

22087 (2025/P3) Sustainable Organising in Times of Crisis, Hki & Vaasa

Podcast Group 2: Operaatio Arktis

Transcription

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Guest: Anni Pokela / Operaatio Arktis

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Hello to our listeners, and welcome to our podcast episode on how societal actors organize to respond to the climate crisis we are facing today.

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We're joined by Anni Pokela, one of the founders of Operaatio Arktis, a climate strategy agency led by young professionals with an activist mindset.

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Their mission is to update society's climate strategies by integrating research

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and development of climate interventions with a focus on Arctic environments.

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Hi, Anni and welcome. Before we dive in, could you briefly introduce yourself and what a climate strategy agency does?

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Yeah, thanks. Thanks for having me. So, I'm one of our strategists in the Climate strategy agency.

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So, it's, in our case, climate strategy agency means that we are looking at kind of the big picture of what our society's

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climate responses are and trying to update those to really respond to the current climate situation.

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We have a lot of new information on where we're actually going with ecosystems,

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increasing in the speed of global warming as well.

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So we have a lot of new, research coming about those things.

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So we're trying to update in a very wide, wide kind of scale

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the way in which we respond to that changing environment.

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Right. And, from what I've heard, the work of the Operaatio Arktis specifically revolves around climate interventions.

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Is this right? Yes, yes. So climate interventions, people usually talk about geoengineering.

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So that's, purposefully, doing stuff to the climate in a very, very like layman's terms.

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Sometimes, geoengineering can mean also carbon dioxide removal,

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so carbon sequestration. But what we're focusing on is in climate intervention specifically.

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So that kind of falls on the under the category of geoengineering usually.

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But climate is inventions, what we mean by them is intervening in the climate system.

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So we're not trying to sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, which is also important:

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it's part of the kind of wide scale of solutions.

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00:02:29,840 --> 00:02:39,260

But what we are not talking about enough is ways in which we might be able to cool down the earth in a fast way.

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So solar radiation management is one of those techniques.

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Well, it's a category of different techniques.

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And then the other can be seen as being these targeted climate interventions.

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So in ways in which we could support glaciers from melting as fast as they are, for example.

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00:03:02,780 --> 00:03:04,140

Yeah, I guess.

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Our next question would have been: tell us a little bit about what Operaatio Arktis does but that's what I think you've covered in already.

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So, moving on to the background a little bit about both of you

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and Operaatio Arktis. In our course,

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we have been discussing ways of dealing with the complexity of the sustainability issues and,

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specifically in organizational context. So we would love to hear more and learn about the early days of that organizational story

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of Operaatio Arktis. So first of all, like, how did you even become involved in climate activism?

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Yeah. So for me, it started with Extinction Rebellion.

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So Elokapina, we were blocking streets.

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I have met friends there, and I was supposed to bring them food, and then I just stayed there, and I stayed for a night.

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And then they stayed, and I slept in the tents, and so on.

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And then, did civil disobedience in Elokapina.

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And then I got to know these friends from that activism.

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And together, with this friend group, we started Operaatio Arktis.

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So we had this major mobilization success in 21, the fall 21.

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So that was Syyskapina, and we had a thousand protesters out on Mannerheimintie.

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And after that, we were kind of like, okay, we need to take a bit of a strategic break,

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like take a step back, recover from what went down and think about what we're going to do next.

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And we looked at climate science, tried to update our understanding of

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where are we actually with the state of our ecosystems and, what's happening on the atmosphere scale?

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And very quickly, we realized that there are a lot of, for example, Earth system tipping points.

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So we're already might be crossing. Even if we stay in the Paris Agreement goals.

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So 1.5 to 2 degrees of warming.

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And we realized that, for example, the West Antarctic Ice Sheet is most probably going to collapse without some additional techniques.

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So in that kind of activist mindset that we have, we're like, okay,

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there are some things that we might not be able to do anything about with only carbon sequestration and emission cuts.

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But we weren't ready to accept those damages.

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So we were like, okay, we need to look at some additional things.

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And that's what led us to geoengineering and climate interventions.

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And now we have been collaborating with different scientific departments.

