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**SCIENCE AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN SOVIET KARELIA:
THE HISTORY OF THE KARELIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE (1930–37)**

**НАУКА И НАУЧНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ В СОВЕТСКОЙ КАРЕЛИИ:
ИСТОРИЯ КАРЕЛЬСКОГО НАУЧНО-ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКОГО
ИНСТИТУТА (1930–1937)**

Аннотация: Прослеживается связь между научными исследованиями и политикой в Советской Карелии. В 1930 г. в республике был основан Карельский научно-исследовательский институт — новаторский центр, цель которого состояла в продвижении научных исследований, направленных на преобразование реальности и создание нового общества. История центра была обусловлена сложными обстоятельствами тридцатых годов и завершилась в преддверии Большого террора. За время своего существования сталинская концепция «социалистического строительства» играла центральную роль во всей деятельности института.

Keywords / Ключевые слова: Science, academic research, Soviet Karelia, the 1930s, Karelian Research Institute, Stalinism / Наука, научные исследования, Советская Карелия, 1930-е гг., Карельский научно-исследовательский институт, сталинизм

Science and academic research played a central role in the political agenda of the Bolsheviks. Already in the spring of 1918, Vladimir Lenin, discussing the main tasks of his new regime, stressed the relevance of science in his political project. According to him, without the leadership of ‘specialists in the various branches of science’ it was impossible to achieve the goals of Socialism since this new system needed to surpass the capitalist system in productivity.¹ To guarantee this scientific development, Lenin’s government paid great attention to academic research. Between 1918 and 1919, for example, 33 research institutes were established and by the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, the Bolsheviks had already 90 such institutions.²

The importance of academic research increased significantly after the ‘Great Break’ during the second half of the 1920s. The acceleration in the pace of industrialisation, within the context of the transition from the NEP (‘New Economic Policy’) to a purely Stalinist economy, required a greater deployment of scientific knowledge, but also greater

¹ Vladimir I. Lenin, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, vol. 36 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury TSK KPSS, 1981), 178-179.

² Konstantin V. Ostrovitianov (ed.), *Organizatsiia nauki v pervyye gody Sovetskoi vlasti (1917–1925)* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1968), 8.

control over academics. In addition to the increase in its relevance, the way in which the regime perceived science and academia also changed during this period.³ The ‘socialist construction,’ the great slogan of the Party had much to do with it. The term *socialist construction* emerged in the revolutionary period to describe the task of creating a new society, however, from the second half of the 1920s it became the main political myth of the regime. According to its new meaning, science and academic research were necessarily at the service of the ‘socialist construction.’

In order to value this new dimension of the concept *socialist construction* and its influence on academic research, it is useful to observe the processes of formation of professional science in the periphery of the Soviet Union. As the development of the scholarly institutions in the Russian Empire was concentrated in its main cities, the peripheral regions lacked academic institutions or higher education. Therefore, the Bolsheviks, in order to meet the needs of their new project, began the construction of research centres and universities throughout Soviet territory. All these institutions were formed by the Bolsheviks’ understanding of the ‘socialist construction.’

This article examines one such case, that is, the creation and early history of the Karelian Research Institute (*Karel'skii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut, KNII*), founded in the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic during the First Five-Year Plan. The centre was the first scholarly research institution in the republic and played a major role in the development of academic knowledge. Between 1931 and 1937, the KNII trained specialists, carried out research and contributed to the region's ‘cultural revolution.’ This case study analyses the history of the professional academic research in the northern republic and its importance at the time, the influence of politics on its activities and the way science and its functions were understood in the USSR in the context of the myth of the ‘construction of socialism.’ In addition, this study seeks to look at the history of Stalinism from a micro-historical perspective and thus enrich the more general debates on this issue. This research uses archival documents from the National Archive of the Republic of Karelia and the Scholarly Archive of the Karelian Research Centre (*KarNTs RAN*).

