

Module 5

Research in the North: Emerging Issues and Practices

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Course objectives

The previous modules of this course illustrated the changes in expressions of cultural self-determination of the indigenous peoples in the North American North, the Russian Arctic (Northwest Russia, the Russian Far East and Siberia) Northern Europe (Norway, Sweden and Finland) and Greenland. The first module of this course discussed the theoretical background in relation to culture, identity and self-determination and examined various ways in which indigenous peoples are seeking to express their identity (e.g., media, literary works, education, family and recreation). The final and last module of this course looks at the ways – both positive and negative – in which research has been used in the circumpolar North. It outlines the development of northern research capacities and emerging research practices across the circumpolar North.

Upon completion of this module, you should be able to:

1. give a historical overview of the debate over northern research practices in the circumpolar world;
2. explain the difference between traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge;
3. explain the contemporary debate over indigenous intellectual property rights;
4. explain why the indigenous peoples demand an increased involvement in, and control of, research that affects northern peoples and give examples of measures taken to respond to these demands;
5. explain why ethical guidelines are important in research where indigenous people are involved;
6. discuss examples of different research approaches that are currently being used in the circumpolar North.

Introduction

Research conducted by Northern institutions is a reflection of circumpolar autonomy. Frustration with being seen as a “ready-made laboratory” for southern research is leading to an emphasis on conducting research in ways that directly and indirectly benefit northern residents. This has been accompanied by the development of northern scholarly capacity and by the development of research ethics specifically for the North (e.g., the ACUNS Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North and the IASSA’s Guiding Principles for the Conduct of Research).¹ Furthermore, there has been an increased emphasis on the respect for and inclusion of Aboriginal traditional knowledge. This module briefly outlines the development of research in the North and the emerging research practices (e.g., community-based research, oral histories, participatory action research). Using a number of case studies and examples as illustrations consideration will be given to similarities and differences across the circumpolar North.

¹ ACUNS stands for the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, established in 1978, with the aim to promote northern scholarship through its mandate and programs. Similarly to ACUNS, the International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), a non-governmental organization consisting of international social science groups participating in Arctic social science research established in 1990, developed guiding principles for all kinds of scientific investigations in the circumpolar North, requiring – for instance – special consideration to native people.

The early tradition of research in the Arctic

The practice of contemporary scientific research in the circumpolar North cannot be understood without reference to its broader social context, in a historical perspective. For centuries the circumpolar North was a land of discovery until it was entirely mapped and the land claimed to nation-states whose capitals and centres lay far to the south. The quests for non-renewable resources such as fur and fish and for shorter marine routes between continents, ran alongside the spirit of adventure and the attraction of acquiring unmapped regions. Scientific research became an increasingly important component of such exploration. Early scientific interests had a wide focus. Indigenous peoples, whenever encountered, were described from the same perspective as plants, fauna, the climate, and geology.

Historically, scientific research on indigenous peoples was linked to the policy of the state: in the middle of the 19th century for instance, Norway's assimilation policy to ensure a homogenous Norwegian nation to be able to respond against outside threats – from Russia and from increasing immigration from Finland (Niemi 1995:331-334). This dominating view was, for instance, supported by several scientists who interpreted the Sami not as indigenous – arguing that they were not the legitimate owners of their traditional territories – but were migrants of Mongolian origin (Niemi 1995:331-334).² Although the majority of scientists at the time supported the policy of assimilation of minorities in Norway, there were scientists who did ethnographic, linguistic, historical and cultural research on the indigenous peoples of Norway such as Friis and Stockfletch (Niemi 199:331-334).

