

Calotte Academy 2015

Crossing & Bridging Borders in the Euro-Arctic North

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This year's edition of the [Calotte Academy](#), an established travelling symposium focusing on the social and political issues in the Arctic, took place in three Northern European countries: Finland, Russia and Norway. The Academy owes its name to the [Northern Calotte](#), i.e. the northernmost part of both Fennoscandia and Russia, and it has a long and glorious history. Having started in the late 1980s when the region was still divided by many borders, both political and symbolic, the “nomadic” summer school has witnessed many changes since then: the empires fell, the borders opened, the people changed. The school itself has changed, too, but it has preserved the main idea of the original Academy: the person-to-person interaction between local experts and decision-makers and established and early career researchers whose scientific interests lie in the Arctic, regardless of any borders. This year, given the complex political situation and tensions between Russia and the West, preserving this idea was crucial, even the most important since the end of the Cold.

The 2015 Academy had its focus on the theme “Resources and Security in the Globalized Arctic”. However, this did not limit the scope of participants' topics to political science only: the presenters had different academic background and areas of focus, including among others anthropology, law, psychology, economics and environmental sciences. Together, the group provided the nexus between different areas of science, the thing many Arctic research planners are seeking now; maybe this is the way how the new Arctic research agenda can begin to be introduced.

Day 1-3: from Finland to Russia

The symposium started in Rovaniemi, the capital of Northern Finland and home to the University of Lapland on the 31st of May with a conference reception hosted by the city of Rovaniemi. In the following day, it was time for the academic sessions to begin. This year's conference program consisted of research presentations by participants as well as brainstorming meetings, and already the first day effectively combined these two types of activity. First two sessions, both focusing on political sciences – “Resources, Energy and Security” and “International Cooperation, Arctic Strategies, Science Diplomacy and Security” – covered the trending processes in the globalized Arctic. The presenters discussed the role of resources for Arctic development and management, ways of developing and implementing Arctic strategies by different states, and new political challenges in the region (mostly connected to Russian international policies). As anticipated, the discussions were animated and even heated, however the general idea of reaching a consensus prevailed throughout the debates. The brainstorming meetings included discussions of major research projects, international scientific activities and other topics aimed at career development; on the first day's session, a new research network initiative *Global Arctic* was presented, and the participants were given a chance to discuss their possible future contributions and collaboration.

Day two was the first border-crossing day during the symposium. After a short morning session that included a presentation by the mayor of Salla municipality and some research insights into Salla's life and development (a result of a cross-border research project itself!), the group started making its way towards Russia. This journey both busted some myths about Russia and supported others. Indeed, the border crossing was smooth and took little time (proof that the physical boundaries are easily permeable), which left some time to visit the borderland Russian municipality of Alakurtti, the base of the newly established Arctic Brigade of the Russian Army (which proves that the Russian military buildup in the Arctic is real). The road to Apatity, the Academy home for the next two nights, was much better than anticipated: the infamous gravel road from the border to the highway was partly freshly paved, which made the journey smooth and fast, unlike the general perception of the poor quality of Russian roads. However, the sad surprise was a vivid ethnographic insight into Russian life: the pipe maintenance in Apatity resulted in the absence of hot water in the whole town, confirming that Russia still has much to do in its transition from the Soviet period.

Day 4-5: from Russia to Norway

The third day, hosted by the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the RAS Kola Science Center, comprised mainly of presentations by Russian participants focusing on economics. Unfortunately, the dramatic changes in the Russian economy made it virtually impossible for regional Russian researchers to make the entire journey with the rest of the Academy, but this day managed to bridge this gap and secure full Russian participation in this important cross-border activity. The participants focused mainly on the economics of energy development of the Russian Arctic, cross-border cooperation in the Barents Region, and issues of social and environmental sustainability in the circumpolar north. It is to be noted that the language of the science doesn't recognize the political boundaries: all the talks – even if delivered through an interpreter – contained valuable insights into the global processes and provided ground for

interesting discussions. One can only hope that the so far successful cooperation between Western and Russian partners can be sustained despite the complex political and economic situation.

The fourth day of the Academy didn't contain any presentations; however, it featured long and in many ways enlightening travel across the entire Kola Peninsula, the heart of the Russian North and the home to many cultural, natural and man-made attractions. The first part of the day's journey, the northbound route towards Murmansk, was telling the tale of conquering the North: the heavily polluted industrial sites of Monchegorsk and Olenegorsk, the Kola Nuclear Power Plant and the long-gone indigenous history of the area. The city of Murmansk, the largest human settlement above the Polar Circle and home to the Russian Northern Fleet, served as the midpoint of the journey. During the second part of the day's ride, the Academy participants had an opportunity to look at the Russian war monuments, military installations from the Cold War era, heavy industrial pollution in Nikel and Zapolyarny (with nearly all vegetation destroyed) and borderland area with barbed wire and streaming rivers. Such insights into the cultural and natural history of the Arctic keep reminding researchers that the Arctic keeps traces of all kinds of human activity and there is still much to be discovered.

Days 6-7: From Norway Back to Finland

The last two days of the Academy, held at the maritime Norwegian town of Kirkenes and in Inari, the capital of Finnish Lapland, mainly focused on the issues of social sustainability, human capital in the North and indigenous and environmental studies. The researchers presented several cases from all across the Arctic, some of them discussing ways of achieving social sustainability and welfare in the circumpolar communities (indigenous and non-indigenous alike), some studying the strategies of environmental management in the Arctic Ocean and the Barents Region, some reflecting on the national policies of the Arctic activities and climate change mitigation. The continuity found in these talks provides an interesting insight into Arctic research in general: how the community-based approach and the studies of global processes can both serve to assess and address potential Arctic futures and build development strategies for global and grass-roots actors. The last evening of the tour brought all the participants together for an outdoor barbecue dinner by the campfire and the genuine Finnish sauna experience on shores of still icy-cold Lake Inari; indeed, not only the academic sessions, but also the endless hours spent in the bus and the well-planned social program are crucial components for making the Calotte Academy what is – a forum for open and enlightening discussions with a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

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The 2015 Calotte Academy features an outstanding example of how the boundaries between different groups and actors can melt and disappear if cooperation and communication are the chosen approach. This concerns boundaries between the established and the early-career researchers, Western and Russian scholars, women and men, but most importantly — researchers from different disciplines. The nexus between social and political sciences and humanities and, more broadly, between “hard” and “soft” sciences, is crucial for conducting meaningful Arctic research. Only comparing different points of view and assessing the situation from different perspectives we can understand the deep roots of the global processes such as

climate change and militarization of the Arctic or, vice versa, understand how the global issues are reflected in individual case studies at the local level. This is exactly what happens during the Calotte Academy: exchange of ideas between people from different countries and different disciplines, evaluation of the research results by peers and established scholars, person-to-person contact between the brightest representatives of the Arctic research. Such opportunities keep bringing people together, and despite the fact that the Academy takes a different route every year, the ideas created during it persist and keep crossing the borders — physical and imagined ones alike.