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We have a lot of friends from academia who are actually working on those techniques.

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So that's kind of one part of thing we're working together with people who are actually developing those things,

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researching them, researching also the like

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societal level questions that we have regarding those techniques and then trying to,

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work with our government and work in like in different,

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national and international circles where we're trying to

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get this message through that we need to update our climate strategies.

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It's so impressive like starting from basically like finding, minded people and

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full on operation. It's very impressive.

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Thank you. I think also, as we understand it,

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Operaatio Arktis operates in quite a complex intersection of both activism, innovation, research and politics.

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So our question would be: is it hard to define yourself and your mission as an organization with this

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multidisciplinary framework? Or do you find it easier? I think more and more we're becoming this like expert organization.

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Now, we have like certain ministries, for example, asking for our advice on certain things because

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we have such a novel kind of approach to these questions.

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We also have some knowledge that maybe other more traditional organization might not have.

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Of course, that's controversial to some people, but I feel, in general,

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people are very ready to have some fresh new ideas from the climate space.

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Because what we are is very much solution based.

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And I think that's something very interesting to people.

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But we also have that activist mindset from the younger days.

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We're still pretty young, all of us. But yeah, I think it's much more

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advantage and a kind of richness in what we do is that we come from like a very different kind of landscape.

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I feel like. And going on what you said

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and also, what we read and have heard about is that you are now also receiving a significant brand from

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the foundation which is very impressive.

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You also have this upcoming project that involves publishing an article in collaboration with James Hansen.

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Yeah, actually, the article came out 2 or 3 weeks ago.

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So, we were very, very happy to get in touch with James Hansen, who is one of pioneers of modern climate science.

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And he was the guy who was in Congress of the United States, stating that climate change is happening in the 80s.

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He is very, very cool guy. And we had the possibility to meet him.

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And I had given this talk in one of our events. And he was very inspired by that.

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So now we are co-writers in his recent publication.

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If you want to be shocked by how bad the cloud situation is, please give it a read!

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But also what's interesting is that James Hansen is this very OG climate guy.

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He has been there from the get-go,

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and now he is speaking for the research and development of solar radiation management solutions.

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So I guess for the listeners he's a former climate research director of that NASA

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which is also telling how far you have come.

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Yeah, that's crazy.

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So of course, we also want to congratulate you on this and your brand and the recognition and the momentum that organization is getting.

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But going on from that, we also want to know, has it always been smooth sailing for the organization?

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What's your biggest challenge you have had to face?

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Or maybe you're still facing like bigger challenges? I think for me, I got to speak on my behalf, I guess.

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I'm doing my masters in gender studies, so I have absolutely no prior experience on climate science.

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So I've kind of through activism, through kind of being like, okay, I need to focus on the climate,

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I went through the whole thing, why am I even focusing on my career?

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Why am I building a career to graduate asap so-and-so, like a gender studies person?

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Like, what's the world going on even look like if we cross all these tipping points,

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00:10:44,950 --> 00:10:51,439

if we go beyond like four degrees of warming. And through this existential thing and like

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okay, I need to put these things on hold and

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I need to really put a lot of my time into trying to solve this issue.

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That meant that I have to become some sort of professional or

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00:11:07,970 --> 00:11:14,510

you know, gain this knowledge through kind of not academia,

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00:11:14,510 --> 00:11:24,230

because I never went to study like natural sciences, and that's not like a comfort zone for me at all.

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So that's definitely been one of the things, kind of finding my space in the discussion as a gender studies student.

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As someone who has this very humanities-based touch on this issue. But at the same time, I feel like that's been a major

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advantage in this whole discussion because I feel like the conversation is very much like held by this.

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Usually the loudest voices in climate engineering has traditionally been old white men in engineering kind of fields.

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And that has also like meant that there isn't especially left leaning people, like activists, activism leaning people,

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00:12:12,680 --> 00:12:20,750

Activism leaning people, humanities. Humanities leaning people don't have an ownership of this discussion at all.

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If we're at some point in the next, I don't know, 100 years going to be doing some sort of stratospheric aerosol injection,

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like intentionally putting more aerosols in upper stratosphere, that is very much a global issue.

