken credibility, while understated positioning may limit strategic opportunities. The most effective approach lies in maintaining coherence between identity and performance. This alignment allows states to build trust over time, which is particularly crucial in cooperative governance systems like the Arctic. In this context, discourse becomes a key instrument for sustaining both legitimacy and influence.

From Responsible Observer to Enabler: Korea's Evolving Arctic Identity

When Korea joined the Arctic Council as an observer in 2013, it strategically adopted the identity of a "responsible observer." This framing emphasized adherence to international norms, respect for the sovereignty of Arctic states, and a non-confrontational posture within a governance system largely shaped by coastal actors. As an entry strategy, this identity proved effective: it facilitated Korea's access to institutional networks, enabled participation in working groups, and signaled its willingness to operate within established rules. At the time, such cautious positioning reflected both structural constraints and a deliberate effort to build trust within the Arctic governance community.

Over the past decade, however, the material and institutional foundations of Korea's Arctic engagement have expanded considerably. Korea has developed globally competitive shipbuilding capabilities, particularly in the construction of ice-class vessels such as icebreakers and LNG carriers. In parallel, it has advanced technologies related to maritime safety, satellite-based navigation, and sea ice forecasting. Its role in scientific research has also deepened through sustained participation in international projects and polar research initiatives. These developments collectively indicate a shift from limited, observation-based participation to a more active and capability-driven form of engagement.

This expansion of capabilities necessitates a corresponding redefinition of Korea's functional role within Arctic governance. Increasingly, Korea is not merely a participant that observes and complies, but an actor that contributes to the operational effectiveness of the system. In this context, the concept of an "enabler" provides a more precise analytical lens. As an enabler, Korea supports the conditions under which cooperation among Arctic and non-Arctic actors can take place—through the provision of technology, infrastructure, data, and logistical support. This role is particularly significant in the Arctic, where harsh environmental conditions and complex operational demands require shared capabilities and coordinated efforts.

Despite these changes, the continued reliance on the "responsible observer" framework reveals important limitations. While the term underscores restraint and norm compliance, it inadequately reflects Korea's expanded contributions and growing capacity to shape outcomes. This disconnect between identity and practice may constrain Korea's international recognition and reduce its potential influence within governance processes.



Moreover, it risks creating strategic ambiguity, as Korea's actual activities increasingly extend beyond the passive connotations of observation.

Against this backdrop, the "enabler" framework emerges as a more appropriate and forward-looking alternative. By focusing on functional contribution rather than positional restraint, it better aligns Korea's identity with its evolving capabilities. This reframing enhances the clarity, credibility, and strategic coherence of Korea's Arctic engagement. Ultimately, Korea's transition from a responsible observer to an enabler reflects a broader shift in Arctic governance itself—from a system centered primarily on status and participation toward one that increasingly values capability, contribution, and collaborative problem-solving.

Limits of Arctic Governance and the Strategic Potential of Europe–Korea Cooperation

Arctic governance, despite its foundation in cooperation, norms, and institutional dialogue, continues to operate under significant structural constraints. At its core, the governance architecture remains dominated by Arctic coastal states, which retain primary authority over decision-making processes. This concentration of influence inherently limits the participation and impact of non-Arctic actors, even as the consequences of Arctic transformation extend far beyond the region itself. Simultaneously, the Arctic is characterized by the coexistence of competing priorities: environmental protection, resource exploitation, economic development, and emerging security concerns. These overlapping agendas create a complex governance environment in which cooperation is both necessary and difficult to sustain. The accelerating pace of climate change further intensifies these pressures by opening new maritime routes, expanding access to natural resources, and increasing geopolitical attention to the region (Kim, 2026).

