

EXPLORATIONS IN OCEAN SPACE V

>>>>>>>>> Listening to the Barents Region <<<<<<<<<<<



Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, Map of Willem Barentsz' first voyage in 1594, 1601

Exploration and Exploitation

Returning from his third unsuccessful attempt to find the Northeast passage from Europe to Asia in 1597, the Dutch cartographer William Barentz died at sea after sitting out a long winter with dwindling supplies and his ship frozen in the ice. The voyage was financed by the Town Council of Amsterdam in a period of colonial exploration and trade expansion. In 2020 as arctic sea ice cover reached an unprecedented low, merchant vessels set out across the Northern Sea route escorted by nuclear-powered Russian ice-breakers already in May. In the previous year a record 31.5 million tons of goods had been transported along this strategic maritime route promoted by Putin to compete with the Suez Canal. Spanning four centuries, these events both bear witness to international efforts to secure maritime supremacy in a sea of global trade.

However the sea carries multiple histories and cannot be defined by the above events alone, even though they are exemplary of the dominating colonial and industrial narrative around our understanding of the world's seas and oceans. Seas are specific geographic places— cultural products, “constructed” socially¹ through layers of regulations, activities and the human imagination as they interact with physical oceanographic properties.²

The course aims to find our own reading of the sea— a more balanced perspective where sociocultural factors, more-than-human protagonists and intangible heritage influence our standpoint alongside state-of-the-art developments in the maritime industries. Such readings form the basis for developing original narratives that will weave through final design proposals at the end of the semester.

If we were to think of the Ocean as a geographic place with spatial characteristics, protagonists, histories, and desires inscribed into its waters, how could we begin to represent it? How could we position ourselves to interact with it, to tell its stories and to intervene as architects and multi-scale designers?

Explorations in Ocean Space aims to facilitate an understanding of the sea as a spatial realm, provide basic knowledge on ocean ecosystems, hydrographic properties and a critical perspective on the current state of the world Ocean. This is complimented by a closer look at a specific Norwegian sea, including exchanges with land, people, culture and spirit, where we dive under the saturated surface of data and industry to explore socio-cultural interactions that can inspire interventions.

Our previous studies have shown that Western society has developed an overwhelmingly exploitative relationship to the ocean, firmly maintained by government collaboration with the maritime industries. The *space* of the sea has now become a premium resource for the energy transition and for new forms of extraction and injection. But changes in oceanic patterns, including warming temperatures and sea-level rise, have gained public attention. An urgent collective, cross-disciplinary effort is required in order to address these complex challenges, which cannot be solved purely by science, technology or the industrial sectors that have so far dominated the sea space. At a time when the ecological crisis is a global preoccupation, different forms of narration are needed to recount today's most critical story and to find ways to collectively reconnect to the seas we have lost. Multiple voices have asserted that the current ecological crisis is accompanied by a crisis of the imagination.

In autumn 2023, our large-scale exploration is focused on the Barents Sea, complimented by a more detailed investigation of the Varangerfjord (Várjat voutna in Northern Sámi) and peninsular. The course offers different ways of approaching ocean space, encouraging dialogue between different types of knowledge and thereby enriching not only ocean literacy in BAS students, but also understandings within current large-scale debates. Becoming more literate in ocean space is one way of overcoming *Sea Blindness*, a way to develop a sense of public stewardship towards the sea, and is a form of creative empowerment for architects towards the other 72% of the earth's surface. In autumn 23 a series of specific inputs around ocean soundscapes will be an integral part of the course.

Barents Sea

Considered by the WWF to be the last European sea where ecosystems are still intact, the Barents Sea is vast, remote and abundant in marine life. Is a “shelf” sea— situated on the continental shelf—on average 230m deep and part of the larger oceanographic system of the Arctic Ocean. Cold Arctic water and warmer Atlantic water delivered by the Gulf Stream, meet in the Barents Sea. The meeting of these waters at the polar front and the spring sea-ice melt, set off chemical and biological interactions contributing to the Barents Sea's high productivity, which supports important fish stocks and the lucrative fishing industry.

Today the Barents Sea is the fastest warming part of the Arctic and is classified as being “Atlantified” since hydrographic changes due to global warming have caused a loss in sea ice and the stratification

¹ Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 78 (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

² Nancy Couling, 'Ocean Space and Urbanisation: The Case of Two Seas', in *The Urbanisation of the Sea: From Concepts and Analysis to Design*, ed. Nancy Couling and Carola Hein (Rotterdam: nai010, 2020), 189–203.

of the water column. Not only are major weather changes in Eurasia are predicted as a result, but petroleum exploration is being carried out in northern areas previously inaccessible through sea ice cover.



