

ABSTRACTS

From Gorbachev's Murmansk Speech to the Present: 37 Years of International Collaboration in Northern Russia

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Starting from Mikhail Gorbachev's era of glasnost and perestroika in the mid-late 1980s, collaboration between the Russian and western researchers was already well developed by the early 1990s. Part of this new relationship was based on fieldwork conducted by foreign anthropologists and natural scientists across the Russian North together with their Russian colleagues. Since the start of the war nearly all fieldwork, as well as most institutional forms of cooperation with the regions across Arctic Russia, have ceased. Our expeditions to Yamal are no longer financially supported by our institutions, yet we still maintain personal contacts with our long-term field partners and friends.

A Hybrid Resolution to Arctic Research During the War: Seeking a Miracle

Art Leete

Before Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine, exploration of the peoples residing in its Northern regions was a steadily growing field in Estonia. The research community had long-term experience conducting field studies in the Russian North and Siberia. In addition, structural developments in Estonian academia favored research in the Arctic. The war complicated all of this. The scale and variety of war-related impediments emerged for the research community incrementally, demanding scholars to continuously adjust their studies. A new research context still needs to be established. For the most part, we intend to apply and adapt long-distance methods of studies, although limited options for field research still exist. Ethnographic explorations on-site and writing about the current situation or anything connected to the Indigenous peoples of the Russian Arctic involve ethical challenges. The differing understandings of the war among the people of the North make researchers' associations with the communities on the ground delicate and mutual comprehension fragmentary.

In the Kingdom of Shadows: Tent Cinema and Collaborative Ethnographic Research in Siberia

Craig Campbell

This essay is a self-reflexive examination of an art gallery exhibition titled "Agit Kino." The author sets the history of the project in the context of the 1920s and 30s agitational-propaganda campaigns of early socialist tent cinema among Indigenous peoples of

Siberia. He makes explicit connections between those efforts in “cultural construction” and his own modest project to share his research in gallery settings a hundred years later in the USA and Canada. While the first version of the Agit Kino project was the sole work of the author, the following two versions were the product of collaboration with a colleague and friend in Siberia. The collaboration continued through the pandemic and the early days of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, but it has now stalled due to the political dangers of communication and collaboration as well as the author’s difficulty in maintaining a research project with no prospect of in-person fieldwork.

Withdrawing Field Sites – Visual Reappearances

Jaroslava Panáková

The events of February 2022 had a major impact on the ethnographic research on Chukotka. Most of the on-site fieldwork, certainly by foreign researchers, has been postponed or discontinued. It is not the first time in the region’s history that such pauses and interruptions have taken place. This study advocates documenting and tracing all the incoherences and contingencies of the present/history through online visual materials. Despite the physical retreat from the sensory everydayness, private stories still emerge online through visual traces. How is it possible to study them in such a difficult context and align with the analogue home photographs collected earlier? The answer may lie in a methodological shift in relation between the photographs and archives. The approach proposed in this study is involvement in the experimental engagement with the visual, bringing to the fore Russian film producer, Sergei Eisenstein’s theoretical legacy. Our anthropological endeavor shall be designed as if it were in a spatial form and made of glass, to encourage the reader-spectator to perceive synchronically diverse concepts, assemble them together, and unravel surprising associations among them.

Sami Women in the Context of the Russian War on Ukraine

Vladislava Vladimirova

This chapter shares reflections on some of the challenges that Sami women in the Russian Arctic face during the ongoing war against Ukraine. Grounded in long-term field research conducted since 2001 in the Kola Peninsula in Northwestern Arctic Russia, it discusses how the changing political conditions in Russia have limited the possibilities for anthropological research and for Sami Indigenous activism. It touches on the recurrent topics of identity, state funding, and support for Indigenous culture, that have been significantly affected by the ongoing militarization of Russia’s political space. Of particular relevance is that, alongside the war in Ukraine, Russia is aggressively asserting conservative gender values that suppress women’s equality and freedom and criminalize multiculturalism and Indigenous rights.

