

ARCTIC 2023 – PROJECTS SELECTED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Phenomenology of Light in the Arctic Environment: Ethnography of Expedition (PhenoLight)

INSTITUTION

Elena Adasheva-Klein, Yale University, USA

ABSTRACT

The PI's doctoral research in sociocultural anthropology begins from the premises that, first, light is important to understandings of the Arctic as a region; and second, the Arctic provides unique settings for studying human relations with light. This project aims to explore the phenomenology (human perception) of light in the Arctic environment by ethnographic study of the expedition. The PI's nine-month dissertation fieldwork in the Arctic confirmed the importance of light and dark in human-environment relations. Specifically, the PI explored how Arctic light conditions shape human relations to 'place', both urban (a small settlement) and natural (tundra and sea). The PI's experiences of moving on foot and in vehicles through the northern landscape directed her attention toward the anthropology of polar expeditions. This project constitutes a continuation of the PI's dissertation research, focusing on the expedition as a site for ethnographic inquiry. The objective of this project is to conduct an ethnographic study of light in the Arctic environment during the polar day and its influence on human perception of the Arctic landscape in the course of the expedition at high latitudes. This project draws from the phenomenological and sensory anthropology, the anthropology of expeditions, and interdisciplinary studies of light and dark. The PI intends to utilize the combination of autoethnographic, observational, conversational, and visual methods, united under the umbrella of sensory ethnography. Adopting a position of an 'emplaced ethnographer,' the PI will move with light in the Arctic environment on ship and experience it together with others. Providing a novel focus in Arctic research, the project contributes to the scientific understanding of human perception of light in the Arctic environment during the expedition. From a practical point of view, this study will be potentially useful for planning polar expeditions and organizing human life in the conditions of polar day in the Arctic and Antarctic. The PI's presence onboard and interactions with passengers and other scientists are embedded in the project's methodology. This project will help to enhance participants' expedition experience through conversations about light, the Arctic environment, and photography.