

SCAR History of Antarctic Research Action Group

Report of the 5th SCAR History Workshop

“History of International Spaces”

Antarctic Treaty Summit 50 Washington, D.C., 3rd December 2009

The SCAR History AG was invited to organize its 5th workshop on “History of International Spaces” within the framework of the ATS 50 in Washington, D.C. on 3rd December 2009. 13 presentations were given by polar historians from Australia, Estonia, Great Britain, Norway, South Africa, and the United States of America among them were several young researchers and PhD students. About 40 participants attended.

The first session of the workshop started with Erki Tammiksaar (Estonian University of Life, Tartu, Estonia) and his evaluation of the reception of information about the Antarctic and the problem of its discovery in the scientific literature of the 19th - 20th century. Due to the very few 19th century expeditions to the south pole region it was still unknown around 1900 whether Antarctica was a continent, a group of islands, or an ocean. Tammiksaar showed how complicated it is to ascertain who discovered Antarctica, because arguments often follow the lead of political circumstances.

Bjørn Basberg (Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, Bergen, Norway) conceptualized the economic history of the Antarctic region from considerations ranging from the 19th century sealing industry and the 20th century whaling industry to the more recent fisheries and even bio-prospecting, as well as tourism – which has been present now for almost 50 years. Basberg reviewed the historic industries in terms of Antarctica being an economic region in a place with no permanent population and no sovereignty claims.

PhD Student Peder Roberts (Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA) also focussed on Antarctic economic history. He discussed the issue of international waters of the Antarctic between the world wars, under the headline “Science and commerce on the high seas”, addressing the period when whaling moved from shore stations to factory ships in the Southern Ocean. At that time science functioned as a powerful source of legitimacy for making judgements on what constituted appropriate commercial activities. Using as examples the British state-sponsored *Discovery* Investigations and the Norwegian private scientific expeditions in Antarctic waters, Roberts explained how science provided the material basis for demonstrating authority in an international space.

PhD Student Lize-Marié van der Watt (University of Stellenbosch, Matieland, South Africa) used another approach towards history, focussing on the case of South African involvement in Antarctica (1919 - 1965). She asked why and how South Africa became involved in Antarctic research and how this activity was received domestically. Although South Africa showed early interest in Antarctic research, the South African government did not start to allocate

significant funds until 1948. The pursuit of science in Antarctica was a factor in legitimising involvement in the Antarctic in the mind of the public.

Irina Gan (University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia) examined the evolution of Soviet Antarctic policy during the 1940s and 1950s prior to signing of the Antarctic Treaty. She identified the practical steps taken by the Soviets, and the thinking of political and scientific decision makers. Gan also reviewed the motives that drove the Soviet Antarctic activities, given the predominant political imperative of gaining a continuous voice in any international decision about a governance regime for the Antarctic.

Simone Turchetti (University of Manchester, Manchester, UK) talked about Antarctica, the Cold War and scientific internationalism. The establishment of an international regime privileged scientific collaboration over political rivalries. However newly released diplomatic archival material revealed that placing scientific internationalism at the centre of Antarctic affairs was a response by the US and its allies to specific concerns about the establishment of Soviet bases in Antarctica. In turn, various diplomatic activities were considered on the basis of geopolitical urgencies. Turchetti showed how scientific internationalism was advocated by the 'free world' diplomats in the Cold War context mainly because of a perceived Soviet threat and possible militarising Antarctica.

During the fourth session after lunch John C. Behrendt (University of Colorado, Boulder, also U.S. Geological Survey, Denver, USA) described the first determination of the configuration and volume of the Antarctic ice sheet in the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957-58, which was constructed from a series of mostly US and USSR over-snow geophysical traverses making seismic reflection measurements of ice thickness. Behrendt drew on his experiences from participating in the Filchner Ice Shelf Traverse as a 25-year-old graduate student. In a few years the team produced a first approximation of the volume and elevation of the Antarctic Ice sheet using what today seem to be very primitive techniques.

Dian Olson Belanger (Washington DC, USA) examined the Antarctic Treaty under the headings of idealism, parochialism and the art of the possible. The Antarctic Treaty created the first internationalized space on Earth, dedicating an entire continent to peace and the cooperative pursuit of science by avoiding territorial claims, military rivalries, and political antagonisms active elsewhere, which was an achievement unique in world affairs. Belanger asked how twelve leery, fearful nations could come to such a high-minded, far-sighted agreement in the depths of the Cold War. She also looked at the role of the International Geophysical Year, and explored how entrenched self-interests and mutual suspicions were overcome and how science did what politics could not. In the end the imperfect success story provided a useful foundation for the day's focus on the meaning and uses of international spaces.

