



*Frost, Ice, and Snow: Cold Climate in Russian History.* Moscow: German Historical Institute (DHI Moscow); Rachel Carson for Environment and Society (RCC), 16.02.2012-18.02.2012.

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## **Frost, Ice, and Snow: Cold Climate in Russian History**

In January 2012 inhabitants of the Northern Hemisphere experienced firsthand how much cold can influence our daily life. The fact that tabloid newspapers in Western Europe referred to it as "Russian cold" demonstrates the strength of the popular association of Russia with cold. It is therefore all the more fitting that the conference "Frost, Ice, and Snow: Cold Climate in Russian History" followed in the footsteps of this cold spell, bringing these topics into connection with each other. At the conference, which was organized by the German Historical Institute in Moscow and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society and took place between 16 and 18 February 2012, scholars of environmental history, philosophy, and geography, as well as religious, film, and literary studies discussed the influence of cold climate on the Russian culture and history.

After the greeting by Nikolaus Katzer, the director of the German Historical Institute in Moscow, JULIA HERZBERG (Munich) introduced the goals of the conference, with the primary aim being to shed light on the relationship between environment and the study of history. She mentioned the discrepancy between the significance of climate for particular historical events in Russian history and the ignorance of historians up to now concerning these factors. Herzberg emphasized that the conference not only aimed to look at the gaps in research but also offered an opportunity to discuss the reasons why environmental history and climatic factors have played a minor role in previous historical scholarship. Furthermore the conference hoped to bring about a shift in fo-

cus within the environmental history of Russia and Eastern Europe. A large proportion of environmental history studies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union consider nature and the environment one-sidedly as a target of human activity. The conference offered a chance to understand the relationship between nature and society as truly interdependent. It also presented new directions in research by looking at the history of science, as well as placing everyday practices and issues of risk and vulnerability at the center of the discussion and offered an opportunity to discuss how individual and collective identities are created through discussions about cold and what significance these representations have for the understanding of oneself and others.

The first session was dedicated to ways of dealing with cold in everyday life and during the war. SVETLANA A. RAFIKOVA (Krasnojarsk) focused on adaptive practices, showing how city dwellers in the Krasnojarsk region in the 1960s managed the cold weather, developing a specifically Siberian culture. KATARZYNA CHIMIĄK (Warsaw) presented her dissertation project, in which she compares Dnepropetrovsk, Å³dÅ°, Essen and Manchester during the hard winter of 1946/47. A central question was whether and to what degree different social and economic structures led to different strategies for adaptation. The second half of the session was concerned with cold climate during the war. ANTHONY J. HEYWOOD (Aberdeen) lectured on its effects on railroads from the First World War through the February Revolution of 1917. Heywood argued against

the thesis that the difficulties with transportation and distribution of supplies resulting from the snow and extreme cold were a primary cause for the February Revolution. ALEKSANDER L. KUZÂMINYKH (Vologda) examined the influence of the Russian winter on German soldiers first on the front and later in prisoner of war camps in and after the Second World War. He discussed why Russian and Soviet historians of World War II have ignored the importance of climate for so long.

The second session, "Coping with Cold" looked at the function of cold and snow both as a threat and as a focal point for building a common identity, as well as serving a recreational function. Using a catastrophic avalanche in the Khibiny Region on the Kola Peninsula in 1935, ANDY BRUNO (Urbana-Champaign) showed how socially produced vulnerabilities are expressed environmentally. Peasants forced to migrate during the settlement and industrialization of the north were most exposed to the dangers of avalanches. The tragic event was a catalyst for renewed efforts to scientifically predict the likelihood of avalanches. The presentation of MARC ELIE (Paris) also focused on a catastrophic avalanche, looking at the disaster in 1966 in Alma-Ata. Avalanches, he argued, present the greatest threat to city growth and sport tourism. Elie showed how a local disaster in central Asia led to avalanches becoming a focus of scientific, technological, and government efforts. The phenomenon of cold also influenced the formation of masculine identity and cultural heroes, as ALEKSANDR ANANÂEV (Moscow) showed using examples of polar explorers and hockey players. ALEKSEI D. POPOV (Simferopolâ) offered a new perspective on the history of tourism with his presentation on Soviet winter tourism as a seasonal phenomenon. He described how the significance of winter tourism changed over the decades from the 1920s to the 1990s. It ceased to function as ideological and physical training in preparation for wartime duties.

"Changing Climates" was the topic of the third session, which began the second day of the conference. JULIA LAJUS (St. Petersburg) presented her work with SVERKER SÄRLIN (Stockholm). Lajus discussed the significance of sea ice studies for Soviet arctic science and looked at its connections to ice and snow research in Sweden. She used the biographies and research results of Soviet and Swedish scientists to show how much contact and cooperation there was across the Iron Curtain. PAUL JOSEPHSON (Waterville) looked at the industrialization of the Russian north as ordered by Moscow and inquired into the environmental damage and social costs which the transformation of the region brought with it.

