

History, Development and Main Actors of International Polar Research

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Abstract

Rapid changes and increased temperatures that are resulting in the loss of sea ice cover, glacier retreat and changing snow and permafrost conditions in particular in the Arctic, have moved the Polar Regions into the focus of the scientific interest. These transformations are not only effecting Polar ecosystems and people living in the Arctic but the entire Earth system. In particular due to the loss of sea ice, the Arctic becomes more accessible and economic and geopolitical interests have made the region a larger player within the global context.

Polar research has a long history but in particular the four International Polar Years (IPY) (1882-1883, 1932-1933, 1957-58 and 2007-2008) were crucial initiatives that facilitated the development of international polar research in addition to national research activities. For example, the IPY 1957-1958 (also known as the International Geophysical Year) led to the formation of the Antarctic Treaty and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR). Due to the geopolitical significance of the Arctic after the Second World War, it took another 30 years until similar international organizations were formed for the Arctic. Changes in the Soviet Union, i.e. *glasnost* and *perestroika* introduced by President Gorbachev, made it possible to establish the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) in 1990 and the Arctic Council was founded 6 six later.

This lecture will provide an overview of the history and development of international research in the Polar Regions and introduce today's main organizations and their priorities and activities.