Ashes of Unfulfilled Dreams: Modeling a Sustainable Indigenous Settlement in Sakha Republic (Yakutia) in a Time of Changes

Vera Solovyeva

In 2021–2022, a multidisciplinary team of Indigenous researchers and activists from the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), residing in and outside the region, planned to model a Sustainable Indigenous Settlement (MSIS) in a vulnerable Indigenous community, the village of Khara Tumul, in the Oymyakon ulus. The model of an environmentally friendly settlement was based on ideas and thoughts about sustainable development that local residents shared with the author in 2015–2016. The project respected the values of Sakha culture and heritage and it remained flexible enough to adapt to newly developing circumstances due to climate change. Our team hoped that the project could create a foundation for international collaboration among Indigenous people, Indigenous culture specialists, and academic scholars for successful climate change adaptation and sustainable development. It would have provided a valuable toolbox for building resilient communities in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), other Arctic regions of the Russian Federation, and polar countries, under the rapidly changing climate conditions. Our methodology focused on enhanced relationships and ties between the home place and local people, promoted environmental stewardship and culturally relevant education, and preserved Indigenous language, ecology, and healing knowledge. Unfortunately, project activities abruptly ended in 2022, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Loss of Endemic Karelian Land Use: Paanajärvi and the War of 2022

Tero Mustonen

The Karelian community of Paanajärvi, located in the region of White Sea Karelia, Russia, is the oldest village in the Kemi River basin. Between 1991–2022, the community became a hotspot for a large cultural revitalization effort. This paper uses oral histories from two knowledgeable Elders – Risto Dementyev and Teppo Dementyev – to investigate how the historic Karelian spatial and temporal ordering of hunting and fishing spaces was preserved in, and emerged from, Paanajärvi, as narrated by people who still practiced these activities. By shedding light on little-known cultural revitalization efforts in Northwest Russia, this paper also points to the future as informed by the past 30 years of attempts to revive the endemic cultures of remote villages in the North and the mixed results they have yielded. The Russian-Ukrainian War of 2022 ended all cross-border collaborations between Finland and Russia and ushered in a new context for relations, which has ramifications for boreal and Arctic international cooperation.

Research on Energy Resource Development in the Russian Arctic: New Challenges

Shinichiro Tabata

This chapter assesses the influence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the Japanese flagship project in Arctic studies, "Arctic Challenge for Sustainability (ArCS) II," that has been carried out since 2020. The author was engaged in its sub-program that studied energy resource development in the Russian Arctic and its influence on local economies and societies. Special attention was paid to mineral resource development in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) and the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. However, COVID-19 hampered the original plan to conduct field research in these two regions in 2020 and 2021. In 2022, while preparations were starting for the field survey in the Russian Arctic, Russia invaded Ukraine. The chapter describes how the project had been progressing until early 2022 and how research has been affected by the war in Ukraine. Since 2022, the team has been pursuing the studies on the influence of war on Russia's Arctic regions, while keeping exchanges with Russian researchers, and shifting to site visits in the Arctic regions outside Russia.

Unfinished Reunion: A Halted Journey of the "Vega" Chukchi Collection Project, 1878–2023

Igor Krupnik, Martin Schultz, Eduard Zdor, and Lilia Zdor

In 2019–2020, the authors explored a collection of early ethnographic objects from Chukotka, Russia, assembled during the Swedish polar expedition of 1878–1880 (the "Vega" expedition) and housed at the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm. This massive collection, originally of almost 1000 objects and several dozen historical photographs, is a trove for research but more importantly, a unique heritage source for local communities in Chukotka, Russia, and an opportunity to strengthen Indigenous cultural awareness, knowledge, and identity. The "Vega Collection project" soon evolved into an effort to seek insights from Chukchi knowledge experts and to re-connect the collection in Stockholm with today's residents of Chukotka. These ambitious plans were slowed down by the Covid-19 epidemic; they eventually were put on hold after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, due to the breakdown in communication with Russian museum specialists and heritage experts in Chukotka. What sounded "problematic" in 2020 became all but impossible since 2022. The current dearth of collaboration is harmful to the original plans and to the status of heritage preservation in Chukotka, even though the project may still be rescued when (if) connections resume after the war.