Varangerfjord 2008, © Northern Adventures

Varangerfjord

The southern edge of the Barents Sea is Norway's most sparsely populated region, but was the first to be settled by humans after the last Ice Age retreated 10-15,000 years ago. Evidence of these inhabitants, and also of the retreating ice itself, can still be found in the landscape around the Varangerfjord— Norway's easternmost fjord. Mainly due to abundant marine resources, the region has supported human populations for thousands of years and is rich in indigenous Sea Sámi culture. But also on land, the north is experiencing the greatest temperature increases in Norway, transforming the unique arctic tundra ecosystems on the Varanger peninsular as trees are taking over, driving fish species north to cooler waters, and causing increasing difficulties for seasonal reindeer movement.

Border Zone

The part of the Barents region is characterized by an accumulation of different types of borders. In the Barents Sea, a specific type of meeting place has emerged in sharp relief since the war in Ukraine; the border between Russian and Norwegian Exclusive Economic Zones divides the Barents Sea roughly in two. Tensions are rising and military exercises are intensifying on both sides- at land and at sea. Abrupt, politically defined borders have been successively laid across Sápmi— the traditional Sámi territory that spans the only comparatively recently defined nations of Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia. Rather than solely a political realm, Sápmi is a cultural-ecological realm where the way of life is directly connected to natural resources and local climate. The construction of national borders has fragmented this realm and severely compromised Sápmi's physical and cultural coherence. Reduced snow and ice cover also make the region more attractive for the extractive industries around petroleum, minerals and wind— activities that frequently conflict with Sámi land- and seascape practices.

Intersections

At the intersection of boreal and arctic climate zones, of wild and farmed fishing, and of both accumulation and dispersion around borders, the course examines heterogeneous engagements with the Barents Sea and the Varangerfjord, based on a response to the compelling energies of the unique land-and seascape. The region is characterised by a concentration of not only different cultures and histories, but also potential futures. The course aims to explore how this could be understood as a crucial contemporary and future-orientated spatial possibility.

If “*caring for, and living on the land is a way of being*”³ what are the ways of being that care for and live with the sea?

Soundscapes

The visual ocean is full of deceit; industrial activities offshore are hidden by the horizon– just under 5 km away – while the surface conceals rich seascapes and sunken war debris. Sámi artist Máret Ánne Sara considers that the visual has dominated the Western art world, at the expense of other forms of perception that “*inhabit a deeper level in our bodies*”⁴.

This semester we will pay attention to a range of oceanic voices – human, and more-than-human, from different moments in time, and speaking in different languages. We believe it is important to seek out voices that have received less attention compared to the voices of political and industrial domination. It is a way to address the plurality and heterogeneity of ocean space and to learn to listen.. and a way to celebrate the spirit and intense beauty of this land- and seascape and its people.



The Tidal Sense, Signe Lidén, sculpture and a sounding canvas, several weeks stretched through the intertidal zone in the village of Ramberg, Lofoten. Exhibited at Lofoten International Art Festival 2019

COURSE STRUCTURE

1. Researching artistic practices Nancy Couling APP, Eva Kun DAV (1 week- 20-24 August)

In order to structurally include plural forms of understanding, the programme explores intuitive, artistic, technological, scientific and indigenous directions, including the distinct methods particular to each. Intuitive “projective” works produced during the course’s opening workshop are important to explain personal relations to the sea and to forge or reexamine emotional ties.

Students research the work of contemporary artists and testing their methods. A list of interesting indigenous, sound and “sea” artists is proposed. Through this process, new ways of communicating critical issues and engaging the senses are opened up – some of which have direct influence on the

³ <https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/events/82781/ruovttu-guvlui-towards-home>

⁴ Katya García-Antón and Liv Brissach, ‘When the Red Calves Arrive, the Hope Returns. Sámi Healing and Sensate Sovereignty in Máret Ánne Sara’s Practice’, in *Čatnosat. The Sámi Pavilion, Indigenous Art, Knowledge and Sovereignty.*, ed. Liisa-Rávná Finbog, Katya García-Antón, and Beaska Niillas (Oslo/Amsterdam: Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA) / Valiz Publishing, 2022), <https://oca.no/publications/catnosat-the-sami-pavilion-indigenous-art-knowledge-and-sovereignty>.

