

# Forest as Area of Communication in Arctic Context – Pre-Study

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**Abstract.** This paper introduces a short pilot study on the concept FOREST COMMUNICATION in an Arctic or Boreal context. The study presents the preliminaries for more extensive comparative studies between Russia and Sweden. Basic data about different interpretations of the central concepts ARCTIC, FOREST, BOREAL and COMMUNICATION are presented and introduced as the base for the study and continuations in the future. The work is based upon qualitative methodology and foremost phenomenology. The main idea is to present the essence of the concepts used. The authors make a statement that the original concept ARCTIC has extended its connotation and that presently the idea of the forest as a major part of the Arctic has to be investigated. The importance of considering special forms of communication in the extended context is discussed and will be the start of future more specialized studies.

## 1 Concepts

In this paper we will present a pilot study and initiate a discussion about the concepts FOREST and BOREAL in an Arctic context, we can also talk about forest communication in a Boreal context. The concept BOREAL is relatively common in different databases, with scientific or popular content. The main meaning of this concept is connected to the area of forestry and has a certain ecological, economical and social content (1). The main idea is that we as human beings are depending on forests to survive as a species and that the communication in this context has to do with the usage of the forest in the best way to obtain optimal socio-economical usage of and relation to the forest. The communication in this context is not so much with the forest itself as with other human beings where the subject and the context is the forest. One concrete example is to describe how people working in the forest use telecommunications to communicate with each other.

The main concept for our paper will be a final more specified concept: FOREST COMMUNICATION where the focus will be on different types of communication patterns and structures developed in connection with and in the forest. We will suggest an initiative to study this concept more in-depth in Swedish and Russian contexts and our present work should be defined as initial and on a planning stage. The states of Russia and Sweden present an interesting approach to the concept since Russia has been considered as an Arctic State for

centuries and Sweden just recently considers itself as an Arctic state. Comparisons between linguistic communication in the two states on FOREST COMMUNICATION will be of high and special interest.

## 2 Arctic

The idea of the Arctic has a very deep foundation in popular awareness among the people and nations of the northern hemisphere. In non-scientific literature, meaning everything from novels and short stories on one hand to biographies and travel reports on the other, the idea of the Arctic has a strong base. A literature search on the concept Arctic in general databases will give a wide and general non-specific result. Scientifically, the results give us information from the biological and industrial spheres. In the book “A History of the Arctic” (2) we get an in-depth study of the many possibilities to interpret the concept Arctic, including the peoples who live there.

The Arctic has become a concept, which unites several countries and regions in the Northern hemisphere. The concept is popularly used to join a large and wide area of land and general ideas and meanings. Originally, the concept was clearly connected to the ice-covered areas in the far north, but during the last few decades, the idea of the Arctic has come, mainly because of an intentional extension of the concept related to the climate change, to include geographical and cultural regions not explicitly connected to ice and cold, the

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Boreal region (3). The Arctic then encompasses a European, a North American and an Asian part. In the North American part, Canada and the USA are sub-parts. In the European part, the Nordic countries and Russia are sub-parts and in the Asian part, Russia is alone even though the northern islands of Japan are sometimes mentioned in this context. In the European part, the concept of the Barents Region has developed into assimilating Boreal areas into the Arctic ones.

There is a lot of research activity regarding many different aspects on the context "Arctic" of relevance on national, regional and local (mostly municipal) levels in northern Europe. Forestry, for instance, is practiced in northern Sweden and Finland – and would thus constitute a resource use sector of broader "Arctic" relevance. Research is also going on in areas around the globe, defining them as Arctic, where Canada and Russia dominate (4).

The recent international attention towards Arctic issues and the involvement of the EU and initially the Russian and North American/Canadian interests, have pointed to the need for Sweden to develop a political and economical position towards the Arctic. A concise discourse analysis of the development of the concept ARCTIC was made at the Swedish Centre on Arctic Research (4). The Swedish position regarding its north is that it is more a part of a general northern region where Boreal is a more dominating concept than Arctic. However, Sweden has slowly been integrated into a northern area, which is called Barents, roughly including the nations of Finland, Norway, Russia, Sapmi and Sweden. (Sapmi is considered as a nation crossing over the formal country borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia). Although the two remaining Nordic countries Denmark (with Greenland) and Iceland geographically and historically should be considered as belonging to the Arctic, they do not touch upon the Barents region.

