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Eternal Ice in the Cold War: The Scientific Exploration and Exploitation of the Polar Regions, 1957–1991

The polar regions, along with outer space, were one of the last unexplored territories in a global, geostrategic power structure, which was at the heart of efforts to obtain and colonize spaces after 1945. The aim of this investigation into East and West German polar research is to present a history of the science of the Cold War from the perspective of spatial and environmental history. The perceptions of space and the knowledge bases formed during the Cold War prepared the way for our global climate and environmental problem awareness.

The transnational and interdisciplinary nature of polar research calls for an integral approach, which will look at the cooperation between German researchers in the context of French, Russian and American expeditions. Which transfer and feedback processes can be discerned operating between science, politics and the general public, and to what extent did the polar research contribute towards a new, holistic understanding of the Planet Earth? The process of transformation of polar research from a Cold War science to a field motivated by environmental concerns is, according to my hypothesis, determined to a great extent by the scientists directly involved. Central to my project are glaciological and meteorological research projects. The transfer of this knowledge and the corresponding strategies used by polar researchers at the interface between media and politics will be examined using the case studies of polar research in the Federal Republic of Germany and in the GDR, in order to analyze the crystallization of a global environmental awareness as a historical process.