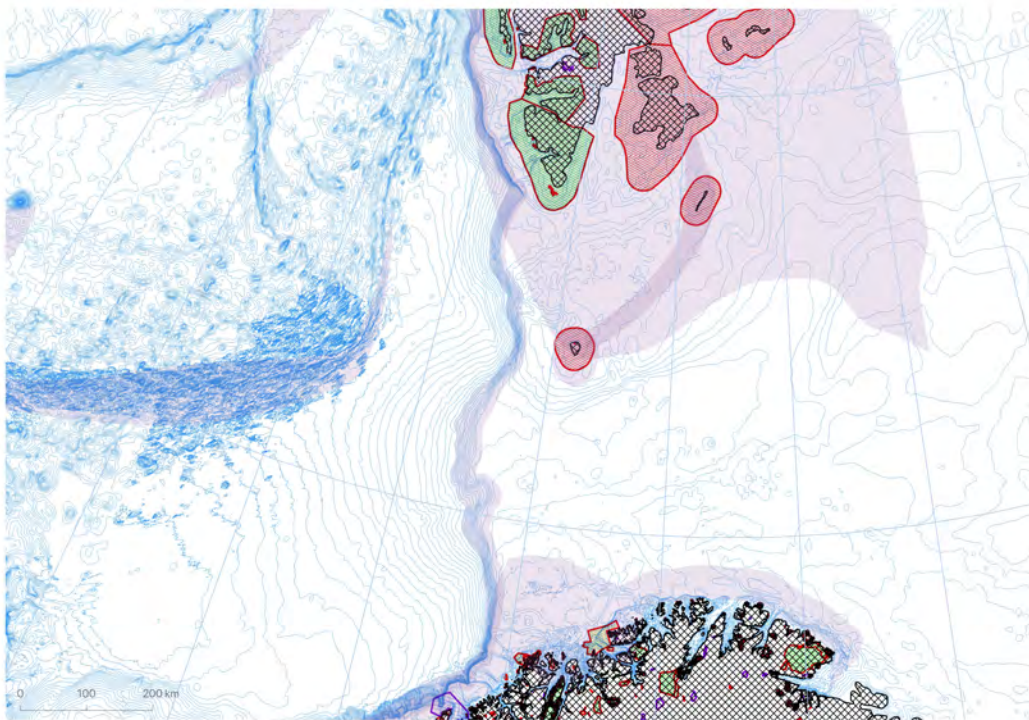
final project direction. The workshop serves as inspiration- the focus lies in the making of the student's own interpretation. Input open lecture by a selected artist and visit to turf soundspace "Jiennagoáhti (Lyttegamme)" (by sound artist Elin Már Øyen Vister) on the hill above Bergen. Lesson in hydrophones.

2. Oceanographic Cartography Nancy Couling APP / External QGIS tutor (1 week 28.08-1.09)

GIS data is useful to trace the geophysical characteristics of the Barents Sea and Varangerfjord In this part of the course we plunge into oceanic data, learn to use the open source software QGIS to research available sources and compile thematic layers of oceanic and socio-cultural information. We trace the life and movements of both the natural and human-induced marine protagonists– cod, haddock, King-crab, plankton, pollution, shipping, maritime borders, infrastructure, fishing, oil & gas, monitoring, mammals, birds, wind, currents, ice and water-masses.

This results in a shared cartographic resource, and forms the basis of thematic fields of interest that are pursued up until mid-term. We are conscious of the political dimensions to scanning, mapping, dividing territory, gathering seabed data and selecting forms of representation.

Parallel to this work, an introductory lecture on Oceans and Climate is given by Helge Drange, Oceanographer at UiB.



Protected and valuable areas, Barents Sea, Wi Chen, BAS 2022

3. History & Theory workshop Nancy Couling APP/ Alberto Altes KTF (1 week 4.09-8.09)

Developing and sharing a background to critical themes important for the course. We explore texts and discuss issues around colonisation, the Anthropocene/Capitalocene, indigenous rights movements, the more-than-human, thinking with the sea, and Sámi history and belief systems, aiming to identify specific areas of interest and research questions to be more closely positioned in the following field-trip preparation.

4. Fieldwork research Nancy Couling APP/ external experts (1 week 11.09-15.09)

In preparation for the field-trip, more detailed research is carried out on the site under thematic headings that concern both the industrial and the sociocultural sea, including indigenous perspectives. Work from the oceanic cartography and history/theory workshops are revised and finalized to be brought together into a shared lexicon and guide & for the field-trip.



