

BOREAS

Histories from the North — environments,
movements, narratives



The BOREAS Programme

The circumpolar North is often seen as an observatory for changing relations between human societies and environments. This region, which includes the Arctic and the sub-Arctic, has now also moved to the centre of global debates on new post-cold-war and post-colonial governance, strategy, regional sovereignty and partnerships.

The Humanities and Social Science-based, interdisciplinary research programme BOREAS will place the circumpolar North into wider contexts. With its focus on time and space, change and movement, BOREAS aims to bring commensurability to the time scales of geophysics, archaeology and lived human experience. In its four-year research period, BOREAS researchers will analyse how seasonality and climate change drive the high level of human and animal movement and create highly integrated zones of contacts – both North-South, but also East-West. It will explore local perceptions of environmental, cultural, social and economic change, thereby facilitating dialogue between different explanatory and descriptive models – such as scientific Western approaches and local understanding.

The North has long been influential in the history of European humanism and science. The visibility of this region in the public eye is set to increase during the International Polar Year in 2007-08. BOREAS as a coordinated programme of research on the North will enable the Humanities to collaborate more effectively and will enhance synergies with social, natural and medical sciences. This is the first circumpolar initiative led by Humanities researchers with innovative elements in joint evaluation processes between funding agencies from Europe, the USA, Canada and Russia and the resulting funded collaboration between 43 research teams.

The Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs)

Colony, empire, environment: a comparative international history of twentieth century Arctic science (CEE)

(DASTI, KVHAA, NFR, NSF, SSHRC)

“Colony, Empire, Environment” will produce a comparative international history of changing conceptions of the Arctic landscape, its scope ranging from science to art. It will yield a greatly improved understanding of Arctic scientific research during the twentieth century and new insights into the shifting meaning and significance of the northern landscape, as colonial domination was replaced by Cold War military activities and ultimately increased native autonomy.

Project Leader:

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Home, hearth, and household in the Circumpolar North (HHH)

(AKA, KVHAA, NFR, NSF, SSHRC)

HHH aims to demonstrate the specific dynamics of northern households. Do residential patterns in the North have a long-term time signature? Does the use of portable lodges contribute to a uniquely northern narrative? Through the study of space, vernacular architecture, and household dynamics HHH will identify similarities and differences in the way that northerners interrelate with their landscape.

Project Leader:

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Moved by the State: perspectives on relocation and resettlement in the Circumpolar North (MOVE)

(AKA, DASTI, NSF, SSHRC)

In the past, seasonal and more permanent movements in the lives of northerners were usually responses to the local conditions upon which their subsistence lifeways were based. More recently, population movements have been more often imposed as a reflection of policy, reflecting market or state logics of a conspicuously non-local character.

Within a common rubric of "state-sponsored resettlement", MOVE will bring together an interdisciplinary team of anthropologists, demographers, historians and community-based researchers.

MOVE will for the first time consider in a single research framework Russian/Soviet and Western modes of relocation, as well as indigenous and settler histories of migration.

Project Leader:

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New religious movements in the Russian North: competing uses of religiosity after socialism (NEWREL)

(AKA, ETF, NSF)

NEWREL will document for the first time the complex topography of new religious movements in the Russian North. It aims to improve understanding of the contemporary religious worlds and to investigate the interweaving of practices and representations across cultures in a complex society. NEWREL will shed new light on the dynamics of religious change among contemporary Arctic and sub-Arctic communities, covering various forms of neo-shamanism and New-Age spiritualities, evangelical Christian movements, revival of Russian Orthodoxy, etc.

Project Leader:

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Northern narratives: social and geographical accounts from Norway, Iceland, and Canada (NORSAGA)

(NSF, RANNIS, SSHRC)

NORSAGA recognises that economies, cultural traditions, and lifestyles in boreal landscapes are intrinsically bound to the environment. Against this background, NORSAGA will focus on histories, narratives and movements in northerly regions, specifically in mountainous and coastal areas in three countries: Norway, Iceland, and Canada. The study will enhance understanding of perceptions of environmental changes, impacts and adaptations in these regions over the last 300 years. Historical and literary analyses will be combined with sociological methodologies and advanced laboratory analyses of climate proxy data and natural archives.

Project Leader:

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Change and the environment in Nordic prehistory: evidence from Finland and Northern Canada (SCENOP)

(AKA, NSF, SSHRC)

SCENOP will seek to identify cross-cultural regularities and differences in human responses to rapid environmental change in prehistory. By collecting and analyzing archaeological and paleo-environmental data from two widely separated but environmentally comparable circumpolar paleo-estuaries, the Yli-li area of Northern Finland and the Wemindji area of James Bay in Quebec, the project will provide information about how prehistoric groups created sustainable adaptive systems in response to the environmental challenges while developing historically unique sets of life-ways. The project will also shed light on the ways in which prehistoric populations consciously and unconsciously transformed and impacted their environments.

Project Leader:

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Understanding migration in the Circumpolar North (UMCN)

(DASTI, NSF, SSHRC)

The goal of this project is to develop a better understanding of the patterns, causes and consequences of migration in the Circumpolar North through interdisciplinary and transnational comparative research. The range of different circumstances, environments, and policies analysed can assist in identifying the factors that affect peoples' migration decisions, and consequently, help predict population movements in response to future social, economic, and environmental change in the North.

Project Leader:

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The aim of the ESF European Collaborative Research (EUROCORES) Scheme is to enable researchers in different European countries to develop collaboration and scientific synergy in areas where European scale and scope are required to reach the critical mass necessary for top class science in a global context. The scheme provides a flexible framework which allows national basic research funding and performing organisations to join forces to support excellent European research in and across all scientific areas. The European Science Foundation (ESF) provides scientific coordination and support for networking activities of funded scientists currently through the EC FP6 Programme, under contract no. ERAS-CT-2003-980409. Research funding is provided by participating national organisations.

www.esf.org/eurocores

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BOREAS Programme

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