The first International Polar Year (IPY), in 1882-83, was the first concerted international effort to gain new scientific knowledge of the Polar regions (Barr 1985). Systematic climatic and geomagnetic observations were among the central objectives. However, at about the same time, ethnographic descriptions of Arctic indigenous peoples were also systematized to a higher degree than they were before. The extensive ethnographic observations of John Murdoch at Barrow (Alaska) were directly related to his program for the IPY. Other famous and precious ethnographies were carried out in the last third of the nineteenth century, for example, in the Bering Strait region (Edward Nelson), in Southern Baffin Island (Franz Boas),

² Many of these views were based on ideas of social Darwinism. According to the theory of social Darwinism evolution of society is based on biological principles; ethnic minorities were considered as backward and only after enlightenment and integration in to the Norwegian culture, the minority culture could survive.

in Quebec-Labrador (Lucien Turner), in East Greenland (Gustav Holm), in Chukotka (Waldemar Bogoraz), and in northern Kamchatka (Vladimir Ilyich Jochelson). The second IPY, in 1932-33, focused almost exclusively on the natural sciences. The Cold War (1948-88) between the United States and the Soviet Union drastically increased tension and thus reduced scientific exchanges across the circumpolar North. Arctic issues were much less prevalent during the third IPY of 1957-58 than in the previous two IPYs. The fourth international Polar Year, which started in 2007 and continued until 2009, mapped the state of the Arctic at a period of rapid global and polar change, mainly as a result of climate change. Scientific cooperation across the Arctic characterized the fourth IPY where over 200 projects and scientists from more than 60 nations were involved (National Research Council 2012). Furthermore, for the first time the joint committee for the International Polar Year 2007-2008 established ethical guidelines which IPY researchers working in Polar Regions have to be familiar with before they conduct their research. The aim of these guidelines is obviously to prevent environmental harm and disruption of traditional livelihoods of inhabitants.

Hence, research in the North has a long tradition of being conducted from southern institutions, with barely any regard for northern residents, except as objects of research. From the perspective of scientists, almost all of whom were based outside the circumpolar North, the Arctic was (and often remains) a faraway area, a field with the characteristics of a “natural laboratory” (Korsmo and Graham 2002:320). It is only in recent years that research practices have been questioned and put under pressure to change. In the United States, Canada and Greenland, these developments have occurred within the context of decolonization, indigenous land claims, claims for self-government, and the affirmation of the right to cultural assertion and survival in the face of assimilationist policies. Simultaneously, northern regions have been building their scholarly capacities. Colleges, universities, and research institutions have been founded and strengthened and are steadily growing in size, competence, and recognition. In Arkhangelsk, Russia, for instance, a federal University was established in 2010 to strengthen the country’s research in the Russian Arctic. In a broader context of international politics, the debates over indigenous intellectual property rights have also become a component of research policies.

Indigenous intellectual property rights

The indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic have passed their knowledge about the Arctic and its environment for countless generations from person to person, often through oral stories, legends, folklore, rituals and songs. Traditional knowledge is defined by the International Council for Science as “a cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices, and representations maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part and parcel of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual spirituality and worldview” (International Council for Science 2002).³ Traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples, by for example, measuring the impact of climate change, is of vital importance, first of all for their own well-being in terms of acquiring food or determining routes suitable for travelling, but also for southern based scientists to understand more about the Arctic. Now, moreover, traditional knowledge is increasingly considered important knowledge for sustainable development of the northern regions but it should be noted that there is no agreement upon the term “traditional knowledge” (Huntington 1998; Kawagley 1995; Turner et al., 2000).

According to standard-setting documents formulated by indigenous peoples, “indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights [refer] to such things as indigenous art, songs, poetry, literature, biological and medical knowledge, ecological knowledge and environmental management practices, and other aspects and expressions of indigenous cultural heritage.” (Simpson 1997:18). In an attempt to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge states have been under pressure to protect intellectual property (and promote indigenous peoples’ use of intellectual property laws), within a Western, legalistic tradition. However, the terminology and concepts of such legislation are quite alien to indigenous ways of thought. “Property” is not a universally recognized concept, especially not under its aspect of individual rights that can be alienated and sold. Likewise, the distinction between “cultural” and “intellectual” is reductionist and not necessarily relevant outside the legal context. The whole issue is framed in concepts originating in Western property law and legal systems. Professor Dr. Erica-Irene

³ The Paris based International Council for Science is an international non-governmental organization with the aim to strengthen international Science for the benefit of society with – as of 2014 – 120 members representing 140 countries and 31 international scientific unions. More information can be found on <http://www.icsu.org/about-icsu/about-us>.

