

IASC Social and Human Sciences Working Group

Workshop Report: “Russia and Arctic Anthropology” Workshop St Petersburg, Russian Federation 17-18 May 2013

Workshop: Russia and Arctic Anthropology: Toward an Agenda for the 21st Century

Ten Arctic researchers convened for two days in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation in mid-May, with the goal of

- 1) discussing possible new and prospective approaches to anthropological research in the Russian Arctic in the 21st century;
- 2) collating research interests and seeing if they might be synchronized with the further goal of
- 3) formulating a topic of a joint research project that could be submitted as a proposal for the ERC Synergy Grant Competition.

The workshop participants included:

Nikolai Vakhtin (European University, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation) (co-convener)

Peter Schweitzer (U Vienna, Austria/ U Alaska – Fairbanks, USA) (co-convener)

Gail Fondahl (U Northern British Columbia, Canada)

Joachim Otto Habeck (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany)

Elena Liarskaya (European University, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation)

Anna Sirina (Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow)

Florian Stammler (Arctic Centre, U Lapland, Finland)

Olga Ulturgasheva (Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge University, UK)

Aimar Ventsel (U Tartu, Estonia)

Vladislava Vladimirova (Uppsala U, Sweden).¹

It is noted that Ulturgasheva is an indigenous scholar from the Russian Arctic. All of the participants have extensive fieldwork experience in the Russian North. Working languages of the workshop were English and Russian.

The majority of funding for the workshop was provided by European University – St. Petersburg. Additional funding from IASC S&HWG was much appreciated.

The workshop’s schedule was planned as such:

¹ David Anderson (U Aberdeen, Scotland) and Rane Willerslav (Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, Norway) were also invited but unfortunately were unable to attend at the last minute.

May 17, Friday

- 10:00–11:30** Introductions. Short briefings on participants' current research topics
Coffee/tea
- 11:30–12:00** *Coffee/tea*
- 12:00–14:00** What to do next?, Part I: Discussion of the state and future of Arctic research
Lunch
- 14:00–15:00** *Lunch*
- 15:00–16:30** What to do next?, Part II: Discussion of the state and future of anthropology (and other social sciences and humanities) and Arctic research in Russia
Coffee/tea
- 16:30–17:00** *Coffee/tea*
- 17:00–18:00** Synthesis of Day One: where are we at and what needs to be done on Day Two? (including skype conference with Anna Kerttula)
- 18:00** Conclusion of Day One
- 19:00** *Workshop Dinner*

May 18, Saturday

- 10:00–11:30** Discussion of the results of Day One
Coffee/tea
- 11:30–12:00** *Coffee/tea*
- 12:00–14:00** Development of three potential projects (in small groups)
Lunch
- 14:00–15:30** *Lunch*
- 15:30–17:00** Plenary discussion of the three potential Joint Research Projects
Coffee/tea
- 17:00–17:30** *Coffee/tea*
- 17:30–18:30** Synthesis and next steps – who does what when, etc.?
- 18:30** Conclusion of Workshop

The proposed schedule was followed with some adaptations on Day 2, as noted below.

The workshop began with a short *tour-de-table* of participants' current research



interests. Dr. Vakhtin also announced that the ERC Synergy Grant competition unfortunately had been suspended recently. The participants agreed that it would still be very useful to 1) develop a research framework that could be used as a beginning to generate a proposal once the ERC Grants are re-

initiated or for other similar opportunities; and 2) consider smaller joint projects within the group that might feed into such a framework in the time being.

Following was a “Discussion of the State and Future of Arctic Research”. Peter Schweitzer and Gail Fondahl each provided opening comments to initiate this conversation, laying out some identified gaps and some key trends in research practices that we might want to consider, as well as key priorities as identified by IASD S&HWG. A lively discussion followed. After a productive lunch break (with further dialogue), Nikolai Vakhtin and Florian Stammli initiated the afternoon session on “Discussion of the state and future of anthropology (and other social sciences and humanities) Arctic research in Russia.” The subsequent exchange involved both topical and methodological considerations. Possible theoretical frameworks were discussed, as were various methodologies. Data management concerns were enunciated, with Schweitzer and Fondahl underscoring the work of IASC on a data sharing protocol and the importance of considering this issue at the beginning of research planning.

For a final session of Day 1, Anna Kerttula (National Science Foundation, USA), who had been invited but was unable to attend the workshop in person, joined the conference by SKYPE. A short summary was provided to her of the day’s discussion. Anna provided some valuable commentary from a funding agency’s perspective, including the emphasis on interdisciplinary work for larger projects, and the importance of considering the research’s value for policy makers.

Day Two started with two break-out groups (rather than the proposed three), to consider key ideas that had been presented on Day 1 and develop a framework project (rather than multiple projects). The groups worked on this task throughout the morning, convening at mid-day to share the results of our work in a plenary session. During the afternoon (post – lunch), the group wrestled together with different aspects of a synthetic project. Otto Habeck offered to draft a short ‘abstract’ while the discussion continued. He presented this, which helped re-focus discussion.



As was likely anticipated by all, the two days were too short a time to complete a research framework. The group was very interested in pursuing the discussion of a joint project (research framework). Nikolai Vakhtin and Peter Schweitzer asked Florian Stammer and Gail Fondahl to take the next step of attempting to further organize the ideas of the two days' discussions, as a step to continue the conversation. Stammer and Fondahl worked on the summary over the next few days, and provided it to the workshop conveners on 23 May.

It was felt that a regional focus on the Russian Arctic was justified for a number of reasons: not only does more than half of the Arctic landmass lie within the Russian Federation, but the human population of the Russian Arctic is the most diverse in terms of indigenous/incomer, urban/rural, and nomadic/sedentary axes, as well as in terms of the in-and outflows of migrants: it is highly multi-cultural and heterogeneous. As well, a significant portion of new resource extraction is occurring or will occur in the Russian Arctic.

We expect that the initiative to fully develop a research framework will continue; we also speculate that some smaller projects will result, which may serve as important seeds for a larger project, once funding initiatives are re-opened, or new ones identified.

Report provided by Gail Fondahl

Photos provided by Sayan Ulturgashev