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And that's very much that touches every one of us, like regardless of our expertise on climate science.

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So what I've felt is through some trial and error, I've found my place in the discussion with

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00:12:57,200 --> 00:13:06,169

the focus that I have and being able to use my God given natural

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skills that I have. And being able to offer them to this work that I feel is important today.

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00:13:13,820 --> 00:13:17,740

Would you say this is also one of the most gratifying moments of their work?

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00:13:17,740 --> 00:13:23,420

And because that was going to be my next question! So what are the challenges and what's been most gratifying?

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But I guess you touched the point both gratifying and challenging.

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00:13:28,010 --> 00:13:32,870

I'm becoming a positive vibe only person, like day by day.

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This is very troubling. I don't sound like an activist now.

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I mean, that's a huge thing.

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I mean, getting recognition, getting invited to places.

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I mean, I'm a human. That's what makes you kind of thrive, and I guess

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that's a message that I have for everyone who are thinking

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What should I do? And, I think there's this idea that climate activism or any anything sort of connected to

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the climate or sustainability. I guess we're in like a stagnant point with these discussions,

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like Greta Thunberg has graduated and we're like brat summer.

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The climate issue is not trending at all. There's no interest in it.

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And I feel like that compared to the momentum that we had on,

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00:14:32,210 --> 00:14:37,790

the IPCC report of 2007 never was like, oh my God, I'm going to ditch like plastic straws.

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00:14:37,790 --> 00:14:42,590

And we have this feeling that we can do something. And there was those big marches in Helsinki, for example.

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I feel a lot of people have this idea now because things are getting worse and worse and worse,

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and we're like, oh my God, this seems impossible to solve.

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00:14:52,760 --> 00:15:00,020

We're getting to like, oh, maybe I should just enjoy life and party and until the world ends and I completely get that.

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I have those moments. I go out and party and that's an important part of life.

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And at the same time you can do this work, you can do sustainability,

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00:15:11,000 --> 00:15:14,780

you can do climate work in a way that is very gratifying to you,

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00:15:14,780 --> 00:15:21,560

and you can do it in a way that really speaks to your passion and

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00:15:21,590 --> 00:15:29,690

drive to get recognition. I feel like that energy that a lot of people connect with

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00:15:29,690 --> 00:15:34,730

entrepreneurship for starting at building a Start-Up and

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00:15:35,120 --> 00:15:39,049

being in that hubris of I can do stuff, this is the most incredible thing.

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00:15:39,050 --> 00:15:50,120

You can totally get those things out of things that are also like morally very much important in this day and age.

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Right. Moving on to climate interventions, roughly a year ago,

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you had this speech at the Arctic Momentum where you mentioned everything from brightening marine clouds with sea salt,

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marine biomass regeneration and seabed anchored curtains.

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These are all examples of technologies that can be harnessed as ways of climate repair,

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for example, in the form of removing carbon from the atmosphere. Generally,

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what stages of development are some of these technologies?

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Do you work with technologies only in a certain stage of development, or is everyone welcome?

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Yeah. So right because we're very much focused on the political change,

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I guess, when it comes to like what kind of research we should be doing,

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We tend to focus on technologies that have some sort of history. Like, okay, there's a lot of research papers on them.

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For example, stratospheric aerosol injection is something that it's definitely not research enough,

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but that's the one climate intervention that people usually know about.

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So there's roughly a thousand like papers about SAI.

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(stratospheric aerosol injection). But there are a lot of knowledge gaps.

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So what we're trying to see what kind of knowledge gaps we have in regards to those things.

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00:17:14,390 --> 00:17:17,810

And, obviously, if I meet a guy on the street and he's like,

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00:17:17,830 --> 00:17:22,940

I have this great idea of putting this in this there and there, and this is like this new technology.

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00:17:22,940 --> 00:17:32,480

That's not the phase where we're like, okay, I'm going to bring this to our environmental minister and like da da da.

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But yeah, SRM is something that we're focusing on, just because it's more scalable.

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If you look at SAI, for example, that's might be very scalable.

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And then the other thing you mentioned, the marine cloud brightening. That's something that we have field tests going on, or not right now.