Daes, who has long been chairperson of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations has suggested that “indigenous heritage” would be a more “simple and appropriate” expression than “indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights” (cited in Simpson 1997:20).⁴

The work of ethnographers (anthropologists focusing on the detailed description of cultures) has long consisted in describing indigenous societies and their cultures, and in collecting their artifacts and knowledge. Until recently, this has been done without seeking the consent of those who shared their lives and their knowledge. The publication in books and exhibition in museums of their most private and sacred knowledge and artifacts is extremely offensive to many people, and indigenous peoples have been subjected to this treatment. The internet increases tremendously the potential for violation of the confidentiality that indigenous peoples wish to have associated with some aspects of their heritage (Daes 2003: 67-69). In the last decades of the twentieth century, some aspects of indigenous knowledge have also emerged as commodities of increasing economic value to non-indigenous peoples. In this context, indigenous peoples of the circumpolar North have voiced their concerns about the unauthorized appropriation of their heritage by outsiders and the commodification of this heritage without their control.

Besides problems with definitions that lack pertinence in indigenous contexts, the *enforcement* of intellectual property laws represents a major obstacle. Thus, for the moment, voluntary codes of ethics, elaborated by professional, governmental, and indigenous organizations, represent a common way to strengthen the potential for indigenous peoples to be consulted about, and to participate in, scientific research that may affect them. In any case, indigenous intellectual property rights cannot be dissociated from the wider issue of indigenous self-determination, and they can only be meaningfully defined and enforced within this context.⁵

⁴ The WGIP was in 2006 replaced by the new Expert Body on Indigenous People’s Rights to “rationalize the human rights mechanisms as well as promoting effective coordination and mainstreaming human.” (UN Economic and Social Council 2008:35).

⁵ Indigenous intellectual property rights are defined as indigenous people’s right to maintain, control and develop their intellectual property over cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

Towards new approaches to the practice of research in the North

The Second World War (1939-1945) and the subsequent Cold War put northern indigenous peoples at the forefront for rapidly increased contact with outsiders and at the forefront of world politics and military confrontation. Change reached the most remote communities, and the pace of transformations accelerated. In North America and Greenland, starting in the 1960s, northern indigenous peoples mobilized themselves politically to bring forward land claims and pleas for self-determination. In the Northwest Territories of Canada, for instance, many researchers were involved in vast efforts to document Inuit land use (e.g., Freeman 1977). A good deal of the research consisted in eliciting the knowledge of Inuit people. The purpose of such studies was to delineate the nature and extent of Inuit land use for the purposes of the Nunavut land claims. During the same period, indigenous peoples became more openly critical about some aspects of scientific research, which they considered unwelcome and potentially threatening.

In response to these concerns, Canadian governmental agencies and research institutions started to draft codes of ethics in the mid-1970s (Korsmo and Graham 2002:31). The most influential early effort was the *Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North*, published in 1982 by the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS). These principles have been widely disseminated in English and French, as well as Inuktitut and Russian. They were aimed at promoting “co-operation and mutual respect between researchers and the people of the North.” According to Fae L. Korsmo and Amanda Graham in their article *Research in the North American North: Action and Reaction* (2002), the ACUNS principles “express social sciences guidelines concerning anonymity for human subjects, informed consent, respect for privacy and dignity, and the goal of sharing data and research benefits with the community” (Korsmo and Graham 2002:321). This applies to the 1982 original ACUNS principles as well as to the revised version approved in 1997, published in 1998, and reprinted in 2003. Ethical principles were also written down by several national professional associations. The *statement of Principles for Ethical Conduct Pertaining to Aboriginal Peoples* adopted by the Canadian Archaeological Association (CAA) in 1997 (<http://www.canadianarchaeology.com/aboriginal.lasso#index>) is one example.

