The History of Svalbard – an introduction

THOR BJORN ARLOV, NTNU & UNIS 2019

Content of today’s lecture

1st half:
• Introduction to Arctic history
  – Arctic colonization: Why are we here?
  – A brief overview of Svalbard’s history

2nd half:
• Presentation of the course
  – What is history?
  – Learning goals
  – Lecture plan
  – Teaching and learning methods
• Administrative matters

Why are we here anyway?

Should there be people on Svalbard at all?

Decide

Yes

Continue lecture

No

Go home
People vs. Nature

• Svalbard is an Arctic archipelago, 500 km from the nearest mainland
• The physical living conditions are extreme
• The resource basis creates limitations for human subsistence
• No indigenous/aboriginal population or "colony", meagre basis for local production and/or finishing
• Particular legal and political status

Arctic colonization

Expansion from Central Asia during Pleistocene
First crossing to America > 13,000 years ago (?)
Colonization in waves during Holocene
Thule People of Arctic Canada settled in Greenland from ca. year 1000 CE

Svalbard’s history – overview

- Barentsz 1596
- Whaling
- Pomor hunters
- Norwegian hunters
- Scientific research
- Coal mining
- Communities
- Tourism

- 9 Feb 1920
- 14 Aug 1925
Excursion to Svalbard Museum
including a visit to the Cultural Heritage Repository

Tuesday 22 January, 12:00–13:00
Wednesday 23 January, 12:00–13:00

• Put your name on the list for one of the days
• Meet outside Lassegrotta at 11:55

Svalbard Museum grants free entry for SH-201 students during the whole course!

15 minutes break

What is history?

• The subject of history: human communities and activities in the past
• History – a human and social science
  – Actors and actions
  – Society and structures
  – Material and spiritual culture
  – Man and the environment
• Chronology: the “post hoc fallacy”
• Stories vs. history: (re-) constructing the past, with an ambition to explain what, why, how...
Historical practice

The past  \[\rightarrow\] Remnants/sources  \[\rightarrow\] The historian

Method:
- Asking questions, raising problems
- Choice of material, sources
- Systematical criticism of sources
  - Reliability, relevance and representativity; facts vs. truth
  - Exploiting sources as remnants or narratives
- Descriptive and normative sources; bias

Sources aren’t always sources...

What do you expect? Here’s what you get

- An overview of Svalbard’s history from 1596 until the present
- Economic and political history, social and cultural development
- Introduction to historical thinking
- An online exercise; > 66 % in order to be approved for exam
- Reading, ca. 250 pages
- Written exam + exercise + 80 % attendance = 6 credits (ECTS)
Lecture plan 2019, 1st week

1. 21 Jan  
   Introduction. Arctic colonization and main lines in the history of Svalbard

2. 22 Jan  
   The early exploration of the Arctic and the discovery of Svalbard

3. 23 Jan  
   Whaling and sealing in the 17th and 18th centuries

4. 24 Jan  
   Hunting and trapping. Russian and Norwegian trappers

5. 25 Jan  
   The scientific exploration of Svalbard and modern polar research

Lecture plan 2019, 2nd week

6. 28 Jan  
   The great (and not so great) polar expeditions from Svalbard

7. 29 Jan  
   The industrialization of Svalbard: Exploration and mining from Søren Zakariassen to Svea Nord

8. 30 Jan  
   The development of governance and environmental protection

9. 31 Jan  
   Svalbard in national and international politics: problems of sovereignty and strategy

10. 1 Feb  
    Permanent settlement and the local history of Longyearbyen

Deadline withdrawal

Deadline exercise

EXAM!

Monday 4 February (3 hours, written)
Teaching and learning

- Purpose and function of lectures
- Course curriculum: recommended reading (see website)
- Visit to Svalbard Museum and Cultural Heritage Depository
- Online exercise must be approved to take exam
- Evaluation: written exam (3 hours)

Information
https://www.unis.no/history-svalbard-course-page-2019/

Boring... (yawn)

- In class: Be active, ask questions, make comments
- Text me: +47 906 35 072
- Email me: thor.arlov@unis.no
- See me: office A 321 (top floor, old building)

Administrative matters

- Registering (web, contact Håkon/Ruben)
- Check attendance list every evening
- Register for exam (80% attendance)
- Course evaluation
- The course homepage:
  - Go to UNIS home page, click Studies
  - Click General Courses
  - Click Course overview: SH-201...
Next time on HOS

Who came first?
- Vikings?
- Russians?
- Barentsz?

End of lecture 1