The Swedish perception of the Arctic is distant and limited. Although Swedes took part in the Bering expeditions as well as the mapping of Sibiria by the Swedish-German cartographer Philip Johann von Strahlenberg, Swedish imprints on the general history of the Arctic are few but including Nordenskiöld and Andrée. The most well known documented experience is the venture by the engineer Mr S.A. Andrée to reach the North Pole by balloon in 1897. This venture represents one big part of the Swedish experience of the concept ARCTIC, that of being the unknown mystery that has to be conquered. It has also given birth to numerous investigations about the reasons for the tragic outcome of the expedition, where a recent Swedish report in many ways can be considered as the ultimate one (5). Sweden was represented in the Arctic by other explorers, mainly A.E. Nordenskiöld. He led the big Vega-expedition in 1878 who successfully discovered and completed the North-Eastern passage.

Recent Swedish activities in the Arctic and especially on Svalbard have been well documented (6). Sweden takes active part in research related to climate changes and animal life in the arctic where Svalbard is in the center. It is also active in the Nordic council regarding

Arctic affairs with the genome center on Svalbard as a concrete example and within the framework of the Arctic University, but formally it did not develop an official Arctic strategy until 2011. As was mentioned in the background (see above) most of the historical references on hunting, represent the idea of freedom and no limits. Concludingly, we find that the Arctic in Swedish references can represent the unknown mystery to be conquered, and freedom without limitations.

It is very common to find translations of texts about the Arctic from other languages into Swedish, often from Russian, which naturally is of special interest to this text.

Historically, Sweden made an effort in the early 17th century to include parts of the Dano-Norwegian lands along the Northern coastline of present-day Norway, starting in the west at Lofoten and going on to the Nordkapp, taxing the Sami people living there. However, when the king Karl IX proclaimed him "king of all lapps" (2) the Dano-Norwegians sent in troupes and beat the Swedes. The result of the peace treaty at Knäred then made the Swedes leave any claims to the North-Atlantic coastline forever. Since Sweden then had control over present day Finland, it also had access to the Arctic regions closer to Russia and the competition, regarding for instance the Kola Peninsula.

An interesting part of the Swedish approach to the Arctic is that it is not just considered to be something to the north. The direction of the east has always been included into the concept, which may be a result of the intense and sometimes antagonistic relations with Russia during the centuries. The idea of exploring the Arctic has somehow also included the exploration of the east, mainly focussing on Siberia where Swedes have taken part in several explorations.

Sweden, however, was active in the Arctic Barents region already about 100 years ago, specifically on the islands of Svalbard where the coal mine Svea was established. This mine has also been reactivated during recent years. Hunting was another intensive activity on Svalbard where some hunters have reached legendary status and would merit research projects in their own right.

The Arctic is mostly associated with ice, snow, the Arctic Ocean, polar bears, northern lights and other phenomena, connecting to the perception of winter and cold. The unique nature of the Arctic region as well as huge energy resources, in particular oil and gas attract the attention of many states at the political level. Russia as the largest Arctic country actively participates in the development of the Arctic region. The Arctic space is viewed in Russia as a priority of strategic planning. Numerous statements by the President of the Russian Federation on the importance of the Arctic, the adoption of the Arctic Development Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020 as well as the ongoing development of the law "On the Arctic Zone of Russia" attest to this. The basic normative document defining the state policy of Russia in the Arctic is the Fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period up to 2020 and a further perspective that were approved by the President of the Russian Federation on September 18, 2008. This document

introduced a new term - the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation, which allows the Russian scientists to describe the Arctic macroregion from the perspective of Russian interests. In the official discourse of Russia and Sweden, the Arctic is represented approximately equally. In both countries, the Arctic region is a unique natural environment, a source of minerals, the original place of life of the indigenous peoples of the North, important element of geopolitics and of course a problem zone in terms of ecology today. As the primary aspect of the Arctic region, of course, the geographical principle is considered. From the geographical point of view, this is first of all, the Arctic region, the Arctic Circle, the North. Recently, the Arctic is considered a macro-region, where there is an intensified international cooperation. Our article is one of the manifestations of international cooperation in the field of Arctic discourse research.

