

Joonas Vola

PhD researcher

Arctic Centre, University of Lapland

Rovaniemi, Finland

I am a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Lapland. I am affiliated with the Northern Political Economy team within the Sustainable Development research group at the Arctic Centre. I have previously worked with the Barents region in various projects like CAVIAR II, MISTRA Arctic Futures and NEO-BEAR. These projects have included Norwegian, Swedish and Russian partners concerning local and regional adaptation to river floods, and economic development and transitions in Barents' communities. My PhD study's objective is to study the socio-political dimension of the Arctic performed in the science communication service environments.

As a child, when asked “what are you going to be when you grow up”, I had a keen idea of becoming a natural scientist and a wildlife protector. This was most likely due to my great affection for beautiful illustrations in zoological literature representing exotic forms of life and their various environments. It is quite evident that the artistic way of bringing ‘nature’ into one’s own living room was not the least of the reasons for my growing fascination for the world of science. Through education my focus shifted and I became more interested in history and social issues. Moving from Eastern Finland to Rovaniemi to study International Relations at the University of Lapland therefore represents a clear continuum for human, state, and society-centred studies.

An internship at the Arctic Centre during the autumn 2011 surprisingly brought these two elements together in this new multidisciplinary work and study environment. I found myself listening and discussing, not only anthropological approaches, but I was also learning about biology, physiology, and glaciology. This is why my early career has been shaped, not only by the questions concerning the Arctic and especially the Barents Euro-Arctic region, but also the different disciplines, which try to understand and describe its complexity while simultaneously inevitably shaping it.

“In my opinion, the importance of material and visual culture of ordinary objects should be more profoundly emphasised in the field of political science.”



In my dissertation the questions scope are on the represented objects of science: the technological involvement in perceiving the environment, what comes between the described object and the viewer, and what kind of phenomenon their interrelation creates. In my research I apply the performative approach to science communication. Performativity does not refer in this context to a ritual or artistic performance, but to the post-humanist approach in which the ontology, epistemology and ethics are inseparable pieces of the same puzzle. By applying such an approach, one would hopefully enable the development of socially sustainable ways of producing and presenting 'knowledge' of the Arctic.

In my opinion, the importance of material and visual culture of ordinary objects should be more profoundly emphasised in the field of political science. Such taken for granted terms as design, which is spreading from industrial design to service and co-designing, is very much bound to societal ideologies as well as discursive material practices. These ideologies and practices can only be decoded from the everyday objects and from their operating with the bodies. Rather than claiming that the design research is lacking a critical perspective in finding its political meanings, I would point out the need to combine the research methods of art & design and social sciences in analysing this matter.



The empirical part of my work is based on science exhibitions that describe the Arctic. The current attempt is to develop analytical concepts for sustainable, affective and effective science communication emphasising the socio-political dimension of the Arctic. Part of this work is based on the data focusing on a critical approach to animal and nature documentary. This can be seen as means of political activism and alternative ways to express the phenomenon of human-animal relations; to study the relation between constructed environment, landscape and body in learning and memorising; and to evaluate exhibition object's affectivity by means of distance. Hopefully as a joint effort the final result could be translated into a range of applications for developing science communication service spaces to support the continuity and sustainability of Arctic research.