



## **The North – changes, challenges, opportunities**

*46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-speaking countries  
(GKS)*

*February 26 – March 1, 2025, Berlin, Germany*

### **Call for Papers**

Canada's North is a huge and variegated space, an environment created by eons of geotectonic forces and, rather recently in geological time-scales, by the forces of exceedingly cold climates. This has shaped landscapes and ecosystems of relatively little (bio-) diversity but – until very recently – considerable systemic stability. Still, such a seemingly neutral, scientific view of these environments as well as using the rather abstract, academic concept of space typically reflects a modern and European, i.e. an outsider's gaze at this part of the earth. However, for several tens of thousands of years, the regions of the North have not just been "space" but also or even primarily full of "places", that is to say, spaces filled with meanings due to human occupancy and/or the spiritual connections of those Indigenous people and peoples who have made the North their "home".

So, the modern European gaze since early colonial times (mis-) interpreted and (mis-) represented the now so-called North both, as a barren and "empty" (of humans) wasteland, and as a space to be explored and exploited. Even more pronounced since the creation of the modern state of Canada the perspectives and agendas of white settler colonialism have dominated public discourse on and activities in the Canadian North. Primarily focusing on a diversity of natural, mainly mineral resources, the North has been configured as a (development) project for business(wo)men and (nationalist) settler colonial politicians alike. Early political as well as academic debates primarily discussed its importance for "the" Canadian national character or a sense of national identity, and cultural and artistic discourse has time and again centered on meanings and representations of the North, as artists of all genres made it a recurring subject of their diverse creative works.

Not surprisingly, then, the North has also repeatedly attracted the interest of (Canadian Studies) scholars from many academic disciplines. And of late, changes in a variety of fields – e.g. climate change, geopolitics, academic theories (such as post-colonial or more-than-human studies), and the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state(s) – have yet again led to the topic of the North occupying a central position within Canadian Studies.

Accordingly, the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-speaking countries will focus on the North as a physical and human reality as well as a symbolic socio-cultural construct and a concept for theoretical and critical debate. True to a

pluralistic and multidisciplinary understanding of Canadian Studies, the conference will approach the North as space and place at a multitude of scales, investigate the interaction of natural and human systems, and it will explore both, historical (constructions of) significance of the North as well as contemporary dynamics and processes.

Three sub-themes and perspectives, each one multidisciplinary in character, will structure the conference proceedings:

### **1 The nature of the North and nature-human interactions**

Through colonial into post-colonial times, the North of Canada has been viewed and (ab)used as a region of natural resources to be exploited for the use of societies and people(s) outside of it, often willfully ignoring ecosystemic implications as well as the long-standing occupation and ownership/stewardship of Northern lands by Indigenous peoples. Human-induced environmental change has now taken hold in a most dramatic fashion through the dynamics of climate change, as the North faces rapidly warming temperatures, shrinking ice cover, thawing permafrost soils, and changing plant and animal habitats, leading to dramatic implications for Northern communities and their chances of physical and economic survival. In this context, we aim to explore issues such as...

- the dynamics of climate change and its impact on natural environments in the North
- the consequences of environmental changes for local communities, Indigenous peoples and traditional ways of life
- issues of environmental rights and environmental justice
- policy approaches to adapt to climate change and to develop long-term sustainability
- policies and technologies dealing with deindustrialization and land reclamation after exploitative practices
- concepts of governance of natural environments, landscapes, and resources
- the role of energy and mineral resources in economic development, sustainability, and in configuring discourses on the North
- narratives of environmental change and human adaptation
- ...

### **2 The socio-political gaze at the North**

The northern regions of Canada have often been construed as frontier and/or borderlands. Whether in relation to the territories of early colonies or, later, of the expanding Canadian nation-state and individual provinces, the political impulse to secure and include those northern lands within the polity of Canada is arguably one continuous theme of Canadian history. Today, especially in view of changing accessibilities on account of global warming, the geopolitical and military significance of the North has increased dramatically while initiatives of international circumpolar cooperation have become more pronounced. All the while, rights to land and concepts of territory have been questioned in view of starkly contrasting systems of governance between Indigenous peoples and communities on the one hand and settler colonial approaches on the other. Questions of federalism vs. local or regional autonomy and self-governance, especially regarding Indigenous peoples, form an important

theme when looking at the North from a socio-political perspective. This leads to questions related to...

- reconfigured issues of national sovereignty and national security in current times
- issues of Indigenous rights, Indigenous nationhood and (self-)governance
- (settler colonial) systems of governing the North (institutions, processes, practices)
- the history of Canada-US relations in view of the strategic importance of the North
- the North as an intra-colonial or intra-provincial policy impulse (e.g. in Quebec vs. in Ontario)
- the role of race, class and gender in configuring the politics of North in Canada throughout history
- circumpolar and cross-border cooperation
- ...

### **3 The North as discursive formation**

Mapping, writing, picturing... the North has been a central theme in Canadian cultural production as well as the politics of nation-building. *Geographies*, *historiographies*, and cultural representations of the idea of North can be traced throughout Canadian history. In this way many different Norths can be found, many different views of the relationship between the North and the rest of Canada, many different ideas of what, where, and who the North “really is”. Hence, the maps, pictures, stories, films, voices that speak about or for the North provide a rich tapestry for cultural interpretation of social constructs, for an analysis of power relations in cultural (re-)production and (re-)presentation and the conference invites contributions analyzing...

- the cultural production of ideas of the North in literature, storytelling, dance, films, visual arts, etc.
- changing understandings of the North throughout Canadian history
- differentiated views of the North in Quebec Studies and in Canadian Studies
- academic (and disciplinary) constructs of the North in Canadian scholarship (in geography, history, politics, cultural and literary studies, etc.)
- voices of the North vs. writing etc. about the North
- racism, nationalism, sexism in ideologies and images of the North
- home and belonging – spaces, places, meanings in the North
- ...

We invite paper proposals in both English and French across all academic disciplines involved in Canadian Studies, Quebec Studies, and Indigenous Studies on any of the above-mentioned themes and topics.

#### **Contact and Abstract Submission.**

Paper proposals/**abstracts of max. 500 words** can be submitted in French or English and should outline:

- methodology and theoretical approaches chosen
- content/body of research
- which of the three sub-themes specified above the paper speaks to (if any).

In addition, some **short biographical information (max. 250 words)** should be provided, specifying

- current institutional affiliation and position
- research background with regard to the conference topic and/or sub-themes.

Abstracts should be submitted no later than May 31, 2024 to [gks@kanada-studien.de](mailto:gks@kanada-studien.de).