### 3 Forest

In the dissertation by Buterina (7) the totality of the concept FOREST is discussed by defining a large number of areas or themes to study the whole of the concept FOREST. In this paper we do not have the focus, neither the need to cover all of her categories or themes. We are focussing on communication in the forest and those who are communicating and how they communicate and interact. The dissertation, however, highlights the wide complexity and richness of the concept as such.

While the concept of the Arctic is often treated as strange, distant, exciting, dangerous etc. the forest is described as closer and more part of the idea of being Swedish. This idea is expressed in literature, in art, in research and of course in the fact that the Swedish economy is based to a large part on forestry (4). In a well known Swedish proverb it is expressed that when you call out in the forest you will always get an answer (Som man ropar i skogen får man svar). Furthermore, forestry has to a large content been exported as a technology to Russia, already in the late 1800's, and this process is documented in several historical scientific reports which will be discussed in future reports. This is a clear concrete example of the connection between Russia and Sweden regarding the concept FOREST.

A common concept of forest in Sweden and Russia is that it is a place of life. We can talk about four categories of beings, representing life in the forest and thereby being communicators: humans, mythical beings, animals and the forest itself, the vegetation on collective as well as individual level. The forest itself is alive and when forestry is applied, it is in many ways representing a process of death of some of the life involved. There is a conflict between the need of humans to work with forestry for utilitarian and commercial reasons and a more unspecified reason to keep nature as it is because it also has the right to live. A certain mystery is perceived, involving mythical creatures having a long history in the cultural life of Sweden. They very seldom have common interests with humans and when they meet, especially in older original myths, it is incidental or accidental and

often one of the parts has to loose to the other. Beings like gnomes, trolls, forest ladies, man in the lake (= waterhorse in Scottish tradition) and others disappear slowly from the awareness of humans and science and no-nonsense approaches take over and reduce those mythical creatures to a (distant) memory. And thereby the forest loses one category of its perceived inhabitants. The mythical creatures are like a projection of the humans of their own ideas of those things that cannot be described in so called rational terms.

In Russian folklore, the spirits of nature are actively represented in mythological tales. The representatives of the Russian North talk about the existence of *lesoviki* (forest spirits). In the Russian folklore there are also folk beliefs about *leshiy* (forest devil), whose name is taboo in the forest itself. The characteristic image of the *leshiy* is very different. It can take a phytomorphic, zoomorphic, ornithomorphic and anthropomorphic image. In the northern Russian folklore stories, one can find references to the abduction of the damned children, the marriage relations of the devil with a woman from the world of people. In a case when a child has lost his way in the forest, elderly people, or, more precisely, old women with foresight, tell their parents and relatives to wrap up some things of the child in the package late at night and carry it to the thicket so that the spirit of the forest will release the child. (8) Often the *leshiy* is portrayed in the northern taiga as the master of the beast. In the North of Russia, there are even ceremonial ritual rules of people's behavior when meeting with *leshiy*: ceremonies at the entrance to the forest, "tasting" the one who watched, protections from the forest devil (for example, dressing clothes on the left side in the forest), rituals when spending the night in a forest cabin (9). Northerners in Russia tend to believe in the existence of otherworldly forces. In the literature one can find references to the fact that, especially in extreme situations, the interpenetration of the so-called parallel worlds. And representatives of the other world can help in getting out of the unpleasant situations in the forest. In folklore, there are special verdicts like "Damn, damn, lead, lead and let go!" (8).

The chief inhabitant of the taiga in the Arctic region of Russia is a brown bear. A brown bear may not be called by his real name in the forest by virtue of taboo. For the nomination of this animal in forest communication between people, the notation "Potapych" or "Mikhailo Potapych" (Russian euphemistic nicknames to a brown bear), "kosolapyj" (clumsy), "kosmatyj" (shaggy), *khodzain* (master) etc. are suggested. Recently, in connection with the increase in the number of bears and wolves in the northern taiga of Russia, people meet with these animals not only in the forest, but also in remote settlements. In popular science literature related to the northern taiga, descriptions of encounters with the brown bear are given, which sometimes contain indications that people are singing in the forest loudly or whistling in order to avoid a meeting with him (8). Advice is also given by the forest specialists, according to which in the forest should be given signals to other people and wild animals about themselves in the form of whistling and singing. The

cases when meeting with a brown bear has turned to a dialogue of a person and this wild animal are also described. So, we can find a description, when one of the taiga fishermen, was fishing, and the bear ate its caught fish, lying on the ground and did not attack the fisherman at all, but asked for more fish (8).

