



XXXI SCAR Delegates Meeting
Buenos Aires, Argentina, 9-11 August 2010

Agenda Item: 10.2.2
Person Responsible: Mike Sparrow

Social Science Action Group:

Values in Antarctica

Executive Summary

Title: Activities of the Social Science Action Group (Values in Antarctica)

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Background

The International Polar Year has increased people's awareness of the polar regions and stimulated high-quality scientific cooperation between participants from more than 60 countries. Media coverage has brought information about the Southern Continent to millions of people around the world and has given them cause to weigh multiple values against one another when considering the overall worth of humanity's endeavours in Antarctica. The balancing of these values may influence a wide range of decisions. Some of these decisions will, collectively, affect entire global systems, primarily via their impacts on climate, natural resources, and international policy. Thus, understanding the extent and nature of the values that human beings place on Antarctica has large-scale and very serious implications. It was this concern that gave rise to the recognition that an action group was needed to study and report on those values.

Progress

A steering group was formed in January, 2010. The key outcomes of two on-line meetings are:

- Discussion of substantive issues about the meaning of value.
- Arrangement for a panel discussion to be held at the IPY science conference in Oslo, 2010, to attract the interest and opinions of scientists not normally associated with SCAR.
- A decision to expand the geographic and disciplinary diversity of the steering group .

Recommendations/Actions and Justification

This Information Paper is to serve only as a brief, interim report on the early activities of the Social Science Action Group. No request is being made of the delegates other than to continue their support for this Action Group.

Expected Benefits/Outcomes

The benefits expected to arise from the work of the Social Science Action Group include:

- increased knowledge about some of the main influences on human decision-making regarding polar issues;
- development of a list of recommendations to be considered by those responsible for major, Antarctic-related decisions;
- compilation of a list of social scientists and humanities researchers involved in polar research, with the aim of initiating and strengthening collaborative networks.

Partners

The formation of partnerships with other SCAR Action Groups (History, CBET) as well as non-SCAR polar social science institutions and agencies is currently being explored. It is hoped that by establishing these ties, a greater breadth of perspectives and knowledge can be included.

Budget Implications

\$4,000 a year for meeting costs.

Values in Antarctica: A project of the Social Science Action Group

Rationale

The International Polar Year has increased people's awareness of the polar regions and stimulated high-quality scientific cooperation between participants from more than 60 countries. Media coverage has brought information about the Antarctic continent to millions of people around the world and has prompted them to consider the benefits that humankind receives from the time, effort, and money invested in Antarctica. In other words, they have been given reasons to consider the value of Antarctica. In addition, the costs of human activities in Antarctica, not merely from an economic perspective but also from environmental and social points of view, are increasingly acknowledged. Consequently, and in light of the coverage of the many aspects of human endeavour in the Antarctic, policy-makers, educators, scientists and the wider public are asked to weigh multiple costs and benefits (that is to say, values) against one another.

The balancing of Antarctic values influences a wide range of decisions. Some of these decisions will be limited to a local impact, while others may affect entire global systems, primarily via their effects on climate, culture, and international policy. Thus, understanding the extent and nature of the values that human beings place on Antarctica has large-scale and very serious implications. It was this concern that gave rise to the recognition that an action group was needed to study and report on those values. Social scientists and humanities researchers have the expertise and tools to lead an academic assessment of Antarctic values. They can offer different perspectives to those of stakeholders more directly involved in Antarctic science and policy.

Proposal and subsequent mandate

To date, there has been very little research conducted on the impact of human values relating to Antarctica. The research that has been done lacks any substantial consideration of alternative disciplinary perspectives or findings. In light of these concerns, a proposal was made to SCAR to bring into existence an action group that would investigate and report on these values from an inclusive, interdisciplinary point of view. In 2009, SCAR chose to support this group.

Objectives

The Social Science Action Group is undertaking to catalogue the range of human values associated with the southern polar continent. A secondary objective is to show the ways in which these values may have an impact on human activity in Antarctica. Connected to both these objectives is the specific aim of compiling a list of social scientists and humanities researchers who are interested in the intersection of society and polar activities. We are seeking their advice and comments about the types of polar values that exist, and the influence these types may have.

Structure

The Social Science Action Group's general structure is similar to that of the History Group. In this case, however, the duties of the chair are shared between Dr. Gary Steel and Dr. Daniela Liggett, who also handle the group's correspondence.

Although the group shares structural similarity with the History Group, there are obvious differences in contents and focus. The emphasis in the Social Science Action Group is on current values. We acknowledge, though, that these values have historical roots. Therefore, we expect to work closely with members of the History Group to insure that these roots are not overlooked in any reports or recommendations we may produce.

Progress Since Approval of the Social Science Action Group

It was decided early in the formation of the action group that reporting on this range of values, and their impacts, would require a diverse set of academic backgrounds. A steering group of experts was formed in January, 2010. They are:

- Dr. Kees Bastmeijer: Conservation Law
- Dr. Paul Berkman: Governance and Science Policy
- Dr. Sanjay Chaturvedi: Geopolitics
- Dr. Alan Hemmings: Environmental Management Policy
- Dr. Bernard Herber; Economics
- Dr. Elizabeth Leane: Arts and Humanities
- Dr. Daniela Liggett (co-chair): Tourism
- Dr. Gary Steel (co-chair): Psychology and Sociology
- Dr. Emma Stewart: Human Geography

The group has met on-line twice since January, 2010. The first meeting established the core membership. There was also some discussion regarding feasible milestones and timelines, a draft of which appears at the end of this report. The group also sought a consensus on methods for communicating within the group, and with those people who may be useful to, or simply interested in, its activities. To this end, it was decided that a panel discussion would be held at the IPY science conference in Oslo, 2010. It was hoped that this would engage social scientists and humanities researchers who are not normally part of the SCAR system, as well as those who are well familiar with SCAR's role (including natural scientists). Additionally, the Oslo forum would serve to gather a wider view of 'values'.

The members also noted that there was a need to broaden the geographic and academic disciplinary representation of the action group, possibly with the addition of a polar historian and a humanities researcher with specific expertise in interactions between art and society. Further, we wished to recruit these individuals from Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, or South America. The group is actively seeking participants from these regions and disciplines. Recommendations would be most welcome.

The SCAR website hosts an information page about the Social Science Action Group (see <http://www.scar.org/researchgroups/via/>) but, in order to reach a wider audience and encourage a greater breadth of opinions, the group is working towards the development of a second website. The website will have news and information about the group, a directory of active polar social scientists and similar researchers, and a discussion forum. An interactive documents area may also be added if funding permits.

The second meeting, in April, 2010, delved deeper into the various definitions of value, and what the range of polar values might encompass. There was further discussion about communication with other social scientists and humanities researchers, as well as the need to recruit at least one more member. A number of more minor, procedural issues were also discussed.

Further information

If you have any questions about this report, the purpose of the group, or our current activities, please contact either Dr. Steel (gary.steel@lincoln.ac.nz) or Dr. Liggett (daniela.haase@canterbury.ac.nz). As well, we would welcome correspondence from anyone in the humanities or social sciences who may wish to contribute to the group's efforts.