The creation of the KNII and its first activities (1930–32)

The Karelian Research Institute was created in 1930 and began to operate the following year. Karelia was one of the first autonomous republics of the USSR to have such a complex, although it cannot be said that it was an exceptional case. The KNII was part of a first wave of research institutes in the autonomous republics

³ Feliks F. Perchenok “‘Delo Akademii nauk’ i ‘velikii perelom’ v sovetskoi nauke” in Viktor A. Kumanev (ed.) *Tragicheskie sud'by: repressirovannye uchenye Akademii nauk SSSR* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995), 232–233.

which were also joined by the institutes of Kazakhstan (which until 1936 was an autonomous republic), Bashkiria or Chuvashia, among others. These institutes were created more than ten years before those of other autonomous republics, such as Tatarstan or Dagestan, which were the result of a second wave.

The first wave of creation of these centres responded to the successive pronouncements of the Bolshevik power seeking to extend academic research throughout the country. One example is the Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) and VTsIK (All-Russian Central Executive Committee) decree *On the construction of museums in the RSFSR* of August 20, 1928.⁴ Despite the fact that in its title it mentions the 'construction of museums,' the decree referred to the need to promote museums as institutions that should contribute to the 'tasks of the construction of socialism' in the geography of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Among these tasks, special emphasis was placed on the ideological and cultural work of these institutions, but also on the scholarly aspect, stressing research work.⁵ These guidelines were decisive in the creation of the KNII two years later.

From the moment of the 'Great Break' the republican leadership of Karelia considered that the development of science was a *sine qua non* condition to fulfill the concrete tasks that the First Five-Year Plan entrusted to the republic. Already in 1929, the Narkompros (People's Commissariat for Education) of Karelia decided to promote and revise the function of the FZU schools (*shkoly fabrichno-zavodskogo uchenichestva*, i. e. the 'schools of factory and plant apprenticeship'), dedicated to the professional formation of specialists facing the requirements of an increasingly advanced industry.⁶ However, the creation of the KNII was the most ambitious project in this field. Its creation agreed upon in 1930 by the Narkompros and the Sovnarkom of Karelia. The latter ratified it by the decree *On the organisation of the Karelian Research (Complex) Institute* on September 24, 1930.

The decree announced the creation of a scientific research institution managed and financed by the Karelian Sovnarkom. Among its objectives were the study of 'the needs of socialist construction,' the training of researchers and the 'popularisation of academic knowledge among the broad masses of workers.' The decree also pointed out that the centre should carry out research of the highest importance for the region. For this purpose, among other things, the new institute could open a library, a laboratory, observation stations, carry out expeditions and excursions or to publish scientific journals.⁷

⁴ Aleksandr F. Titov and Yurii A. Savvateev, *Karel'skii nauchnyi tsentr Rossiiskoi akademii nauk: 1946–2016 gg.* (Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii nauchnyi tsentr RAN, 2016), 10.

⁵ *Khronologicheskoe sobranie zakonov, ukazov Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta i postanovlenii Pravitel'stva RSFSR. T. 1: 1917–1928 gg.* (Moscow: Gosyurizdat, 1959), 543–545.

⁶ "Karel'skaia promyshlennost' nuzhdaetsia v spetsialistakh" *Krasnaia Kareliia*, March 9, 1929: 5.

⁷ Nauchnyi arkhiv Karel'skogo nauchnogo tsentra RAN (NA KNTs RAN), f. 1, op. 3, d. 2, fol. 50–52.

In regards to internal organisation, the institute was divided into six sections: forestry and wood industry section, the ‘natural productive forces’ section, the agriculture section, the socio-economic section, the historical-revolutionary section, and finally the section of ethnography and linguistics. The Bureau of Local Studies (*Kraevedenie*) in Karelia was also included in its organisational chart. Edvard Gylling, the Chairman of the Karelian Sovnarkom, was appointed as director, while historian and ethnographer Stepan Andreevich Makariev became the deputy director, taking on much of the centre’s management work.⁸