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But there have been field tests (at least two field tests) going in Australia

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00:18:02,660 --> 00:18:11,990

to protect coral reefs and in San Francisco last year, there was a field

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00:18:12,050 --> 00:18:19,040

trials on that as well. But there needs to be a lot more done ethically, by

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00:18:19,040 --> 00:18:26,179

talking to local people because that has been an issue before not talking to local communities and local people.

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So there's been like, oh my God, what are you doing? Your engineering or climate?

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00:18:31,040 --> 00:18:36,560

What's going on? So there needs to be a lot of public discussion on those things as well.

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00:18:36,740 --> 00:18:41,819

And the other thing which I would like to point out, because that's a very you can be proud as a fan because

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00:18:41,820 --> 00:18:47,690

Lapland University, they have this research project with John Moore, who was a very good friend of ours.

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00:18:48,260 --> 00:18:56,120

They're trying to see if it would be possible to anchor these

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00:18:56,120 --> 00:19:05,779

seabed curtains to protect ice sheets so that they wouldn't collapse and melt.

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00:19:05,780 --> 00:19:09,590

Yeah. That sounds very interesting.

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00:19:10,100 --> 00:19:13,610

And with promoting this industry and innovation,

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00:19:13,910 --> 00:19:17,960

There's a usual association with growth driven economic models.

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Whereas we often see that in climate action it's more focused on degrowth.

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00:19:23,480 --> 00:19:28,940

So what is your personal take on growth and degrowth? Where does Operaatio Arktis situate itself?

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Well, I would like to answer this in sort of curveball way. I'm not trying to escape the question,

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00:19:38,300 --> 00:19:40,520

but I would like to frame it in a different way,

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00:19:40,970 --> 00:19:51,320

which is that despite the fact that we might have an amazing economic, economical break,

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00:19:51,320 --> 00:19:58,910

we're going to have this great systemic change.

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00:19:59,450 --> 00:20:02,470

And where are we? Things are going to be more sustainable.

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Whatever that is, whether it be some sort of degrowth model, whether it be like green capitalism, you can have a lot of opinions on that.

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00:20:11,860 --> 00:20:19,570

Even if it's like a complete communist takeover, we would still probably need these techniques.

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00:20:20,320 --> 00:20:29,799

So that's kind of why I feel like it's important to bring that. That's an important piece to bring

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into the conversation is like no matter what you think about those things,

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00:20:34,210 --> 00:20:37,210

we're going to probably need these techniques.

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00:20:37,240 --> 00:20:43,750

So maybe the question about growth and degrowth isn't really like the main issue,

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00:20:43,930 --> 00:20:51,940

or it's the activities that you do that actually preserve the complete climate.

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00:20:51,970 --> 00:21:02,230

Yeah, definitely like degrowth growth, huge issues in, like systemic change, climate justice, all these things.

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00:21:02,320 --> 00:21:04,930

Not denying that in any sense.

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00:21:05,410 --> 00:21:15,040

But I guess a lot of people might feel like it's just like, I don't know, it's given that you have to

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00:21:15,280 --> 00:21:23,740

put yourself out there to be I am for degrowth. Yes, there's spaces where that's needed.

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00:21:24,070 --> 00:21:32,139

And also I feel like we need this fresh outlook also in the fact that these techniques are not... I mean,

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00:21:32,140 --> 00:21:36,280

I would like to see a world and that's what I'm working towards.

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00:21:36,280 --> 00:21:41,530

I want to work towards a world where these techniques, because they are being developed as we speak.

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00:21:42,010 --> 00:21:51,820

If at Operaatio Arktis, we close our doors and we go on an infinite holiday,

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00:21:52,420 --> 00:21:56,860

people are still going to build these machines,

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00:21:56,860 --> 00:21:58,809

they're still going to try to make this happen.

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00:21:58,810 --> 00:22:05,530

And when climate impacts become worse over time, like the interest towards these techniques will only grow.

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00:22:06,700 --> 00:22:13,809

So I really want to work for a world where these techniques are not used as a silver bullet and

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00:22:13,810 --> 00:22:18,760

they're not used to uphold an economic status quo.

