



EUROCORES Programme BOREAS: Histories from the North - environments, movements, narratives

BOREAS Workshop
**"Heading North, Heading South:
Arctic social-sciences research in
a global dialogue"**

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology
Halle, 6-9 March 2008

Organisers:
Joachim Otto Habeck and Piers Vitebsky



Purpose of the Workshop

- To place the study of the circumpolar North into wider contexts
- To “deprovincialise” Arctic/ Northern social-sciences research

The aim of the workshop was to demonstrate how social-sciences research activities in the Arctic can provide new insights for, and be linked up with, research in other regions. By inviting colleagues from various disciplines working in other parts of the world, we sought to disseminate lessons from “the North” to the wider academic community, while simultaneously incorporating “Southern” prospects and experiences into our own work.



Design of the Workshop

Facilitating integration at different levels:

1. cross-CRP integration;
2. involvement of scholars with Southern background and expertise to facilitate North-South dialogue;
3. involvement of scholars from Russia, with the aim to maintain and develop a close working relationship with specialists in Russian institutions (Russia has so far been unable to participate formally in BOREAS);
4. involvement of doctoral students and young post-docs to promote BOREAS and North-South dialogue among prospective scholars from different continents.



Seven sessions with inter-disciplinary themes

Task: bring together participants from different BOREAS CRPs and include "Southern-ists"

- 1 Frontiers and borders
- 2 Indigeneity and indigenism
- 3 Conversion and community cohesion
- 4 Migration
- 5 Relocation
- 6 Development and conservation
- 7 Environmental change

Poster Session, Keynote Speech, Final Discussion





Ammar Bouhassane
Institute of Political Science, Algiers University

Timothy
Dept of Geography, University of

Lee Huske
Dept of Public Administration,
University of Alaska Anchorage




Max-Planck-Institut
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Max Planck Institute
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Red threads

Themes that reoccurred throughout the workshop and in the final discussion:

- Access to resources (e.g. mineral resource extraction)
- “Global South”, “global North” and the Far North
- Critical approach to the concept of “wilderness”



Access to resources

Assessing parallels between the Far North and the “global South”, participants very frequently addressed the issue of access to resources and land, and mineral resource extraction. Much of our discussion was devoted to “studying the impact of natural resource distribution on social network formation, maintenance and fragmentation”, as one participant summarised.

As mineral resources extraction, flows of goods and environmental pollution have attained global dimensions, the boundaries between the Arctic and the “rest” are becoming blurred.



“Global South”, “global North”, and the Far North

The Arctic (Far North) has remained “out of sight” in the conventional North/South dichotomy. It is widely associated with such commonplaces as: fragile environment, wilderness, harsh conditions for human existence, etc., which make it very distinct from the “global North” as the region dominating the world.

Participant from India: “The most surprising thing about this workshop is that I discovered that there’s no such thing as North. It is more South[ern] than the South itself!” → Similarities in resource extraction, political dependencies, and claims for recognition in the Amazon, the Sudan, Alaska and the north of Russia.



Critical approach to the concept of “wilderness”

The presence of humans in the circumpolar North is still insufficiently reflected in scientific research on the Arctic. Ingold and others provided examples of the Arctic as a homeland and of landscapes shaped by long-term human influence. “Wherever there are humans, there’s a spectrum of human [activities], and there are different strategies and ways in which landscape is impacted”. “Wilderness”, therefore, was seen by many participants as problematic.

Again, Northern views on this issue were paralleled by experiences from Mexico and South America, where nature conservancy in practice often appears to perpetuate alienation from local inhabitants and political dependency from external actors.



Follow-up

The transcripts of the entire workshop are now ready for distribution

Publication plans

- make more scholars aware of the necessity of this kind of dialogue;
- keep this exchange going!



Thank you for your attention /
Thank you for your attendance
(and for having signed the attendance forms)



Session 1: Frontiers and Borders

- Jean Comaroff
Dept of Anthropology, University of Chicago
- Julia Lajus
European University St Petersburg
- Piers Vitebsky
Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge



1 Frontiers and borders

The Amazon and the Arctic, the deserts of Africa and Siberia all carry the notion of frontier. Previously perceived by colonial powers as peripheral regions that need yet to be conquered, civilized and exploited, these regions and their inhabitants were subjected to scientific inquiry in a specific way. Nation-state borders cut across the Arctic, fragmenting indigenous peoples' spaces politically and economically. Perceptions the North have somewhat changed over the last years, but the geopolitical role of the Arctic as a mineral resource base still prevails. What does the legacy of colonial research have to offer to the descendants of those who were then "under study"? How do incomers and long-time settlers negotiate "belonging" to the community and how do they deal with shifting notions of "home" and "frontier"?