Also in the United States, codes of conduct for research were developed and adopted by diverse bodies over the past 10-20 years. In 1990, the United States Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC) published *Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic* (<http://www.nsf.gov/od/opp/arctic/conduct.htm>). In 1993, the Alaska Federation of Natives endorsed the creation of an Alaska Native Science Commission (ANSC) “to bring together research and science in partnership with the Native community.” The ANSC has drafted a “sample code of research ethics” (<http://www.nativescience.org/index.html>), which is intended to regulate the rights and obligations of communities and researchers as partners.

In Europe, ethical guidelines and standards emphasize the principles of good scientific practice (researcher ethics) and standards to protect individuals and societies at large. In Norway, the Norwegian research Council (<http://forskingsradet.no/en/ethics/>) has established three national committees to monitor developments in ethical issues and to safeguard ethical considerations in research projects. These are the National Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics (NEM), the National Committee for Research Ethics in Science and Technology (NENT), and the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH). Moreover, the National Committees published a Research Ethical Checklist in 2014, applying to all academic fields, and not as for instance in Canada, focusing on research in the Arctic in particular. This check list sums up the most important aspects for research projects, and includes: the project’s aim and method (are they in conflict with commonly recognized values?), informed consent, protection of personal information, risk and uncertainty (risk or injury to people, animals or nature), and whistle-blowing (if a researcher is in doubt about the ethical aspects of a particular project). In Finland, the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, an expert body appointed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has drawn up guidelines for good scientific practice and procedures for handling misconduct and fraud in science. These guidelines were updated in 2012 and can be found on <http://www.tenk.fi/en/advice-publications>. Again, these guidelines and principles refer to academic research in general and not specifically to Arctic research.

Given the globalization of science, ethical principles, standards and codes of conduct are also developed at the international level by for instance, the International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA). IASSA published its *Guiding Principles for the Conduct of Research* in 1998 (<http://www.uaf.edu/anthro/iassa/>). This non-governmental organization currently has an

Observer status at the Arctic Council and advises the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) on matters pertaining to human and social sciences research. The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) – which represents the interests of Inuit peoples from Canada, the USA, Russia and Greenland – published the *Principles and Elements for a Comprehensive Arctic Policy* in 1992. During its 10th Assembly meeting, the ICC decided to imitate a process with the objective to update these principles (ICC 2006).

Since its creation in 1990, IASC has taken a leading role as the international organization dealing with natural research in the Arctic. Besides developing guiding principles for scientific investigations, the IASC organized the first International Conference for Arctic Research Planning (ICARP) in 1995 in Hanover (New Hampshire, USA). This conference initiated a series of international priority research projects to be implemented in the Arctic (see the IASC Project Catalogue 2004 at <http://www.iasc.no>). The second ICARP meeting was hold in Copenhagen in 2005 which brought together scientists, decision-makers and indigenous peoples from all over the world whereas the third meeting is scheduled for 2015. The type of research encouraged by IASC is innovative in its intention of “bringing together the physical, biological and social sciences to address substantive themes” (<http://www.iasc.no/>). Among its “Project Selection Criteria” one reads, “addressing the concerns of those who live in and near the Arctic” (*idem*). Whereas IASC was mainly known as natural sciences organization, the International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), founded in Fairbanks, Alaska in 1990, has played an imported role in the promotion of social science research in the Artic.