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00:22:18,760 --> 00:22:22,480

So, yes, that's an important part of the question, too.

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00:22:23,050 --> 00:22:28,690

So we've kind of escaped the question, but still not the way to go.

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00:22:28,690 --> 00:22:31,749

Nothing is perfect.

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00:22:31,750 --> 00:22:36,729

For our next subject, as you were talking about in

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00:22:36,730 --> 00:22:41,080

one of the previous questions you talked about, we also need to have communication with the people.

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00:22:41,530 --> 00:22:48,460

We wanted to talk more about the indigenous engagement that everybody is involved in.

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00:22:48,760 --> 00:22:51,309

But more on general level.

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00:22:51,310 --> 00:23:00,760

We know you have this collaboration with the people of Sami, and you had a "Sharing Sami Experiences" event in New York and everything.

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00:23:00,760 --> 00:23:08,739

I know it's not your specific field in the park area that they have what we call an expertise.

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00:23:08,740 --> 00:23:09,549

Expertise.

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00:23:09,550 --> 00:23:19,930

But, still, only touching maybe up on, what does this involving the people more in general mean to Operaatio Arktis?

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00:23:19,930 --> 00:23:23,830

How do you see the collaboration with the people?

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00:23:24,310 --> 00:23:33,190

Yeah, yeah. Well, we just see that there's no way that this thing should happen on the backs of

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00:23:33,190 --> 00:23:38,229

indigenous people on the climate frontlines as well.

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00:23:38,230 --> 00:23:48,730

I think that to demographics that are usually put aside in climate discussions and,

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00:23:48,730 --> 00:23:55,719

a lot of these techniques we work. We're called Operaatio Arktis,

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00:23:55,720 --> 00:24:03,790

so it deals with the Arctic area. If we think about Finland, that's mainly, Sami land.

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00:24:05,170 --> 00:24:09,700

So for us, it was really like a question of oh

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00:24:09,700 --> 00:24:14,139

we need to

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00:24:14,140 --> 00:24:21,190

get comfortable with the fact that we are white climate activists from Helsinki, like most of us are from Helsinki.

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00:24:21,340 --> 00:24:28,690

I should put it out there. Not all of us, but me, for example.

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00:24:28,750 --> 00:24:32,979

I was at the cop 20...

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00:24:32,980 --> 00:24:36,310

What? What was the number? 27 or 28 that was in Dubai.

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00:24:36,820 --> 00:24:44,740

Not the year before last. And I got introduced as a speaker, as an Arctic youth person.

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00:24:44,740 --> 00:24:50,979

I'm like, hmm, from Helsinki, not an Arctic young person.

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00:24:50,980 --> 00:25:00,670

So I think it's a work of decentering our experience and bringing different voices. Even it was

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00:25:00,690 --> 00:25:04,379

to talk about the research in itself, like researching climate interventions,

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00:25:04,380 --> 00:25:11,220

there's a lot of traditional indigenous knowledge that hasn't been traditionally included

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00:25:11,220 --> 00:25:19,049

in like engineering research, for example, and researching in general, and in Western history.

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00:25:19,050 --> 00:25:21,090

So, so that's one big part of it.

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00:25:21,090 --> 00:25:27,659

Also, if you want to do experiments on something and just please ask the local people if that's okay.

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00:25:27,660 --> 00:25:31,319

Like I have a discussion with them.

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00:25:31,320 --> 00:25:37,889

There's also an example of Harvard trying to do this SCoPEX experiment,

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00:25:37,890 --> 00:25:44,490

in Swedish part of the Sami land, in Kiruna.

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00:25:44,790 --> 00:25:52,260

And I believe they did not ask the consent of the state of Sweden.

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00:25:52,500 --> 00:25:59,700

And they did not ask for the informed consent of the indigenous peoples there.

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00:26:00,000 --> 00:26:05,700

So of course, it was shut down like it's not going to happen. Fortunately we have organizations,

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00:26:05,700 --> 00:26:15,000

we have people who speak for all of this research being done with, you know, free, prior and informed consent.