He demonstrated that the Bolsheviks ignored both the climatic and geological conditions as well as the knowledge of the local population, which resulted in a sharp increase in the environmental costs. JONATHAN OLD-FIELD (Glasgow) presented a counterpoint to this in his paper, arguing that the understanding of the reciprocal relationship between society and nature improved after the Second World War. He showed that Soviet geographers of the 1950s not only recognized the importance of climate as a historical and dynamic process, but also pointed out the dangers of climate change. Like Oldfield, DENIS J. B. SHAW (Birmingham) concerned himself with one of the most important Soviet geographers, A. A. Grigorâev and his text "Subarktika," focusing on Grigorâev's studies of the tundra. The discussion following both contributions showed once again how much research and politics were intertwined during the Cold War.

The papers in the following session, "Civilizing Coldness," focused on the period around the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Thus EKATERINA A. DEGALÂTSEVA (Biisk) talked about the mythically colored image of the "Sibiriyakâ" that developed in Russia in the nineteenth century, showing how climatic conditions influenced the (self)perception of Siberian residents. NATALIA RODOGINA (Novosibirsk) focused on the significance of climate on the representations of Siberia in the Russian media in the second half of the nineteenth century. Of central importance was the question of whether the narrative of Siberia as a land of cold helped to integrate the region into the empire or whether it hindered this process. Imperial attitudes towards the periphery were also the subject of the presentation by IAN W. CAMPBELL (California-Davis/Harvard) on *zhut* in Kazakhstan. *Zhut* is a weather phenomenon occurring every ten to twelve years, characterized by the freezing of fodder grasses and resulting starvation of livestock, and was used by the scientists and bureaucrats in the waning empire to devalue the nomadic lifestyle and promote their ideas about the "modernization" of the steppes. DAVID SAUNDERS (Newcastle) looked at the economic and technological development of the Russian arctic. Saunders made clear that the personal aptitudes of the people involved played a decisive role. From the perspective of a geographer ERKI TAMMIK-SAAR (Tartu) reconstructed the discovery of the Antarctic in the 1820s, another controversial topic during the Cold War due to the difficulty of clearly delineating a mass of ice. Therefore he argued that one should acknowledge multiple discoverers in different time periods,

and base our evaluation on the knowledge available in their time. The competition to develop the Antarctic, as well as the initial discovery of it, demonstrates how scientific accomplishments were used for propaganda during the Cold War.

The last session of the second day examined cold as an aesthetic phenomenon and an imagined feeling. OKSANA BULGAKOWA (Mainz) began with a media and film studies approach to the topic. Using key examples from Russian/Soviet film history, she looked at the ways cold was narrated and portrayed. Bulgakowa showed that the films contributed to making snow an important component of national identity. While Bulgakowa was concerned with the Russians's image of themselves, ROMAN MAUER (Mainz) was interested in the portrayal of Russian cold in German films of the post-war period. Here cold functioned as a symbol of trauma, allowing Germans to portray themselves as victims of the Soviet regime and to suppress questions of guilt and responsibility.

The third day continued the examination of artistic portrayals of cold, now turning to the medium of literature. SUSANNE FRANK (Berlin) discussed permafrost as a metaphor for memory in gulag literature. Starting with *Anna Karenina* as a figure for the *other* in eighteenth-century literature, she suggested that in gulag literature ice gained a new function in addition to the classical one: it allowed projections of the future and of the possibility of living on (after death). The subsequent discussion emphasized that, particularly in hagiographic writing, the usual negative connotations of cold may be supplemented with positive ones. Similar comments were made regarding the presentation of religious scholar JOSEF SCHOVANEC (Alfortville) on freezing as a spiritual experience. Schovanec showed that authors of autobiographical gulag literature often portray snow, ice, and cold as active forces. This presentation thus offered an opportunity to discuss the analytical value of the approach to think of nature as an actor.

The next session, *Representations Between Science and Politics* was introduced by PEY-YI CHU (Princeton). She described how a scientific discipline developed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s which made permafrost soil the object of scientific investigation and argued that this was also a strategy to present the permafrost zones as regions of economic significance. She discussed how different conceptions of the permafrost led to it being manifested in various visualizations. CAROLIN F. ROEDER (Harvard) dedicated her presentation to the Yeti as a *transna-*

tional monster. She showed how even during the Cold War discourses about the Yeti overcame national boundaries and how it became a locus for discussion about *science* and *pseudoscience*.