Varangerfjord, 2008 © Northern Adventures

5. Field-trip Varangerfjord Nancy Couling APP/ Geir Tore Holm DAV / local experts

Planned for 7-10 days in September, between 18-29.09, the fieldtrip is particularly important to enter first hand dialogue with local communities, to participate in different forms of documentation, mapping and story-telling which will inform the work up until mid-term and to experience the magic of the land- and seascapes. We will explore Varangerfjord together with well-known Norwegian and Sámi artist Geir Tore Holm, as much as possible on land and sea, from Kirkenes to Vardø, Vadso, Nesseby and the Tana river (Deatnu).

We aim to restrict travel costs to around NOK 4000 (return flights to Kirkenes ca NOK 3000, plus other transport: Hurtigruten Kirkenes Vardø NOK 214 student discount). Car hire is useful– ca NOK 300/day/pp.

Possible (non mandatory) participation in the 4-day Experimental Workshop “If the Ocean Could Speak”, part of the research project “Spatial Experiments for the Post-Anthropocene Arctic”, funded by NordForsk 2023-24 (Couling & Altes)–Situating methods of making space through experiential knowledge, focusing on intangible Sámi cultural heritage. Input by invited sound artist Elin Már (tbc) before or after the field-trip.

6. Synthesis - Mid-term presentations and reviews Nancy Couling APP/ DAV / invited critics

The synthesis of work so far – findings and inspirations on heterogeneous seascapes, intersections and border zones including conflicts and potential ways forward– will be developed in thematic groups leading up to the mid-term review. At this presentation, smaller groups and individual students should be able to articulate an area of interest for their ongoing explorations in second half of the semester. Group work in exhibition format.



Four Ecologies of the Fjord, mid-term exhibition in silo basement, BAS 2022

7. Project development Nancy Couling APP/ DAV / marine biology /invited guests

After mid-term, time and space is dedicated to further project development individually or in small groups with ongoing input and support from course teachers, a marine biologist, a curator, project presentations from previous course students, and an introductory video-making course. Regular reading/discussion sessions in relation to project work occur throughout. Students are expected to find their own project direction and medium resulting in a wide-range of topics and modes of communication, including video, installations, sound, creative writing, models and drawings. The relevant scale of projects will also vary greatly. We encourage projects ranging from geo-political concerns of the Barents Sea, to abstract, conceptual explorations, to detailed studies of the local socio-cultural site and marine life and to concrete material contributions such as boat-building or seaweed cladding.

8. Final presentation Nancy Couling APP/ DAV / invited guests

The course maintains an open approach to formats for the final presentation, presented as an exhibition. Formats discussed with the teachers throughout the semester according to the projects themselves, and students are encouraged to explore and to pursue their own methods of research, project development and narrative communication. Findings feed into the ongoing Index of Terms and Lexicon of Species and Things and further venues/platforms for presentation of the project results in a wider context or at the project site will be investigated.



Final reviews, BAS December 2022

CONTRIBUTING TEACHERS

Nancy Couling APP (Lead)
 Geir Tore Holm (DAV) (external)
 Eva Kun (DAV)
 Alberto Altes (KTF)
 Mariana Anchini, Marine Biology (external)
 Frances Toynbee (QGIS) (external)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

a) SKILLS

The course offers students a way to gain an integrated understanding of the relations between different scales and teaches a range of skills to communicate these scales; for example QGIS, marine biology, video-making, using hydrophones. It also offers access to different forms of knowledge and encourages an artistic as well as a scientific basis for design work.

In a similar way to promoting an agile transition between different scales; from the scale of the sea, through regional basins or fjords, to the micro-scale toxins or plastics, the objective is to promote an agile transition between these different spheres of knowledge, and to enable to students to extract, transform, utilise and potentially synthesise elements from each. This agility enables architecture to provide a detailed local scale interpretation of large-scale design decisions, while the local scale can be perceived through the view of different protagonists; human, or fish, oilrigs, birds and more. This pedagogical approach is based on the conviction that such skills will be required to create meaningful architectural interventions in the age of the Anthropocene and in a paradigm shift in the ambitions of our profession.