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00:26:15,450 --> 00:26:21,269

So even if you think as an engineer, how am I going to do this experiment?

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00:26:21,270 --> 00:26:25,140

luckily I can say that you most probably won't be going to do it.

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00:26:25,170 --> 00:26:31,600

You won't be able to do it. If you don't engage with these people.

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00:26:31,680 --> 00:26:40,530

And what I would like to add, if there's time for that, is that I think in indigenous engagement, talking as a,

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00:26:40,530 --> 00:26:47,100

white person is like one of the most important things is that you come into this discussion with

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00:26:47,400 --> 00:26:58,050

indigenous representatives and you have to come into that conversation being willing to change and willing to be changed by that,

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00:26:58,620 --> 00:27:06,360

discussion and by that engagement. And I think that's one of the biggest things that I've learned so far doing this work.

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00:27:06,870 --> 00:27:15,210

Amazing. I think it's perfect that we had time to discuss this as well, because I think it's like such a big part of your

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00:27:15,240 --> 00:27:21,330

organization's work to have this indigenous engagement.

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00:27:21,330 --> 00:27:26,280

You have Sami colleagues, and it's a very big part of your work, especially,

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00:27:26,280 --> 00:27:31,499

you said, even in the name, Operaatio Arktis. In that Arctic environment,

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00:27:31,500 --> 00:27:33,930

but obviously the people as well. Exactly. Yeah.

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00:27:33,930 --> 00:27:41,610

But just to wrap up now, we would like to ask you some concluding wrap up questions, if you will.

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00:27:41,910 --> 00:27:45,790

So, looking ahead, first of all, what's next for Operaatio Arktis?

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00:27:46,890 --> 00:27:48,540

This what's the next big step?

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00:27:49,380 --> 00:27:58,890

So right now we're trying to include tipping point risk management into Finnish climate strategies very shortly answered.

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00:27:59,190 --> 00:28:06,900

That's what I've been working on. And then would you have any final advice for any of us or any of our classmates?

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00:28:07,200 --> 00:28:12,750

How can we incorporate just an eco-conscious mindset to our future studies and work?

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00:28:13,380 --> 00:28:17,550

I think ... that's hard.

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00:28:17,550 --> 00:28:22,350

You know, it's not very nice to just say read climate science.

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00:28:22,350 --> 00:28:30,870

But I would suggest ... I think about

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00:28:32,040 --> 00:28:36,809

what state we are and the public discussions on climate change and how

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00:28:36,810 --> 00:28:42,540

cynical we're starting to get, which is very understandable.

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00:28:43,320 --> 00:28:49,950

I think being okay with the fact that I'm experiencing these cynical feelings and I would just like to make money and,

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00:28:49,950 --> 00:28:57,749

live a very happy and cozy life, making space for those feelings that are very much valid.

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00:28:57,750 --> 00:29:03,780

Like we have been robbed of the future that we were promised when we were growing up.

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00:29:03,780 --> 00:29:14,430

That's really sad and horrible. And then, try to let yourself care.

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00:29:15,390 --> 00:29:22,920

You won't break from caring: you can survive it,

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00:29:22,920 --> 00:29:28,260

you can survive caring about ecosystems, and you can survive

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00:29:28,260 --> 00:29:35,880

putting your heart out there and actually starting to care about the world and where we're going.

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00:29:36,690 --> 00:29:40,979

And that's actually very good advice. I think we can all take that with us.

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00:29:40,980 --> 00:29:44,130

And it's not a really hard thing to do either

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00:29:44,190 --> 00:29:48,270

Yeah. So basically thank you so much.

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00:29:48,420 --> 00:29:53,459

Thank you. And so thank you for your insights.

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00:29:53,460 --> 00:30:00,410

And uh, if our listeners want to learn more about you and your operation and maybe support Operaatio Arktis.

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00:30:00,720 --> 00:30:05,940

Where can they find more information? I would recommend going to our Instagram page.

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00:30:06,030 --> 00:30:15,360

Operaatio Arktis. Perfect. And with that, we would like to wrap up today's episode and thank all of our listeners as well.

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00:30:16,030 --> 00:30:17,490

And thank you Anni! Thank you.

