

A.1: Power imbalance and hierarchies in Finno-Ugric studies

Organizers: Svetlana Edygarova, Maria Fedina, Maria Vyatchina (University of Helsinki)

Historically, Finno-Ugric studies have had a strong focus on language and folklore studies, while other disciplines have often been overlooked and, as a result, stayed much less represented. Studying languages detached from communities and people's cultural knowledge, Finno-Ugric studies thus risk becoming an exclusive discipline. The growing number of scholars doing research with Finno-Ugric peoples but unable to be represented in Finno-Ugric studies further proves that the time has come for the field to become more inclusive.

Finno-Ugric departments have traditionally been present in the universities in the Finno-Ugric regions and countries; the respective departments have also been operating in other countries, such as Germany and Austria. Both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers are represented in the field and engage in research projects both in and outside communities. At the same time, being open about your own role and positionality, for example, in publications, still remains more of an exception than a rule. Furthermore, we, as researchers, believe that it is also important to be reflective about our engagement in communities, the relationships we build with our interlocutors before, during, and after research, and the appropriateness of the research methods we use.

The development of Finno-Ugric studies has not been absolutely linear and unified. One of the main reasons for that was the geopolitical isolation of the scholars in Soviet times, which resulted in the impossibility of research visits, exchanges, and joint research projects. The most recent and ongoing example of such isolation, imposed from inside and outside, is the drastic cessation of Finno-Ugric contacts with Russia as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. How have this and other forms of isolation and restrictions influenced the development of national and international Finno-Ugric studies? How has it affected the Finno-Ugric communities and their representativeness in research?

In our symposium, we aim to approach critically imbalanced power structures engrained in contemporary Finno-Ugric studies. Among other things, we intend to address such topics as discipline representativeness, the role and positionality of researchers, researcher-community relationships, research ethics, and epistemological and methodological turns. Additionally, we strive to analyze how Finno-Ugric studies were and are developing in restricted settings.

We welcome papers, individual contributions, and autobiographical observations that address the aforementioned topics or any other aspect related to the discussion of hierarchies and power structures in Finno-Ugric studies.

Contact person: Svetlana Edygarova svetlana.jedygarova@helsinki.fi