Roughly the same animals inhabit boreal areas everywhere as well as arctic areas. Some variations are found in the boreal areas close to alp country as in the northwest of Sweden, where reindeers and wolverines and occasional wolves add to the fauna. The dominating theme here is that animals have limited rights to their lives because of the domination of humans. However, humans also take a certain responsibility for protecting animals from suffering and extinction. Humans hunt animals, eat them and use them as trophies. Humans also enjoy a certain imagined closeness with animals by keeping them in zoos, more or less close to the natural habitats of the animals.

An interesting fact is the possibility of the existence in the Russian North of local-group nicknames with the designation of forest animals. The inhabitants of some northern villages of Russia are called by using the names of forest "dwellers". Let us quote the statements of the real inhabitants of the north, translated into English after they were recorded on a tape recorder and digitized in the text format.

"Soyants are Chukhari, because we live in the forest. Chukhar is a bird ... Well, chuhar is a wood grouse". (inhabitant of the Soyana village, Mesen rayon, Arkhangelsk oblast, 2009).

"Residents of Zasurye village are hares, because hares often run out of the forest in this village" (inhabitant of the Sluda village Pinaga rayon, Arkhangelsk oblast, 1998). (9)

The forest itself that is the flora, is of course alive and thereby formally it communicates. However, the communication process is very distant from the one of humans and can often be described as what humans project. A tree can be something of beauty, which fills the on-looker with feelings. It can also be an object of use, which can be changed by cutting it down and transforming it to objects of use to the humans. (9)

Humans finally have always made homes in the forest. Humans put themselves in the centre of the forest and the forest communication. They communicate with each other but the other possible communicators become either projections from the humans or objects of use to human beings. Forest communication in literature mostly is literature about using the forest itself from economical reasons (1).

## 4 Target

The Forest as an idea has always been central in Scandinavia, mostly in Sweden and Finland, but also in Russia, since forest covers a large area of the countries and thereby not only is dominating the national economy but also the cultural awareness of the inhabitants. In this paper, we will begin discussing a small part of the connotation of the concept FOREST, in a sociocultural

context and based upon a phenomenological approach, aiming to look for the essence of the special concept. The concept of the forest as communicative environment will be discussed in connection with the forest considered as a part of the main concept ARCTIC. Initial results from Sweden and Russia are presented and indications for future in-depth studies.

The formal concepts used for the areas or environment in question will be the Boreal forest or Taiga (in Russia) and Arctic Tundra and the question for our discussion will be in what sense the Boreal concept separates itself from the Tundra concept. In the popular definitions as for instance in Boundless (3) we can see that the definitions are predominantly geographical and physical. Boreal forest / Taiga: "a biome found in the Northern Hemisphere and characterized by coniferous forests consisting mostly of pines, spruces, and larches" and Tundra: "a biome found in the far Northern Hemisphere, north of the boreal forests, where the subsoil is permanently frozen". The concepts are presented nearly as opposites. Still, as Keskitalo proposes (4) the concepts are partly merging and mostly according to a visible development of the arctic discourse in Canada. We will focus on the concepts FOREST and BOREAL within the concept ARCTIC. Further research can connect them stronger to each other.

Despite the general idea of the inhabitants of Sweden and Russia about the forest in the Arctic regions, there are still differences in forest communication between the representatives of these two nations. They concern not only the communicative behavior of a person in the forest and the communication associated with the use of forest products, but also the use of a specific vocabulary for the nomination of the forest. So, for the designation of the White Sea taiga in the North of Russia, there are two specific nominations: "taybola" (dense forest) and "urmana" (vast virgin forest) (8)

The concept COMMUNICATION is a very general and vague concept, not only where language is involved so we then are specifically talking about linguistic communication, the main theme of this pilot study and future related studies.

