

Roundtable Perceptions and Representations of Arctic Science

» Abstract for ICASS VII «

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The Arctic figures strongly in TV documentaries, newspapers, and other media around the world. Polar researchers of many disciplines are an important part of this imagery as their travels and fieldwork make for visually attractive, exotic footage. Increasing interest in the Arctic has been triggered by the International Polar Year 2007-2008, and strong media coverage is one of its most beneficial outcomes.

However, the dialogue between scholars, Northern residents, the media, and the wider public is not without problems. "The public outside the Arctic has images of the North that are often formed by science, national identity, sovereignty, national pride, and resource pools, while people living in the Arctic have images of their homelands with their cultures, resources, and opportunities for a good life. Scientists' images of the Arctic may be driven by field seasons, access to funding, global politics, and science agendas" (ICARP II Science Plan, see below). Among researchers, there are complaints about misperceptions and misrepresentations of research findings in the media. Journalists and politicians, on the other hand, think that researchers could do a better job in making themselves understood. Residents of Northern communities see researchers flying in and out, but in many cases the latter cannot provide results of immediate relevance for the communities concerned. Researchers, on the other hand, find that Northern residents' observations and explanations about change cannot always be easily connected with conventional scientific forms of knowledge.

Such examples of "messages not getting across" point to the multiple and contested perceptions and representations of Arctic science. There has been an increasing if not widespread awareness of potential and actual misunderstandings on all parts, but even though this issue has been raised on earlier occasions, the issue has yet to be discussed systematically. Therefore we believe it is time to explore in a roundtable format how to further address the interconnection of Arctic science, politics, stakeholders, the media, and the wider public. Everybody is welcome to attend the discussion.

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