



The meeting of the Social and Human Working Group of IASC (SHWG)

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stronger connections not only between researchers in wide-ranging fields but also provide an opportunity to bring together large national and international programmes. Antarctica and the Southern Ocean exert a significant influence on the rest of the planet, playing a key role in the regulation of global climate by absorbing large quantities of heat and carbon from the atmosphere, and occupying a special space as a global commons in the geopolitical system. Diverse ecosystems and species inhabit these regions, some of commercial significance, and the fate of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet is considered the greatest remaining unsolved problem in terms of global sea level rise. Integrated approaches to research and coordinated efforts to improve long-term monitoring are vital for this remote, but complex and important region. The main take-home message was that we need to continue bringing together not only researchers from the two poles, but from a wide range of disciplines, in order to ensure the right questions are being asked for the challenges ahead.

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The meeting of the Social and Human Working Group of IASC (SHWG)

(17 June 2018, Davos, Switzerland)

During its meeting in Potsdam in 2011 the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) established the Social and Human Working Group (SHWG). It is one of five working groups, the others being Atmosphere (AWG), Cryosphere (CWG), Marine (MWG) and Terrestrial (TWG). SHWG consists of 38 members representing 20 countries with a broad competence in disciplines within the social sciences, humanities and health sciences. Collectively, the group has an extensive transdisciplinary research experience, with a number of ambitious and collaborative projects (such as the Arctic Human Development Report, Arctic Social Indicators, Long-term Perspectives on Arctic Social-Ecological Systems) under its belt, and is characterised by a substantial cultural and disciplinary diversity, scientific excellence and extensive networks.

The scientific scope of the SHWG includes all aspects of the social sciences and humanities in the Arctic, as well as their connections with other IASC Working Groups. It is imperative to integrate social and human perspectives into international efforts to address issues of climate and environmental change. Not only does human behaviour have an enormous influence on the environment, but changing natural environments in the Arctic also directly and indirectly affect people. Therefore, a wide range of topics is of interest to the SHWG, including human health and well-being; exploitation and development of natural resources; governance and law; vulnerability and resilience in changing social-ecological systems; and

histories, perceptions and representations of the Arctic. As demonstrated by the activities supported in 2017/2018, SHWG members address these topics in all manners of ways: by going into depth on core concepts, by bringing a global perspective to the Arctic or by working closely with local stakeholders.

In addition to these, the SHWG continues to develop its cross-cutting activities along the research priorities that emerged from the Third International Conference on Arctic Research Planning – Roadmap for the Future (ICARP III). The ICARP III process concluded that more research is needed into ‘Cultural Responses to Long-Term Arctic Change’. In light of this, the SHWG continued to support the Sustainable Arctic Infrastructure Forum and launched a new cross-cutting initiative entitled ‘Long-term impacts, vulnerability and resilience in Arctic social-ecological systems’ that focuses on the Arctic’s paleo-history as a starting point for further investigation into what factors contribute to long-term vulnerability and resilience in complex human-environment relationships.

SHWG had its annual meeting during *POLAR 2018* in Davos. Important items such as the adoption of the Work Plan 2017–2022, the development of interdisciplinary initiatives, the recommendations of the IASC Action Group ‘Communicating Arctic Science to Policy-Makers’ (CASP) and indigenous participation were discussed. Together with other IASC Working Groups (WGs), SHWG has allocated funding for the following cross-cutting initiatives: *Rapid Arctic Transitions due to Infrastructure and Climate*; *Air Pollution in the Arctic: Climate Environment and Societies (PACES)*; *Year of Polar Prediction*; *Permafrost on all channels*; *High Latitude Dust*; and *Societal Relevance of Polar Research*. Initiatives by SHWG members that were funded include: *Human land use in permafrost landscapes*; *Gender in the Arctic*; and *Global Arctic – Understanding Peace in the Arctic*.

The IASC Action Group ‘CASP’ has had a series of meetings as well as organising a session at the Arctic Circle in Reykjavík in 2017. The main concern of the group was to identify what the best position may be for IASC to communicate Arctic science to policy-makers, and also what the organisation’s limitations might be. In the final report presented to the IASC Council, the group provided a set of recommendations on how IASC can contribute further to scientific communication and offer advice in a way that does not duplicate the efforts of others.

The IASC Council discussed and voted on the Terms of Reference for a new IASC Action Group on Indigenous Involvement at its meeting in Davos. These Terms of Reference were put forward by a scoping group, created for that task in particular and chaired by SHWG member Gail Fondahl. At its meeting, the Council approved the Terms of Reference and established the Action Group, which is tasked with providing recommendations on how to support and increase indigenous involvement.

The large *POLAR 2018* conference in Davos included a variety of social-science themes, demonstrating a strong position in Arctic research. In its efforts the SHWG highlights cooperation with the other science organisations that hold observer status to the Arctic Council (International Arctic Social Science Association (IASSA) and UArctic). There has also been a recent strengthening of Antarctic cooperation. Together with representatives from the Humanities and Social Sciences Expert Group of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, the SHWG co-organised the session ‘Polar research in the humanities and social sciences’ at Polar2018 and also shared efforts in developing an EU PolarNet White Paper titled ‘The Road to the Desired Future States of Social-ecological Systems in the Polar Regions’. The central task with the latter initiative was to look at the Sustainable Development Goals and how they fit with the Polar Regions, with the aim of informing a more targeted approach to sustainable development. The initiative should raise funding opportunities for projects addressing the theme and the knowledge gaps identified.