## 5 Methodology

When discussing meanings and concepts, classical subjects in a linguistic area, a suitable methodology is found in the phenomenological philosophy. A methodology based upon the philosophy, originally described by Edmund Husserl, offers the collection of meanings and context, then analyzed through reduction. It has been developed in such wide areas as sociology, medicine, psychology, and literature. In the present short text, there will at least be a beginning to a more developed approach to the application of phenomenological theory and methodology to a concept like FOREST. The data collection has been taken from different sources, connected to the themes. The study will be an initial one in an intended series.

A related methodological approach could have been the ethnographical one. However, this would have asked for a longer period of investigation inside a forest community, which may be an approach in future studies. The personal experience of the authors of this paper of growing up in the Boreal area is however an indication that this approach is valid. Concludingly, it is evident that a study like this one should be approached through qualitative approaches.

Main research questions initially formulated in this pilot study have been:

How do people communicate with each other in the forest? Are linguistic forms the natural ones to describe communication in the forest? How does the forest affect human communication? Do people consider other partners than other humans as communication partners?

Can the forest itself be considered as a communication partner and if so – how?

## 6 Databases as tools

Scientific literature on the perception of the Arctic is relatively limited and often focusing on defining and delimiting the concept ARCTIC. Most results are found in databases, either with economic content or bio-ecological content. Scientific literature on forest is likewise focussed. The number of references is relatively high and constantly growing, seemingly partly because of discussions about climate changes. The concept FOREST COMMUNICATION is mainly oriented towards communication about forestry, either outside or inside the forest itself. This concept is mostly presented in texts and papers available outside scientific databases as through a Google search on Internet, where the possibility to more exactly define a reliable result is limited due to the inexactness of Google. The results of our pilot study are in general presented in a national context, pointing to more detailed follow-up studies.

In this article, two books can be cited as examples of forest communication. The first book was published in Sweden in English "Siberian larch Forestry and Timber in a Scandinavian Perspective". The compilers of this popular scientific publication are Swede Owe Martinsson, a member of the Russian-Scandinavian Larch Projekt (1996-2001), and Jerzy Lesinski, a forest professor of Krakow who settled in Sweden in the beginning of the 1980s. This book is aimed to anyone interested in forestry and timber use. It was created within the SIBLARCH project, which was a cooperative, international, Northern Periphery project between forest and timber organizations in Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Russia (10). The second book is published in Arkhangelsk (Russia) as a popular science text, it is called in translation into English "In captivity at the Taibola" (8). This book is written by the professor of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University, a specialist in the field of forestry Nikolai Babich and journalist Yuri Bad'in. Forest communication is presented in this book in a lot of aspects. In both books forest communication is represented, but in different aspects of forest as a communicative environment. In an English book

published in Sweden, in the popular scientific form, the results of the research have been described dealing mainly with the Siberian larch species and the importance to the forestry of Siberian larch introduced into Scandinavia. This first book summarizes the experience of cooperation, including intercultural communication of scientists from Russia and Scandinavian countries and Sweden, in particular, in the sphere of forestry.

In the second book written in Russian, readers can discover many valuable pieces of information for staying in the taiga conditions of the Arctic region, including the peculiarities of communication in the northern forest. So, the authors of the book give advice on preventive communication between people when sent to the forest in order to ensure safety when in an emergency situation. In particular, it gives a recommendation that when moving in the forest, it is necessary to inform the relatives or friends in detail, in what direction, with whom you are going and the period of return. At the same time, attention is drawn to the fact that people traveling together are more often lost in the forest (8).

In the event of a loss of orientation in the forest, it is suggested to orientate on the terrain by identifying special signs left by people such as notes indicating the state of health, markings on trees, shreds of moss, and then proceed to find the direction of the sides of the horizon and its position relative to the surrounding objects. It is advisable to listen to sounds (voices of friends, train or car sounds, squealing chainsaw etc.). It is said that one should not rush to the first sound, headlong, it is better to wait for new signals, so as not to make a mistake in the chosen direction. Useful information is given that the impacts of the ax of the logger and the human cry in the forest are well audible at a distance of 200-300 m, the cracking of falling trees - for 800 m, the noise of a machine walking along a dirt road - 1-2 km, along the highway - 3 km. Barking dogs are heard from a distance of one kilometer, the sound of the train is four or five and even ten. Light campfire is visible for 7 km, burning matches - for 1.5-2 km.