Within this evolving context, non-Arctic states are no longer peripheral actors but increasingly important contributors to the governance ecosystem. Korea exemplifies this shift through its functional and capability-based engagement. Rather than pursuing territorial or sovereignty-based claims, Korea's role is defined by its advanced technological capacity, particularly in shipbuilding, maritime logistics, digital infrastructure, and polar research. Acting as an "enabler," Korea contributes to enhancing the operational effectiveness of Arctic governance by supporting safe navigation systems, ice-capable vessels, satellite-based monitoring, and scientific research infrastructure. However, the effectiveness and legitimacy of such contributions are maximized when embedded within cooperative, multilateral frameworks rather than pursued through unilateral initiatives.

In this regard, Europe emerges as a particularly strategic and compatible partner. European actors both Arctic and non-Arctic have accumulated extensive experience in Arctic governance through sustained engagement in scientific research, environmental regulation, and multilateral institution-building (Cha & Lim 2022). European countries and institutions have played a central role in shaping governance norms that prioritize sustainability, environmental stewardship, and rule-based cooperation. This has resulted



in a multilayered governance system that integrates national policies, regional cooperation mechanisms, and international legal frameworks. Europe's normative leadership and institutional sophistication thus provide a critical foundation upon which deeper cooperation with Korea can be constructed.

The relationship between Korea and Europe is fundamentally complementary, offering a strong basis for synergistic collaboration. Korea's strengths lie in its industrial and technological capabilities, including world-leading shipbuilding industries, smart shipping technologies, and advanced digital systems. Europe, by contrast, brings expertise in governance design, regulatory frameworks, environmental standards, and policy coordination. The integration of these strengths allows for a more holistic approach to Arctic governance—one that bridges the gap between technological implementation and normative regulation. Such integration is particularly crucial in addressing governance deficits, where technological solutions must be aligned with robust legal and institutional frameworks to ensure sustainability, safety, and accountability.

Moreover, the expansion of scientific and industrial cooperation between Korea and Europe significantly enhances the prospects for effective governance. Joint research initiatives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Arctic environmental changes, thereby strengthening the knowledge base for evidence-based policymaking. Collaborative efforts in shipping, logistics, renewable energy, and infrastructure development can support economic activities in the region while adhering to stringent environmental standards. Importantly, such cooperation also facilitates the diffusion of best practices and the harmonization of regulatory approaches, reducing fragmentation within the governance system.

Ultimately, Europe–Korea cooperation represents not merely a supplementary dimension of Arctic governance but a strategic pathway toward its evolution. By combining technological innovation with normative leadership, and operational capacity with institutional experience, this partnership can help address existing structural limitations in Arctic governance. It offers a model of inclusive and functionally driven cooperation that enhances resilience, promotes sustainability, and reinforces multilateralism. In doing so, Europe and Korea are well-positioned to contribute to the development of a more integrated, adaptive, and forward-looking Arctic governance system capable of responding to the challenges of a rapidly changing region.

Concluding Reflections: Reframing Arctic Governance through Discourse, Identity, and Europe–Korea Cooperation

This study has argued that Arctic governance should be understood not as a fixed institutional framework, but as a dynamic order shaped by the interaction of discourse, identity, and performative contributions. Diplomatic discourse functions not merely as a tool for describing state roles, but as a constitutive element that defines the scope of participation and legitimacy. This is particularly significant in a multilateral setting such as the Arctic, where influence is determined less by geographic proximity than by sustained contributions and consistent role performance.



Within this structure, Europe has played a central role in shaping and advancing Arctic governance. Through its accumulated experience in scientific research, environmental protection, institutional design, and norm-building, Europe has contributed to maintaining the stability and sustainability of the governance system. Its normative leadership and institutional sophistication have been essential in preserving the Arctic as a space of cooperation. In this sense, Europe functions not merely as a participant, but as a key pillar in the formation and evolution of Arctic order.

At the same time, the role of non-Arctic states, including Korea, has been steadily expanding. Functional contributions based on technological capacity, infrastructure, and scientific expertise are increasingly recognized as critical to Arctic operations. This shift indicates a broader transformation of Arctic governance from a closed, coastal state-centered structure toward a more open and multilayered system. Contribution-based participation is thus emerging as a new standard of legitimacy.