So there is a clear trend towards more involvement of circumpolar residents, and in particular of northern indigenous peoples, in research that may affect them. Prior to the existence of Nunavut in Canada the Science Institute of the Northwest Territories (SINT) was created in 1984 and was given the prerogative of licensing all science conducted in that part of the Canadian North, and the licensing process included the consultation of relevant representatives of the communities involved. As Nunavut was becoming a reality, a separate Nunavut Research Institute (NRI) was created to serve to develop and promote traditional knowledge (NRI 1997).⁶ Increased control of and participation in research are aspects of indigenous self-determination – as intellectual property rights (as discussed earlier in this

⁶ SINT merged with Aurora college in 1994 and became the Aurora Research Institute.

module); and these aspects are linked to the emergence and growth of northern scholarly institutions.

One may also note that the evolutions in research practices are not universally taking place across all countries, social milieus, and scientific disciplines. So far, for instance, the Russian Academy of Sciences – a network of scientific research institutes established since the 18th Century – has not yet established any ethical guidelines and/or principles for conducting research in the Arctic. Some of the above mentioned codes of conduct (ACUNS, IARPC) explicitly apply to all types of research and to all scientific disciplines whereas in Northern Europe ethical principles apply more to general research practices.

Variations across the circumpolar North

As we have seen in the previous section, North America has been leading the trend of innovations in research practices during the past two or three decades. Progress has consisted in acknowledging and taking into account the concerns, the needs, and the knowledge of northern residents, in particular indigenous peoples. The evolutions in other circumpolar countries with indigenous peoples can be described as following in the footsteps of the North Americans, but they can also be seen as particular trajectories shaped by national traditions.

In Greenland, since shortly after the introduction of Home Rule in 1979 and the 2008 referendum for greater autonomy, the responsibility for education and research has been taken over by Greenlandic authorities. The country has its own university – Ilisimatusarfik in Nuuk obtained university status in 1987 – with three institutes with full-degree education in several disciplines. Since 1995, it also has a Nature Institute, which conducts most research on renewable resources in Greenland and a commission for scientific research, advising the Danish Minister of higher education and science in matters related to the funding of projects of researchers based in Greenland as well as in Denmark. Research priorities set by this commission are usually in close agreement with those of the Research Unit of the Greenlandic Home Ministry for Culture, Education, Research, and Church. Research in Greenland is also conducted by researchers and research institutions from countries other than the Danish realm. Part of this research is announced to, and licensed by, the Danish Polar Center (DPC) in Copenhagen.

There are many universities and research institutions in northern Fennoscandia, for instance, in Rovaniemi (University of Lapland founded in 1979) and Oulu (University of Oulu founded in 1958) and in Sweden in Luleå (University of Technology established in 1977), and Umeå (Umeå University founded in 1965). As of 2014, two Universities are located in Norway: the University of Nordland in Bodø, established in 2011, and The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø founded in 1968 (with another campus in Alta and the Centre for Sámi Studies) – in addition to a Sami University College located in Kautokeino. Due to the relatively short distance between these Northern European countries (and between these European countries and the Russian Federation) research projects in this region are often characterized by international cooperation between scientists, students and policy-makers from several states (including Russia). Often, research projects cross several borders in the European North. The homeland of the Sámi, for instance, is spread over four different states and research related to reindeer herding therefore involves scientists and students from several states. An example of an institute supporting cooperation between Russian and – mainly – Norwegian actors is the Barents Secretariat – supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - located in Kirkenes.

Research in the former Soviet Union – as in other nations – was influenced by the political developments in society at large. Whereas in the Soviet Union, more than in Western countries, science was one of the instruments of political propaganda, contemporary research in Russia is reflecting the country's ambitions to preserve its role as a leading actor in the Arctic (Russian National Security Strategy 2009). Although the economic crisis of the 1990s hit the world of Russian scientific research hard, the significant improvement of the financial situation in the country led to the establishment of new, and strengthening of existing universities located in the Russian Arctic. Today, federal universities are located in Arkhangelsk [Northern (Arctic)] Federal University since 2010) in Northwest Russia, Krasnoyarsk (Siberian Federal University established in 2006), Yakutsk, (North-Eastern Federal University since 2010) and Vladivostok (Far Eastern Federal University since 2010). As in Norway, these federal universities were recently established in Russia – or existing universities were strengthened or promoted from university college to university or state university to federal university – in order to respond to the increasing demand for research in the Arctic.