If someone is lost in the forest, advice is given, to carry out written communication in the form of notes indicating health and the direction of movement, time and date. If funds for written communication are not with you, it is recommended to tie the young shots of bird-cherry, rowan, willow as a knot. It is possible to leave tufts of moss along the way, and draw on the soil arrows with the direction of movement (8).

If someone has lost his orientation in the forest, he/she is recommended to move in one direction. A good guide can be pictograph signs, such as the carving on trees made by other people, usually foresters. "When you see the embossment on a tree in the forest, approach it: it means that there is a second, third tree with similar notations. Look - ahead of the clearing! (...) On the path, go to the intersection with another clearing, where there are quarter columns of poles (...) ". It is reported that in the northern forest, litter in the form of two criss-crossed young trees may often occur along the way.

One of the rules of behaviour in the forest in the extreme case of loss of orientation is a whistle. If two or

more people are lost, it is recommended that they look more often, clarifying their own and their friends' location, developing topographic memory, paying attention to the features of the forest, such as unusual trees, glades, forest road bends, etc. (8).

The book documented numerous cases of forest communication in extreme conditions. So, when meeting with random people in the forest, dialogues or polylogues may arise, sometimes it is not required.

This is confirmed by a passage from the Russian-language text of the book, translated by us into English: "Having seen the girl in such a desolate place, and yet quite alone, the stranger evidently understood everything without words. I asked him what kind of place he was from, he said that only one kilometer from here was the railway station Piles. He goes there himself. We went to the station. Uncle Andrei bought two tickets: for himself to the Mikuni station and for me to Mezhoga." (8).

The following situation, which is described in the same book, also includes an analysis of the elements of forest communication. After two women were lost in the forest, on the fourth day of their stay there, they used as a possible means of rescue both the door of the forest hut and the sheets of plywood found there, on which the following short text in Russian was written with coal from the furnace, scraped with an ax and nails "People, help us! We are in the dugout", and also the day when the text was written was given. They hung plywood tables in the woods together, putting the arrow-pointers. (8). And it really helped. This is evidenced by a further description of the situation to save the lost in the forest:

"... On Friday, faster than the usual charter from the next search for the road we fell asleep. And suddenly Nina heard through a dream: Who needs our help here? "She did not even realize at first that a living human voice is real, real. They flew out of the dugout, and there "three cute guys." Probably, brought by desperation of the women, the devil himself would have seemed at that moment an angel. But Nina repeated five times: "cute guys." So this is so. None of them had even heard of any announced search. Anatoliy Soldatchenko Yevgeniy Nosov and Nikolay Katkov just went to the forest for berries. And found unusual letters." (8)

Rules of conduct, including communication, in forest huts built for fishermen and hunters in general and long known in the north of Russia under the name "kushnya" (small forest house), in which anyone lost in the woods can find shelter, are formulated in the chapter titled "In the kushnya they are waiting for you" (8).

When visually or by hearing detecting an airplane (helicopter), it is recommended to light a fire, light a birch bark flame or give other signals, including sunbeams. As the most effective means of emergency alarm at a distance, the smoke of a fire is indicated. To make it blacker and denser, it is recommended to throw fresh grass, green foliage, raw moss, etc., into the fire after its burning. It is important, when losing orientation in the forest of two or more persons, to encourage one another, to find words of comfort for others. Shotgun searches can be signals for rescue, it is important to listen to them (8).

The most effective method of communication in the forest during extreme situations is considered mobile communication with relatives or with representatives of the rescue service. In the present book, numerous cases of forest communication with the help of mobile communication are described in the loss of orientation in the forest. The problem with this may be either the lack of cellular communication, battery charge or funds on the mobile phone account (8).

As a conclusion, it should be stressed that forest communication is a very multifaceted type of communication in the forest or in connection with the forest. Its study in the Arctic context will make it possible to study the polymodality of human communication with humans, animals, plants, and even mythological creatures in the conditions of the boreal forest or northern taiga, both in anthropocentric and in multidimensional semiotic aspects.

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