

Category

SH Social Sciences and Humanities

Session Number

SH-3

Session Title

Historical perspectives on Arctic and Antarctic connections

Session Description

The Arctic and Antarctica may be at opposite ends of the earth, but they share many historical connections, and knowledge gained in the North often influenced later exploits in the South. While 16th-century explorers and their backers searched for the North-West or the North-East Passages, seeking a shortcut between Europe and Asia, the southern continent remained unknown, and was even imagined by some as a place promising wealth and glory. Commerce became an important driver in both regions; whaling and sealing flourished in the Arctic before taking off in the Antarctic, and in some cases individuals and firms operated in both Polar Regions. Explorers turned from North to South, making use of their Arctic experiences in the Antarctic context, while Indigenous individuals from the North also accompanied many expeditions in order to provide polar expertise. Organizations such as the Scott Polar Research Institute, the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute of the USSR, the Norwegian Polar Institute, and the German Alfred Wegener Institute linked both Polar Regions within a common framework for both research and logistical planning, while government departments increasingly established desks with responsibilities in both Polar Regions. Research techniques developed in Antarctica have also been put to use in northern areas, reversing the original direction of exchange. The session welcomes papers from all disciplines.

Keywords: History, Polar Regions, knowledge transfer, politics, research organization, humanities, social sciences

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