

# **Youn Researcher Report: Open Assembly Panel: *Humanity, Communities, Minds, Perceptions, and Knowledge on Ice***

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## ***Humanity, Communities, Minds, Perceptions, and Knowledge on Ice Panelists:***

- Dr. Ludmila Gashilova (Head of the Institute of the Peoples of the North, Russian State Pedagogical University)
- Ms. Liisa Holmberg (Rector of the Saami Education Centre & Saami Parliament in Finland)
- Mr. Edward Itta (Mayor of North Slope Borough, Alaska)
- Dr. Bob Su (Department of Water Resources at University of Twente, Netherlands)

Sunday's Northern Research Forum Assembly panel on *Humanity, Communities, Minds, Perceptions, and Knowledge on Ice* presented four geographically distinct presentations regarding knowledge and adaptation, considering the Indigenous Siberian, Saami, and Inupiaq peoples as well as the broader implications of the Third Pole and its inclusion in global considerations.

Despite the differences in language, culture, tradition, and geography, each of the four presenters shared concern not only for the changes in climate, environment, and weather, but also concern for how those changes impact the human populations and their traditional lifestyles. Gashilova, Holmberg, Itta, and Su each emphasized, with varied contexts and examples, the imperative relevance of Traditional Knowledge interfacing with Western science, involving the communities themselves becoming participants in the research process. This human-centered approach was a unique and engaging way of linking environmental discussions (both from this panel itself and the assembly as a whole) to the people and life that inhabit the

land; as Greenland's Prime Minister Kuupik Kleist remarked in his opening statement, "people live in the arctic, too, and have for thousands of years, and will continue to do so". Not only do the residents of the arctic (and the Third Pole) depend on the environment to retain traditional lifestyles and patterns, but the human population is also the keenest observer of its rhythms and movements and can provide histories (written, oral, and otherwise) that greatly augment scientific data and can direct and advise its future as well. The inherent and powerful connection between the human population and their landscapes, including the important role ice plays in these landscapes, was a key thread throughout the panel.

Adaptation, rather than acquiescence, was highlighted in both Dr. Ludmila Gashilova and Ms. Liisa Holmberg's presentations about the eastern arctic Siberian and Saami communities, with examples of technology and education being combined with Traditional Indigenous Knowledge to preserve and retain ancient patterns, skills, and teachings. In addition to adaptation amongst the Saami, Holmberg also suggested the strength of inter-cultural exchange and discussion as a tool for retention of Traditional Knowledge and expansion of a collective Indigeniety. Mayor Itta also conveyed the magnitude of retaining the millennia of Inupiaq traditions, particularly in the face of immense changes and outside influence. Itta acknowledged that some of the advancements bring both benefits and detriments to the Inupiaq people, but that finding a balance between tradition and change was a positive direction to explore. Mayor Itta's wisdom regarding the flora and fauna of Alaska's North Slope echoed Gashilova and Holberg's discussions of the importance of the reindeer for the Siberian and Saami peoples. All three presenters interacted with Dr. Su's questions about adaptation to change and use of the past to predict change in their discussion of animal patterns, and the arctic expertise of regional resources underscored Su's assertion that stakeholders and community members are essential in scientific research, both as observers and participants.

Following the four panelists' presentations, discussions emerged regarding how the first and third poles interact, and how their human populations, though geographically disparate, can share and exchange experiences and observations. Gashilova, Holberg, Itta, and Su all focused

strongly on stakeholder contributions, and as such the question of who and how stakeholders are determined or chosen emerged, to which Mayor Itta was able to provide a very succinct breakdown of the regional, tribal, state and federal channels in the Alaskan Inupiaq traditional territory. This led to further conversations about community divisions related to environmental and economic concerns as well as differing opinions about progress, adaptation, and change experienced by all Indigenous groups faced by Western culture and influence.

With humanity as a key stakeholder in all Polar issues, the importance of preservation stressed, as the environment is a necessary sustainer of life and not simply an abstract concept, and the panel on *Humanity, Minds, Perception and Knowledge on Ice* brought the human element to the forefront.