



Dear reader,

The European Arctic region is currently being visited by hordes of enthusiasts, making their way out into the snow-clad landscape, wearing brightly coloured sports jackets and body-hugging outfits. For most of them, all they want is a few hours on the skiing trails in order to achieve a deep sense of inner satisfaction for the rest of the day.

But some of them may be looking for more. Maybe some of them would like to gain a deeper understanding of how natural resources and a dependence on trails characterise the northernmost parts of Europe. To those citizens with an interest in society, I just have this to say: Congratulations! Mistra Arctic's website has never contained as much information about this as it does now....

Films featuring researchers on the website

On Friday 17 November, Mistra Arctic's researchers presented their most important findings at an open meeting at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. The research presentations and panel debate were all recorded and can now be accessed on the Mistra Arctic website: www.mistraarctic.se. Below are some of the voices from the meeting.

Focusing on the image of the Arctic

The Mistra Arctic Sustainable Development (MASD) research programme focuses on the northernmost part of Europe – northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and north-western Russia. Even though these areas have in many cases started to be viewed as “Arctic”, Northern Europe is very different from other Arctic regions:

“In Northern Europe, governmental authorities and commercial stakeholders from the south have been interacting with populations in the north for much longer than in many other Arctic regions,” explains Carina Keskitalo, scientific programme manager for MASD. “The forestry industry, for example, has been in Northern Scandinavia since the 14th century.

“This means that it might not be as easy to describe Northern Europe in the same way as other northern areas are described. Virtually all industries in the region are well institutionalised and based on strong, historically developed patterns for resource utilisation and interests – as well as, for example, conflicts around land utilisation going back a long way in time.”

Highlighting conditions for land utilisation

The purpose of the research programme has been to identify what the conditions for land utilisation and industry in this area have been like throughout history until the present day, and thereby to clarify the conditions for the future governance of issues relating to natural resources in the region.

The main financier is the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research (Mistra), which has contributed around SEK 30 million over the years. With the support of this resource, the researchers have promised within four years to increase knowledge of how historical developments and the current situation both control and limit the opportunities for the better utilisation of natural resources and planning in the northernmost parts of Europe. Asked whether she believes that they have succeeded with this, Carina Keskitalo responds in the affirmative:

“We’ve had so many researchers from so many different social science and humanist disciplines, who haven’t previously worked together in this way, that we’ve been able to compile knowledge that isn’t normally available in this way.”

What is the most important result from MASD?

“The fact that we can analyse developments from the 14th century until the present day in several different natural resource sectors, and see how the historical development of one sector even affects what can be done today – and in the future.”

The Mistra Arctic Sustainable Development (MASD) research programme has been coordinated for the last four years by Arcum, the Arctic Research Centre at Umeå University. More than 30 researchers are involved in the research programme, which is now entering its final phase. In addition to Umeå University (the Department of Geography and Economic History and the Department of Political Science), there are also researchers from the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) and the institutes of environmental and peace research respectively in Stockholm (SEI and SIPRI), and also from various research institutes in Russia, Norway and Finland.

A few more voices from researchers who have taken part in the programme:

Jan Kunnas, who recently completed a post-doctoral programme at the Royal Institute of Technology:

“My research in MASD shows that the changes in forestry from the 18th century until the present day have often been faster than the rate at which trees grow. In decisions on methods and species that are used to regenerate forests, we ought to be able to predict future needs over a period of time up to and beyond one hundred years. When it comes to forests, this can mean that you should use more different kinds of trees and better protect biodiversity.”

Annika E Nilsson, senior researcher at the Stockholm Environment Institute:

“In a changing world, decision-makers in northernmost Europe must at all times analyse how uncertain global future interact with local and regional conditions. Our contribution to this work is a method in which we work together to create future narratives that link local and global perspectives. We have applied this method in places such as Pajala, Bodö and Kirovsk.”

Niklas Eklund, senior researcher at the Department of Political Science at Umeå University:

“The MASD programme has given us the chance to discuss our research with not only representatives of authorities and political bodies, but also citizens in different parts of northern Scandinavia. I quite simply believe that it's made me view the northern territory as more vibrant and relevant. If I'm fortunate, those people I've spoken to and made presentations to have also gained a better understanding of which global forces affect living conditions.”

Having shared these news items, I'd like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Lena Maria Nilsson
Communications Officer for Mistra Arctic