In this context, cooperation between Europe and Korea exhibits a structurally complementary character. Europe's strengths in normative frameworks and institutional governance, when combined with Korea's technological and industrial capabilities, create the conditions for more effective implementation of governance mechanisms. This goes beyond a simple division of roles, pointing instead to the emergence of an integrated governance model that links norms with technology and policy with operations. Such integration is particularly important in addressing existing limitations in implementation capacity.

Furthermore, scientific and industrial collaboration serves as a key domain through which this partnership can be operationalized. Joint research initiatives, data sharing, and technological cooperation strengthen the scientific foundation of policymaking while also fostering trust in international cooperation. At the same time, collaboration in maritime logistics, green technologies, and energy sectors enables the pursuit of both economic opportunity and environmental sustainability. These efforts contribute to transforming Arctic governance into a more practical and executable system.

To summarize the main findings and theoretical contributions of this study, Table X presents the key arguments regarding the transformation of Arctic governance and the strategic significance of Europe–Korea cooperation.

As summarized in Table 1, the transformation of Arctic governance reflects a broader shift from geography-based authority toward contribution-based legitimacy. The findings of this study suggest that influence within Arctic governance is increasingly shaped by the ability of actors to provide scientific knowledge, technological capacity, institutional support, and practical solutions to shared challenges. From this perspective, discourse and identity are not merely symbolic elements but strategic resources that enable actors to establish credibility and sustain participation in governance processes. The cases of Europe and Korea further demonstrate that effective governance is strengthened when normative leadership and functional capabilities operate in a complementary manner. Accordingly, the future development of Arctic governance is likely to depend on governance arrangements that connect institutional frameworks with operational implementation and combine regulatory coordination with technological innovation.

**Table 1.** Core Arguments and Contributions of the Study

Analytical Dimension	Main Argument	Implication for Arctic Governance
Governance Transformation	Arctic governance is shifting from a geography-based system toward a contribution-based governance model.	Legitimacy is increasingly derived from functional participation and sustained contributions rather than territorial proximity.
Role of Discourse and Identity	State influence is shaped not only by material capabilities but also by discourse, identity construction, and role performance.	Arctic governance should be understood as a socially constructed and dynamic order.
Europe's Position	Europe has established normative leadership through environmental governance, scientific research, and institutional development.	Europe functions as a key norm-setting actor that supports the stability and sustainability of Arctic governance.
Korea's Evolving Role	Korea is transitioning from a "responsible observer" to an "enabler" through technological expertise, scientific capacity, and operational contributions.	Korea's legitimacy increasingly stems from its ability to facilitate cooperation and provide practical governance solutions.
Europe-Korea Complementarity	Europe's normative and institutional strengths complement Korea's technological and industrial capabilities.	Combining governance expertise with operational capacity can address existing implementation gaps in Arctic governance.
Future Governance Model	Effective Arctic governance requires cooperative structures that integrate norms, technology, and multilateral collaboration	Europe-Korea cooperation provides a model for a more adaptive, resilient, and inclusive governance architecture.

Ultimately, the future of Arctic governance will depend not on the unilateral role of any single actor, but on cooperative structures that combine complementary capabilities. The convergence of Europe's normative leadership and Korea's functional contributions offers a pathway toward a more stable, sustainable, and resilient governance model. Such cooperation not only helps maintain the Arctic as a space of collaboration rather than competition but also holds broader implications as a model for global governance in an increasingly complex international environment. Beyond the Arctic itself, this partnership illustrates how middle powers and non-Arctic stakeholders can contribute constructively to addressing transnational challenges through multilateral cooperation, knowledge sharing, and capability-based participation. In this regard, Europe-Korea cooperation represents not only a regional governance strategy but also an example of how future international governance frameworks may evolve in response to growing geopolitical uncertainty and global interdependence.



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