

Connecting Research Across the Globe

Environmental histories take place on many levels, from local town planning to global commodity chains. One of the great challenges of European environmental history is to move beyond nation state boundaries to tell narratives of the human–nature relationship in which the local and global are linked. To do that requires bringing together specialists with research cases from various locations that can be woven together to expose the similarities and differences in their histories. ESEH wants to encourage this kind of border-defying scholarship; thus we are pleased to feature in this Notepad a recent workshop that shows how such collaboration might get started.

As climate change has taken centre stage in the public discourse, the circumpolar North has gained prominence as an at-risk environment. The plight of the polar bears and melting glaciers have captured our collective imaginations. It is thus timely that Tina Adcock and Peder Roberts decided to organise a workshop focused on northern environmental history. What was unique about the workshop was its focus on bridging the ocean between scholars, both literally and figuratively, by inviting researchers from Scandinavia and Canada to come together. Comparing circumpolar histories reveals that exceptionalism and banality can co-exist—things are everywhere different, yet they are the same.

Could this example of transnational discussion be followed for other biomes? Are there comparable and comparative histories to be told about rainforests or deserts around the globe? I think so, and I hope European scholars will take up global challenges and think big with their environmental histories.

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Northern Nations, Northern Natures

On 9–11 November 2013, the Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm hosted a workshop entitled ‘Northern Nations, Northern Natures’. The eighteen participants (including seven graduate students) came from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Russia, Canada and the United States.

In the twenty-first century, the circumpolar North has become central to global consciousness and vital to global environmental well-being. Yet

traditional modes of national history-writing are of little use in comprehending the Arctic as a site linked to places around the world through flows of people, commodities, ideas and biotic and abiotic components. Accustomed to conceiving of and working within transborder bioregions, environmental historians are well situated to begin exploring supranational means of studying northern peoples and places. The workshop's main goal was to bring together senior and junior scholars from Canada and Scandinavia to discuss transnational and comparative approaches to northern environmental history, including boreal, subarctic, arctic and polar environments. By introducing scholars from different northern nations to each other, the workshop also aimed to build and strengthen transatlantic scholarly networks of northern environmental historians.

The presentations and discussions centred on three overlapping themes: northern identities, northern environments and transnational approaches to northern environmental history. The northern identities theme investigated the means through which different countries have come to regard themselves as 'northern nations'. How have they built and defended such identities? As Graeme Wynn outlined, Canadians have long privileged the North as a symbol of national identity. Yet most Canadians had little direct experience with northern environments until modern technologies like the airplane narrowed the physical and conceptual distance between northern and southern environments. Wynn spoke of a lingering northern exceptionalism in the Canadian imagination, a 'nordientalism' (à la Edward Said) that still complicates engagement with the region's true human and environmental histories.

In their presentation on the Austro-Hungarian Polar Expedition of 1872–84, Johan Schimanski and Ulrike Spring showed how this expedition repositioned the border between northern and southern Europe. Austro-Hungarians followed the expedition's exploits avidly, integrating its textual and visual representations into their public discourses. By affixing the imperial name of Franz Josef Land to an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean, they also came to view the Arctic as an extension of domestic Austro-Hungarian space. The question of how non-northern nations can acquire northern identities has important contemporary relevance, given the recent entry of Asian and southern European states into Arctic geopolitical and scientific spheres.

Other papers described how geopolitical factors have shaped northern national and environmental identities. Janet Martin-Nielsen discussed clashes between the American and Danish governments over scientific fieldwork in post-Second World War Greenland, as the American military often assumed rather than requested Danish permission for their activities. Martin-Nielsen demonstrated the importance of examining instances in which Danes withheld permission, for reasons including displeasure at the placing of nuclear devices on Greenlandic soil and the desire to reassert sovereign control over multinational scientific programmes of field research there. Matthew Farish revealed

how the postwar American military categorised Arctic spaces alongside desert and tropical ones, as a global set of 'hostile' environments in which soldiers from temperate climes had to learn how to operate effectively. Through manufacturing simulated northern environments in places like Big Delta, Alaska – which stood in for the whole 'North' – the military trained (and continues to train) 'Arctic warriors' capable of knowing and controlling polar environments across the world.