William B. McAllister (U.S. Department of State, Washington DC, USA) reconceptualized Antarctica and other new international spaces as the opening of the "Interdependency Age". Between 1960 and 1980 a variety of developments made it possible to exploit the Antarctic continent in new ways that paralleled novel opportunities in the oceans and outer space. Scientific communities and emerging ecological constituencies contested the definition, ownership, and use of these spheres. McAllister explored how diverse communities reconsidered notions of "interest" to accommodate human activity in these previously "uninhabitable" spaces. This led to new conceptions of interdependence across an expanded geospatial continuum. He stated that the heightened awareness of the interconnectedness of

humans with each other and the planet made it possible to “see” the globalized world that we now regard as commonplace.

Margaret S. Race (SETI Institute, Mountain View, CA, USA) updated policies for scientific exploration and protection in outer space while borrowing from the Antarctic Treaty experiences. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 required that exploration of other worlds be conducted without “their harmful contamination” and the ICSU’s Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) provided policy guidance for exploring the solar system to protect future scientific study by preventing biological contamination. When a study on forward contamination of Mars recommended re-examination of COSPAR’s policy in 2006, a task became to integrate considerations of “ethical implications” into the policy along with science protection. Race pointed to an international forum planned for mid-2010, which will gather scientists, legal/policy experts, and ethicists to examine questions pertaining to the potential revision of the existing science-based policy. She was convinced that comparative studies and lessons learned from the Antarctic Treaty could provide useful information and approaches for the deliberations ahead.

Adrian Howkins (Colorado State University, USA) examined science, conservation, and the question of Antarctica in the United Nations by investigating the use of scientific and environmental rhetoric in the political discussions of Antarctica in the early 1980s. When views of all UN member states on the “Question of Antarctica” were requested, the Chilean government concluded its reply with a section entitled “The Danger of New Utopias”. The Chileans argued that the Utopian speculation of the Non-Aligned Movement threatened peace and science, which sustained the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). A similar rhetoric was used by almost every member of the ATS to defend the Treaty. Howkins argued that the use of science and conservation to defend political rights to the continent had a long history associated with imperial claims.

The last paper given by Peggy Dillon (Salem State College, Salem, MA, USA) dealt with the workshop at the Beardmore South Field Camp in Antarctica (1985) and its role in the history and evolution of the Antarctic Treaty. Participants from 25 countries met on the Beardmore glacier to help determine Antarctica’s future by freely sharing their views about the continent’s resource management, day-to-day logistical operations, related political and legal issues, and the evolution of the Antarctic Treaty System. Open discussion and camaraderie rather than production of conclusions or recommendations were the main purpose of the workshop at Beardmore South Field Camp. Dillon discussed the major talking points and the conclusions of the workshop in the context of Antarctic history and scientific research.

In addition to the oral papers, PhD student Jason Davis (The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio) presented a poster on emerging geopolitical contexts for Antarctic operations. Recent political frameworks, like the neoconservative theory, tended to promote the extension of state power beyond its borders and saw non-state enactments of power as threats, while critical theories were more wary of state power extensions and celebrated non-state practices of power. Davies reviewed these geopolitical theories and their relevance to Antarctic practices to help us to gain a better understanding of how approaches to international spaces were currently framed.

In addition to the workshop, the chair of the SCAR History AG, Cornelia Lüdecke, was invited to give the historical paper on “Parallel agendas for the International Geophysical Year” during the first plenary session of the AT Summit and to take part in the subsequent panel discussion. Two other members of the History AG played active roles during the

Antarctic Treaty Summit. All of the speakers have prepared papers to be published in the Proceedings of the Antarctic Treaty Summit. A movie including our interviews was produced alongside, which will be published 2010.

The workshop was a great success for the SCAR History AG. Several young researchers and PhD students were among the speakers. They gave enthusiastic feed back, having benefited from becoming engaged with a forum of scholars with the same interests in the history of Antarctic research. The input of IGY veterans and senior polar historians with various backgrounds in the discussions was very much appreciated.

Cornelia Lüdecke