The course cultivates informed spatial criticality and aims to sharpen communications skills. The ability to summarise and communicate the essentials in complex oceanic relations to a broader audience is vital to the improvement of ocean literacy.

b) KNOWLEDGE

- Understanding of the spaces and dynamics of the global Ocean, with a particular focus on the chosen sea or fjord.
- Understanding of the ecological processes affected by human impact in marine environments and knowledge about the state of the art in potential solutions.
- Knowledge of, and a critical approach to the maritime sectors including marine spatial planning
- Understanding of current theoretical writing addressing man-nature relations and urban processes
- Knowledge about cultural relations to the sea and potentially threatened practices, in particular indigenous rights.

c) COMPETENCIES

Architecture students are skilled in spatial representation and the ability to create imaginative proposals. They are able to activate knowledge, to mould material and space into something new, and to find engaging ways to communicate ideas. The course will build on these skills, and also offer short workshops or external inputs to address specific thematic areas and methodological approaches:

- oceanography
- marine biology
- cartography
- GIS mapping with QGIS
- sound recordings including underwater sound with hydrophones
- researching artistic approaches
- current spatial theory (reading & discussion)
- collective model-making (optional)
- video-making with Adobe Premier Pro /and or web-site creation

EXAMINATION/ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT WORK

Students will be assessed (in an individual written evaluation at the end of semester) based on the following criteria:

- Regular participation in the course and contribution to presentations, class discussions and delivery of material. Taking responsibility for integration and cohesion or other tasks within the class.
- Depth and precision of research/exploration on topics chosen throughout the different work-phases
- Completion of work for each phase of the project; the preparatory workshops, the field-trip, mid-term synthesis, Modus Operandi (project strategy), pre-final review, final reviews and submission of a portfolio as well as upload of material to the website after the review.
- Quality, coherence, clarity and communication of work throughout each phase, according to the duration of each phase (most time is dedicated to the final project development).
- Personal effort and levels of innovation in approaching unfamiliar design terrain and willingness to move beyond standard architectural formats, contexts and methods of presentation.

This course requires regular participation and cannot be followed from a distance – any unforeseen absences must be communicated with the teacher. Exchange and communication between students is a vital part of the learning process and each student will have important knowledge to contribute to the whole class. The first part of the semester involves mostly group work, and students must be committed to developing work in collaboration with their colleagues in a constructive way. After mid-term you have the option to work alone, however the complexity of the topic means we highly encourage group projects.

READING LIST /REFERENCES:

(to be finalised at the beginning of semester)

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- Bélanger, Pierre. 'The Other 71 Percent'. *Harvard Design Magazine* 39, no. F/W 2014 (2014). <http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/39>.
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- Gugger, Harry, Nancy Couling, and Aurélie Blanchard, eds. *Barents Lessons. Teaching and Research in Architecture*. Zürich: Park Books, 2012.

- Hessler, Stefanie and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science*. London England, Cambridge Massachusetts: TBA21-Academy The MIT Press, 2018.
- Ingold, Tim. 'The North Is Everywhere'. In *Knowing from the Indigenous North: Sámi Approaches to History, Politics and Belonging*, edited by Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Sanna Valkonen, and Jarno Valkonen. Routledge, 2020.
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- Zyman, Daniela, ed. *Oceans Rising. A Companion to Territorial Agency: Oceans in Transformation*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2021. <https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/oceans-rising/>.

SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

A master course is considered a formal exam at BAS. The only grading is Pass /Fail.

An external examiner will be present during the final review, and participate on the final grading of the student in collaboration with the teacher(s) in charge on the course.

If a student lacks the minimum level and attendance in order to be evaluated for the exam, the student shall receive written notice of this as soon as possible, and at the latest 2 weeks before the final review. Then this student will have failed the course. As a master course is based on the effort and work during a whole semester, this will be the basis for the approval for the exam.

Written notice/warning can be given throughout the semester if a candidate does not have the required progress or attendance. Then it is the student's responsibility to put in the extra effort and resources.

Even though a student does not receive a warning/notice from the teachers, the final result will be depending on an evaluation also by an external assessor, and the result can therefore not be guaranteed.

If a student has special needs and will need facilitation during the master course, the student must contact BAS before the course starts and inform the school about this. It is required to have documentation of a diagnosis in order to have facilitation. If you have had a process with this earlier in your study, you nevertheless have to contact admin to inform and agree upon the specific needs for facilitation for the upcoming semester.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

will be made by the teacher(s) in charge of the course plus an external examiner during the final review, and will be based on:

1. The individual submission for the different stages of the project.
2. The level of participation and contribution to the collective/group work.
3. The assessment of the work/project as presented at the final review.

After the final review one will receive either a pass or fail. If there are minor weaknesses that could improve the project in order to pass, a candidate may be given supplementary work that is to be completed within 2 weeks after the final review. The supplementary work will be evaluated to either a pass or a fail by the teacher(s) in charge. If the weaknesses are not possible to overcome by doing supplementary work, the grade will be fail. This decision of giving supplementary work is solely up to the teacher and the external examiner.

PORTFOLIO

a student is expected to make a portfolio of all 3 master courses before diploma. This is to be submitted at the beginning of the diploma semester.