Session 2: Indigeneity and Indigenism

- Peter Loovers
Dept of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen
- Ron Niezen
Dept of Anthropology, McGill University, Montreal
- Gertrude Eilmsteiner-Saxinger, University of Vienna, and
Peter Schweitzer, Dept of Anthropology, University
of Alaska Fairbanks



2 Indigeneity and indigenism

In both the North and the South, indigenous movements have strongly grown in importance over the last 10 to 20 years. They have established transnational and international networks. New forms of identity representation and political leverage have resulted in a much higher degree of complexity of legal and political negotiations. How do indigenous movements, organizations and spokespeople connect with and represent themselves towards official institutions on the one hand, and how with local communities on the other?



Session 3: Conversion and Community Cohesion

- Mathijs Pelkmans
Dept of Anthropology, London School of Economics
- Chris Southcott
Dept of Sociology, Lakehead University
- Virginie Vaté
Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcités,
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique



3 Conversion and community cohesion

Along with the growing importance of spirituality and the “return” to religion that can be observed in many regions of the world, there is increased interest in the activities of various religious denominations worldwide. For the individual who has converted, religion provides a new sense of belonging and participation in a truly global network; however, missionary activities may have a negative impact on the social “fabric” of the local community. What do we know about the speed and intensity of conversion processes in different regions of the North/South? To what extent can we speak of religious identifications as either collaterals or alternatives to ethnic/indigenous ones? Why does religious conversion help create a particular local identity in some cases, whereas in other cases it has a disruptive effect on community cohesion?



Session 4: Migration

- Ammar Bouhouche
Institute for Political Science, Algiers University
- Timothy Heleniak
Dept of Geography, University of Maryland
- Lee Huskey
Dept of Public Administration,
University of Alaska Anchorage
- Maria Nakshina
Dept of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen



4 Migration

Of all migratory processes affecting Northern and Southern countries likewise, rural out-migration is the most decisive one. More and more, sparsely populated areas lose permanent residents, as employment is more and more concentrated in urban areas. On the other hand, there is a trend to temporal forms of residency and land use (e.g. tourism, mineral resource extraction). How much do we know about the reasons for these migrations, and what are the likely consequences for both rural and urban areas? How do changing patterns of land use influence people's perceptions of "home" and their degree of mobility?



Session 5: Relocation

- Yvon Csonka
Dept of Cultural and Social History, University
of Greenland
- Sharon Hutchinson
Dept of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin
Madison
- Robert Wishart
Dept of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen



5 Relocation

Patterns of displacement and relocation in the North seem to be caused by very different processes than in the South. While refugees appear to be a “Southern” problem, resettlement over large distances, organized by state authorities “from above”, is a phenomenon known from many parts of the North. These processes seem to lead in opposite directions: some people are pushed to the periphery whereas others are moved to the centre against their will. To what extent can such divergent cases be discussed and integrated within a common theoretical frame-work, such as colonialism? What do we know about local responses and coping strategies, physically and psychologically?



Session 6: Development and conservation

- Michael Bravo
Scott Polar Research Inst., University of Cambridge
- Tina Sawchuk
Scott Polar Research Inst., University of Cambridge
- Patty Gray
Dept of Anthropology, National University of Ireland,
Maynooth



6 Development and conservation

The political discourse on development is commonly associated with “third-world” countries in the South. Development policies in the North have received much less attention, although nation-wide modernization projects (e.g. during Soviet times) have led to large-scale social and economic change, and frequently also to environmental change. The discourse on nature conservancy runs counter to the one on development and modernization. Who takes part in the formulation of such principles as “rational land use”, “sustainable development”, protection of “cultural heritage”? How are they implemented in practice, appropriated and/or subverted by various actors? How, and how much, are social scientists themselves involved in local empowerment or paternalism?



Session 7: Environmental change

- Andre Costopoulos
Anthropology Department, McGill University Montreal
- Ron Doel
Dept of History & Dept of Geosciences,
Oregon State University
- William Patterson
Dept of Geological Sciences, University of
Saskatchewan
- Martin Welp
Global Change Management,
University of Applied Sciences Eberswalde



7 Environmental change

Public awareness of global climate change has led to increasing attention of the Polar Regions. Research on the likely impact of global climate change on land use and human living conditions is now being conducted in many parts of the Arctic. Climate change in the Arctic is likely to improve access to mineral resources and spur new conflicts concerning the control over resources. Why is there, in comparison, such a small number of studies that address the impact of global environmental change on economies and populations in Africa or other “Southern” regions? How do farmers, hunters and pastoralists deal with climatic risk factors in semi-arid regions as compared to the tundra and tree-line regions? How can research on prehistoric environmental conditions and human adaptations help us to understand the consequences of climate change from a long-term perspective?