A second theme that emerged was the role that northern environments, particularly their natural resources, played in creating northern identities. Isabel Lemus-Lauzon shed light on the history of trees in the Arctic by asserting the importance of wood harvesting to Nainimuit, the Inuit living in the community of Nain, Labrador on Canada's north Atlantic coast. With the aid of oral historical and scientific methodologies, Lemus-Lauzon reads the forest around Nain as an archive of how Nainimiut land use has changed over time. In similar light, Anna Varfolomeeva explained how traditions of extracting and refining particular minerals among the Sami and Vepses of northwestern Russia had led each group to develop distinctive 'mineral identities'. Rafico Ruiz described recent efforts to harvest the icebergs of 'Iceberg Alley' off the coast of Newfoundland, to convert them into bottled water for the global premium water market centred in wealthy Arab and Asian countries. The new commodification of icebergs has the potential to revitalise the local economy of St. Anthony, Newfoundland. But it also raises questions over the ownership of circulating natural resources such as icebergs, and gestures to possible future conflicts over the privatisation and export of Canadian water resources in an increasingly thirsty world.

Other participants examined the role of non-human agents and factors in the environmental history of northern nations. Dolly Jørgensen presented a series of case studies in the translocation of Nordic animals such as muskoxen and beavers. She argued convincingly that we must view the boxes that moved these animals as Latourian 'mediators', technologies that transformed what lay within. Through these boxes, wild Greenlandic muskoxen were converted to domestic Swedish muskoxen, and wild Norwegian beavers to wild Swedish beavers, in the early twentieth century. Dagomar Degroot considered how climate change in the early modern era shaped Dutch Arctic exploration by focusing upon the three voyages that William Barents undertook to find the North-east Passage in 1594-97. Degroot emphasised the importance of distinguishing between climate and weather history. By analysing the specific environmental conditions in the North Sea during each expedition, he demonstrated that local weather determined the success or failure of each journey much more than did the overriding climatic phenomenon of the Little Ice Age.

Around the third theme, workshop participants discussed comparative and transnational approaches to northern environmental history. Tina Loo examined the problem of sustainability in postwar northern Canada, asking: how

did the federal government teach impoverished northern peoples to live well in challenging environments? By investigating the history of concepts like sustainability, it becomes easier to place the North within global histories of development and welfare. Julia Lajus outlined how early twentieth-century Scandinavian and Soviet scientists were drawn together through their shared concern for managing North Atlantic herring and better understanding their marine environments. Kirsten Thisted's presentation described contemporary notions of indigeneity in Greenland. Since the extraction of uranium is necessary for Greenland to attain full economic independence from Denmark (and thus full sovereignty), many Greenlanders have integrated this new 'mineral identity' into their overall conception of what it means to be indigenous. In provoking a vigorous discussion about contrasting ideas of indigeneity in northern Canada and Greenland, Thisted's work highlights the potential of comparative northern environmental histories to call national narratives into question.

Several graduate students in attendance had projects with transnational or international dimensions. Paula Saari is comparing the history of national parks in Canada and Finland; Jonathan Luedee is examining how the transboundary Porcupine caribou herd linked aboriginal groups and northern states across the Alaska–Yukon border in north-western North America; and Janina Priebe's work seeks to situate the extraction and commodification of natural resources in Greenland within wider imperial economic networks. In discussing this research in progress, participants collectively evaluated best practices for pursuing such projects. Comparative histories can all too easily become parallel ones, with each case study told in solitude with no substantive interplay or cross-pollination. A better strategy is to follow the circulation of ideas and objects through networks that cross borders and often span the globe. How have past northern and southern peoples and environments become entangled in eclectic, complicated and contingent ways? Such investigations promise to combine existing academic literatures in innovative ways, leading to revealing and surprising conclusions.

Participants left Stockholm convinced of the vibrancy of northern environmental history, which is flourishing across a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines in Scandinavia and Canada. Interested readers can glimpse this research, and the conversations it inspired, in a series of blog posts available on the workshop's website (<http://northernnatures.wordpress.com>) and on *The Otter*, the blog of the Network in Canadian History and Environment (<http://niche-canada.org/category/the-otter/>).

The organisers are grateful to The Swedish Research Council Formas for providing event funding, and to the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE) for subsidising the airfares of Canadian graduate students.

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