In his concluding remarks KLAUS GESTWA (Tübingen) reflected upon the results of the conference, identified a number of central themes and suggested possibilities for further research. In many presentations, he noted, the human, societal and economic costs of the harsh climate were particularly evident. At the same time, events such as Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 or the Second World War also had a protective function. The conference showed, Gestwa concluded, how closely the history of cold is linked with science and technology. Above all the history of science during the Cold War, which was the subject of multiple presentations, showed that during the Cold War the investigation of *cold*, of all things, offered opportunities for scientific collaboration which transcended ideological differences. Gestwa expressed regret that the majority of presentations approached the cold regions from the point of view of outsiders, while the perspective of the indigenous population was only rarely considered. He proposed using the dichotomy *challenge* and *threat* as analytical categories and giving further consideration to the problem of whether nature can be described as an agent or actor. In the final discussion conference participants suggested other topics for further investigation, for example, to look more closely at ways of dealing with cold in everyday life, at the connection between climate and perceptions of space, as well as linguistic aspects of the subject. Many contributions to the conference made clear that cold can develop its own dynamic, demonstrating that nature is more than just an object of human activity.

### Conference Overview:

#### *Welcome and Introduction*

Nikolaus Katzer (DHI Moscow), Julia Herzberg (RCC Munich)

#### *Session 1: Mundane and Exceptional Times*

Chair: Andreas Renner (Tübingen)

Svetlana A. Rafikova (Krasnoïarsk): *Siberian Frosts and the Everyday Adaptation Practices of City Dwellers*

Katarzyna Chimiak (Warsaw): *Challenging Crisis: Human Strategies of Adaptation and Survival during the Winter of 1946/1947 in Dnepropetrovsk, Å³dÅ°, Essen, and Manchester*

Anthony J. Heywood (Aberdeen): Transport for War in a Cold Climate: Russia's Railways, July 1914 to March 1917

Aleksandr L. Kuzâminykh (Vologda): The Wehrmacht and the Russian Winter: the Influence of Climate on German Servicemen on the Front and in Soviet Captivity (1941-1956)

*Session 2: Coping with Cold*

Chair: Erki Tammiksaar (Tartu)

Andy Bruno (Urbana-Champaign): Tumbling Snow: Avalanches in the Soviet North

Marc Elie (Paris): Winter Sports, Ice Sciences, and Avalanches in Soviet Central Asia, 1950s-1980s

Aleksandr V. Anan'ev (Moscow): Heroes of the Ice: Two Masculine Identity Scripts of the Soviet Era—Hockey Player and Polar Explorer—and their Actualization at the Start of the Twenty-First Century

Aleksei D. Popov (Simferopolâ): Winter Tourism in the Soviet Union: School of Courage, Competitive Brand, National Pastime

*Session 3: Changing Climates*

Chair: Carolin F. Roeder (Harvard)

Julia Lajus (St. Petersburg): Cryo-Connections, Political Friendship and the Prospects of an Ice-Free Arctic, 1928-1955

Paul Josephson (Waterville): Soviet Efforts to Transform Nature in the Russian Northwest (Arkhangelsk and Murmansk provinces, Karelian Republic)

Jonathan Oldfield (Glasgow): Conceptualisations of Climate Change amongst Soviet Geographers from ca. 1945 to the early 1970s

Denis J. B. Shaw (Birmingham): The Subarctic: A Classic Study of the Tundra

*Session 4: Civilizing Coldness*

Chair: Marc Elie (Paris)

Ekaterina A. Degalâtseva (Biisk): Sibirsk as a Concentrated Concept of Russian Cold (a Case Study of the

Nineteenth Century)

Nataliia N. Rodigina (Novosibirsk): From the Country of Cold and Darkness to the Promised Land: the Role of the Climate in the Construction of Siberia's Image in the Russian Magazine Press of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Ian W. Campbell (Davis, CA): The Nomad Who Came in from the Cold: Zhut and Civilizational Difference in the Late Nineteenth Century

David Saunders (Newcastle): Commerce and Technology in the Development of the Russian Arctic (1862-1921)

Erki Tammiksaar (Tartu): Russian South Pole Expedition in the Context of Political Interests of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union

*Session 5: Imagining Coldness*

Chair: Julia Herzberg (Munich)

Oksana Bulgakova (Mainz): Global Warming

Roman Mauer (Mainz): The Aesthetics of Cold and National Trauma in Film: Escape from a Siberian POW Camp

*Session 6: Metaphors and Narratives*

Chair: Roman Mauer (Mainz)

Susanne Frank (Berlin): Permafrost as a Metaphor of Memory in Russian GULAG Literature (Pavel Florenskii, Varlam Shalamov)

J. P. Schovanec (Alfortville): Frost as a Spiritual Experience: Written Accounts of Foreign Detainees in Stalinist Camps

*Session 7: Representations Between Science and Politics*

Chair: Paul Josephson (Waterville)

Pey-Yi Chu (Princeton): Mapping Permafrost Country: Visualizations of Frozen Earth in Russian History

Carolin F. Roeder (Harvard): A Creature of the Cold War: Soviet Science and the Snowman

*Concluding Session*

Klaus Gestwa (Tübingen): Concluding Remarks

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<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

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