**ICARP III TOWN HALL, ST. PETERSBURG**

**ICARP III Town Hall Meeting**

**St. Petersburg, Russia**

**August 29, 2014**

**(**held in conjunction with the 54th Congress of the European Regional Science Association**)**

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At the end of August 2014, the Social and Human Sciences Working Group of IASC used the opportunity of the 54th Congress of the European Regional Science Association held in St. Petersburg, Russia, to reach out to the Russian Arctic social science community to engage in a dialog about the ICARP III process. The meeting was held at the building of the European University at St. Petersburg (EUSpb), a center of Arctic social science studies in town, in order to attract a maximum number of interested Russian scholars (in addition to delegates to the congress). The town hall was the second such event in 2014, following on the heels of the ICARP III town hall meeting in Prince George, Canada, held during the 8th International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS VIII) in May 2014. While the ICASS VIII town hall was able to have a large number of Arctic social scientists in attendance, the St. Petersburg meeting had the big advantage of “coming to the people” and engaging in discussions a group of scholars, who have been unable to participate in ICASS VIII or similar conferences in recent years.

Professor Nikolay Vakhtin from EUSpb welcomed the participants and opened the town hall meeting. SHWG vice-chair Gail Fondahl and chair Peter Schweitzer led the meeting with assistance from Andrey Petrov, SHWG member and IASC-financed ECS representative at the meeting. The town hall started with an overview over the ICARP III process and an explanation of what it wants to achieve (and what not). Then, individual social science-relevant activities (that is, primarily projects from the “societies and ecosystems” theme, as well as some from the “outreach and capacity building” theme) of the ICARP III process were introduced. The majority of the time was reserved for input from the audience: people commented on what they had heard, asked questions, and proposed areas of research they considered important for the future of Arctic science.

Here are some of the questions and issues that were raised and discussed:

* The costs and benefits of interdisciplinarity.

There was discussion about the interdisciplinary nature of ICARP III and whether it represented a trend within Arctic science.

A related debate concerned was whether the natural or the social sciences would dominate goals and methodologies of interdisciplinary science.

The necessity to recognize there is more than one social science and that there are differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies were highlighted.

* Importance of circumpolar and interregional comparisons.

For example, the notion that the Arctic is empty is no longer valid (and it never was). Thus, recognition that whenever “development” takes place, it needs to consider what has been there before. There are significant similarities and differences as to how this is perceived and dealt with throughout the North.

* What is the relationship between resource extracting companies and Arctic communities?

Given that many Arctic communities are resource based, the question arose as to what their relationship with resource extraction companies is. On the one hand, these communities need a voice in their own development. On the other hand, they need to find ways to keep the resulting wealth within the communities.

The concepts of “Corporate Social Responsibility” and of a “Social License to Operate” (building of trust between communities and corporations; community acceptance through formal and informal institutions of communication) might be relevant here.

The Canadian ReSDA project attempts to figure out ways in which local communities can benefit from resource extraction, be it through impact benefit agreements or other means.

* Community self-confidence in the Russian Arctic.

All too often, people (in the Russian Arctic) are silent and do not believe that they or their community have rights, or have possibilities to negotiate future developments. Thus, it is important to understand how local communities could change their perceptions of themselves, and believe more in their own power. The internet and other media could provide communities with means to share their voices.

* The challenges of old infrastructures and technologies

Many (Russian) Arctic communities are located in old settlements with decaying infrastructure. Sometimes, these settlements are being re, posed﷽﷽﷽ reo se old decaying infrstructure.he question was raised whether and hintroduced. the n weberin ist tersuchen. Ihr -purposed, such as “dacha” settlements that are turned into forestry settlements. It is interesting to analyze how change and adaptation occurs in the Arctic sectors, and what the role of modern technologies in shaping social and economic processes in the North is.

* History, governance and sustainability.

While “sustainability” was not the topic of the town hall, it came up in each and every comment as we were talking about the “survival” of Arctic communities. In that respect, the question was raised whether and how sustainability in the Arctic is different from sustainability in other areas. Thus, it might be necessary to write the history of the Arctic as a common history. While sometimes the notion of sustainability becomes connected to a “history of the winners,” it is also interesting to look at what did not succeed and why.

* The Arctic as a role model in human rights?

The Arctic can be seen as a source of human and civil rights debates and developments that are of relevance for southern countries as well. Perhaps the same can be said for how to sustainably manage human and economic development as well.

Overall, most participants agreed that the Arctic social sciences had made remarkable gains regarding new knowledge development and recognition from other Arctic sciences (as well as from government and funding agencies).

In sum, the town hall meeting was a big success, as reflected in the number of participants, and the quantity and quality of input provided. The mere fact of involving Russian scholars in the process was a tremendous step forward. Given that Russia continues to be not represented on the IASC working groups, this was one of the rare opportunities for broad scholarly communication with scholars from this Arctic country. Several participants told us later that the town hall had exceeded their expectations in terms of the number of attendees and in terms of the productivity of the discussions. It certainly was a valuable learning experience for everyone involved.

Several weeks after the town hall meeting, in September 2014, results from this ICARP III town hall meeting enriched an IASC-supported from Arctic-FROST Steering Committee meeting in Anchorage, Alaska. Another IASC-supported ICARP III event, a writing workshop focused on producing a white paper on “Understanding Sustainability in the Arctic” will take place in Charleston, USA, in February 2015. The questions raised and comments made during the Prince George and St. Petersburg town hall meetings will be reflected in the resulting white paper that will be presented at ASSW 20015 in Toyama, Japan, in April 2015. In addition, the input to the town hall meetings will be echoed in other social science sessions at Toyama.