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## Scientists and stakeholders anticipate alternative futures for remote Russian Arctic region

On December 8, 2017, Vladimir Putin visited the remote Yamal Peninsula Western Siberia to celebrate the launch of the extensive international Yamal liquefied natural gas (LNG) project. At the same time, a group of Russian and international scientists and stakeholders from science, media, non-governmental organizations and indigenous groups gathered in Moscow to discuss the development prospects of the same region, the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, as part of the “Yamal 2040” workshop series.

While the Yamal LNG project promises to boost the region’s energy exports and economic development, substantial climatic, environmental, economic, social, political, and legal changes in the Arctic and worldwide mean that the future is highly uncertain. The “Yamal 2040” workshop series will enable stakeholders to consider these changes and how they might adapt to them in the future.

The research team leading Yamal 2040 are using innovative discussion techniques called “foresight methods” to enable participants to address and overcome their cognitive biases. Cognitive bias arises from an individual’s interpretation of reality based on their previous knowledge, experiences and upbringing, which can sometimes distort how they perceive information or events. Foresight methods enable participants to think reflectively about alternative development pathways for the region.

“It is very interesting to observe how engaging the Foresight method enables a diverse group of participants to address a shared topic of concern”, says Dr. Kathrin Stephen from the IASS, co-organiser of the workshop series. “Furthermore, the method makes it possible for people to construct truly innovative ideas and approaches about the future of a region impacted by large transformational processes such as climate change and globalisation”.

In two further workshops in 2018 participants will further develop and explore these scenarios to prepare for the future of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug by 2040.

“It was a very interesting event! The used method is a good approach to strategic thinking about the future and enables uniting different perspectives. I am looking forward to the next workshops”, says Rodion Sulyandziga, head of the Center for support of the indigenous peoples of the North, who participated in Moscow.

The workshops are jointly organized by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies ([IASS](#)) in Potsdam, Germany, the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations ([IMEMO](#)) in Moscow, and [Foresight Intelligence](#) in Berlin, Germany.



The Scenario Planning Project “Yamal 2040” is a part of the “[Blue-Action – Arctic Impact on Weather and Climate](#)” research project funded through the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Blue-Action aims to boost economic growth and improve the safety and wellbeing of people in the Arctic and across the northern hemisphere. Reducing risks associated with Arctic operations and resource exploitation, and supporting evidence-based decision-making by policymakers and stakeholders worldwide and locally is a key component of Blue-Action’s work from 2017-2020.

Image

Caption: Scenario expert Johannes Gabriel from Foresight Intelligence guides workshop participants through the multitude of factors influencing the future of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug by 2040.

Credit: Kathrin Stephen

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