Fractal Conversations

David G. Anderson

This chapter tells the story of an ongoing collaboration with folklorists, historians, and Siberian indigenous knowledge holders which has been continuing throughout the period of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. It addresses the theme of a “fractured North” through an analysis of the constant difficulties the project faces in the new hostile environment. In telling this history, the metaphor of a “fractal” conversation captures the way that openings and misunderstandings tend to repeat themselves, recursively, across different time periods. The chapter demonstrates how respectful conversations can continue today, as they did during the “old” Cold War and offers hope for a renewed form of circumpolar ethnography.

**From Implemented Co-production to Enforced Stagnation:
Revising Methodologies in a Changing Political Environment (1993–2023)**

Erich Kasten

This chapter reflects on personal experience from several co-production initiatives with Indigenous communities in Kamchatka implemented since the mid-1990s and how they became gradually impeded during the past twenty years for political reasons. It illustrates how collaborative ventures that were initially successful and rewarding for all sides eventually came to a halt after Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022. The paper concludes with the search for flexible research methodologies that are able to adapt to ongoing changes in political environment and may be applied for maintaining connections with our partners.

Field Relations with Indigenous Communities in an Era of a New Iron Curtain

Lukas Allemann

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, researchers dealing with Russia and based in Western institutions face a new plethora of restrictions, regulations, and practical hurdles. Even more challenging are the ethical dilemmas and social pressure, as experienced by a researcher based in Finland who is trying to maintain long-term relations with the Saami people in the Russian part of Sápmi. Discussions among scholars about continuing or discontinuing fieldwork in Russia are broad and diverse. In Finland, the author repeatedly encounters admonitions by colleagues to be strict about not working with anyone who supports the Russian regime. Not only the dominant media discourse but also views among researchers are increasingly drifting towards “groupism,” the tendency to group people together and to reify them as entities with supposedly homogeneous interests and agency. While this counters the widespread constructivist stances in social sciences, but it seems that in practice currently many

scholars are tempted by groupism when discussing Russia. Instead, the author proposes to leave a door open and see the declarations of regime support by partners in the field in more multi-layered ways. As he shows in the case of the Saami, this may well mean, and on both sides of the new Iron Curtain, front-stage collusion for the sake of keeping a level of back-stage freedom of movement.

What Went Wrong Between East and West? An Assessment Using the Example of European-Russian Science Projects

Martin Gross

The author shares his experience from two decades of work, since 1998, in several European-Russian university collaborative projects. The official goal of these European-Russian projects was to support Russia on its path to democratization, market economy, and civil society, and to integrate it into a common European higher education area. These plans eventually failed for various reasons. Perhaps their original flaw was that such projects were founded on a fundamental misjudgment of the possibilities for reforming Russian higher education policies. The paper describes some areas in which European and Russian teaching traditions collided. The unsupported reform zeal led to arrogance on the Western side and bitterness on the Russian side.

Openings and Closures: The Anthropology of Siberia and the Politics of Field Access

Peter Schweitzer

When the author attempted to overview the history of anthropological research in Siberia more than 20 years ago (Schweitzer 2001), one of his conclusions was the oversized impact of Russian state politics on access to, and control of, field work in Siberia. The author used the terms “openings” and “closures” to characterize different periods in the history of anthropology of Siberia, that is, those with relatively open international access to the field versus those when the access was restricted to (some) Russian citizens only. Now, in the early stage of yet another field “closure,” the question arises whether we may learn something from previous periods of restricted access. The paper provides a brief overview of the most illustrative phases of Siberian research between the 17th and 21st centuries, through the lenses of openings and closures, by using certain predominantly “open” periods (most of the 18th century), as well as prolonged periods of “closure” (most of the 20th century) as ground for analysis. The main goal in understanding past patterns of scholarly access to Siberia is to draw conclusions on how to deal with the closures, so that we may be better prepared for future openings.