Although formal research ethics codes and practices were mainly introduced by Western scientists in the 1990s, it should not be forgotten that many individual Russian researchers – ethnographers, archaeologists, and so on – followed implicit research ethics in their relations with the communities they investigated that were quite comparable to that of their western colleagues. Starting in the 1990s, in northern Russia just like in other parts of the Arctic, residents and indigenous communities became increasingly involved in controlling and participating in research that could affect them. Grassroots as well as official indigenous associations began to claim the right to veto certain types of field research.

Innovative research practices

A revised version of the *Ethical Principles* first published by ACUNS in 1982 (see above) has appeared in 1998 (and later on in 2003). The revision reflects:

‘political and social changes in the Canadian North brought by land-claim settlements and self-government agreements. The revised principles call for community consultation at all stages of the research, including design and implementation and, where possible, for incorporation of local research needs into the research design, and incorporation of relevant traditional knowledge into all stages of research. The keyword is partnership: researchers and community members are to be equal partners in the design and conduct of research’ (Korsmo and Graham 2002:321).

Participatory approaches are indeed one of the main innovative practices of recent years in research in the North. Those outside the indigenous communities have not always recognized or respected the value of traditional knowledge or the participation of indigenous peoples in research. More recently, however, there seems to be a greater emphasis on collaborative research between scientists and indigenous people (Huntington 2000; Krupnik and Jolly 2002). Indigenous organizations from different Arctic countries are represented in the steering committees of large international scientific assessment projects sponsored by the Arctic Council. The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA 2007) and the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR 2004) are good examples of this development. Rather than understanding the Arctic through statistics, the ACIA report “is meant to provide the reader with a human face to some of the impacts of weather and climate change by focusing on

different case studies of observations observed by arctic residents” (ACIA 2007:62-64). The AHDR provides the “state of affairs from a regional point of view” by arguing that in order to meet the challenges of the Arctic (e.g., climate change, changes in economic and political systems), “Arctic societies will have to balance the retention of long-standing social practices with the introduction of new forms of knowledge and innovative technologies” (ADHR: 231-236).

Hence, research training of local residents is an important aspect of many recent projects. More and more new projects involve, whenever pertinent, inter- or multi-disciplinary approaches. To take one example, it is increasingly recognized that conservation and management of renewable resources (flora and fauna) are social issues as much as they are scientific ones, and that to be successful, conservation projects must involve social scientists (Mascia et al. 2003). The readiness to include indigenous knowledge whenever pertinent and feasible represents another major innovation in research practices in the Arctic. One may also mention, as one aspect of the participatory approach, the requirement to disseminate results to a broad public, in plain language, and first and foremost to the communities involved in or potentially affected by the research and its results. Moreover, some projects have aimed at “knowledge repatriation” of data collected in the past (e.g., Krupnik 2000:2002).

In sum, research practices in the circumpolar North are rapidly changing. The Arctic used to be considered a “natural laboratory” where one could conduct field research freely, without consideration for northern residents. In the past few decades, researchers have been under pressure to adopt innovative research practices involving partnerships with local communities and taking into account indigenous and local knowledge. Professional associations, as well as indigenous organizations and funding agencies, have developed codes of conduct and ethical guidelines for research in the North. Such codes are instrumental in enforcing respect for indigenous intellectual property rights. It remains to be seen, however, whether the increased demand for Arctic research, as illustrated by the establishment of federal universities in Norway and Russia, will lead to more and better cooperation with – and involvement of – indigenous peoples and organizations, including when the research design and research questions are being drafted.

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