Makariev himself, in an extensive article published in *Sovetskaia Kareliia*, described the reason for the creation of the institute and the tasks it was given. As was usual in the Stalinist propaganda of the 1930s, the article began by summarising the incredible results of the First Five-Year Plan: the birth of modern collectivised agriculture replacing the old agriculture, the flourishing of new industry in the formerly inhospitable northern territories and new sources of energy would attest the contrasts made possible by the ‘Great Break.’ The author also praised the cultural revolution that was deployed in the heat of the national policy of the Party and the *korenizatsiia* (i. e. indigenisation or nativisation). According to Makariev, this ‘colossal’ economic and cultural growth demanded a widespread deployment of academic research, urging the republican leadership to the founding of the KNII. Finally, with the creation of the centre, for Makariev, science was at the service of the ‘socialist construction’ in Karelia.⁹

Obviously, the understanding of science as something that should be at the service of the ‘construction of socialism’ was not a local phenomenon but a typical feature of the Stalinist experience. For the Bolsheviks, in a society governed by the dynamics of class antagonism nothing could exist outside this logic and science was no exception. The science served the classes, and the Bolshevik task was none other than to conquer science and put it at the service of the proletariat. The political changes in the USSR at the end of the 1920s progressively changed this view. In the five plenaries of the VKP(b) Central Committee between April 1928 and November 1929, which concluded with the political victory of the Stalinists over various forms of opposition, more than an economic model was at stake. The replacement of the NEP by the planned economy was accompanied by a new way of understanding the rhythms in which the USSR had to move towards a classless society.

⁸ Svetlana N. Filimonchik, *Razvitie nauki v Sovetskoii Karelii v 1920–1930-e gg.* (Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo PetrGU, 2014), 36; Svetlana N. Filimonchik, “Rol' nauchno-issledovatel'skikh institutov Karelii v razvitiu gumanitarnykh nauk v 1930-e gody” *Trudy Kareliiskogo nauchnogo tsentra RAN* 4 (2010): 104, <http://illportal.krc.karelia.ru/publ.php?id=5673&plang=r> (accessed December 12, 2020).

⁹ Stepan A. Makariev, “Nauka — na sluzhbu sotsialisticheskomu stroitel'stvu” *Sovetskaia Kareliia*, 8–10 (1931): 23–24

At this point, the ‘socialist construction,’ a term used since the late 1910s, takes on a deeper and more immediate meaning. As evidenced by Stalin’s speech on the twelfth anniversary of the October Revolution, a ‘socialist offensive’ against ‘capitalist elements’ had begun in the USSR. The country was advancing ‘at full steam’ towards socialism, leaving behind the ‘old Russian backwardness.’¹⁰ It is evident that what Stalin announced was his own programme of modernisation, but beyond that the ‘socialist construction’ contained more elements. It was the political myth of Stalinism, codified in the form of a story years later in the famous Short Course, which legitimized Stalin’s ‘revolution from above’ since it would be reciprocated by society. During the ‘construction of socialism,’ which the Soviet leaders defined as a historical period, science would have the function of satisfying the needs of the moment. What we observe in the case of Karelia is the local adaptation of that same idea. With the construction of the KNII, the leadership of the Party and the republic in Karelia tried to solve the challenges of such a socio-economic transformation with the peculiarities of the region.

If we study the first activities of the institute, we will observe the central points of this process in the republic. Its economy was mainly based on the forestry and wood industry, driven by the production objectives of the First Five-Year Plan.¹¹ Therefore, the work of the forestry and wood industry section was strategic for the institute’s leaders. Before the establishment of the institute, there was already scientific work in this field, more specifically in the *KareLLes* trust, so its group of researchers was incorporated into the institute and became the forestry and wood industry section of the centre.

Its early research can be classified into three areas. First, the section began to recognise Karelian forest resources in order to locate exploitable forests. Secondly, it studied the ideal forms for their exploitation and the subsequent logistics for the transport of the exploited material. Finally, but just as important as the previous ones, the section focused on studying the forms of work in the exploitation of these resources¹². As with other industries during Stalinism, the exploitation of resources was as important as the way in which this exploitation was done. The ‘construction of socialism’ involved, to use Marxist terms, substituting capitalist relations of production for socialist ones. In this way, the forestry and wood industry section sought to discover this new ‘socialist’ form of producing wood.

Even though it was an independent institute, collaboration with specialists from Moscow and Leningrad was common in the work of this section, generally because of the lack of specialists in the region. These scientists, along with those of the institute

¹⁰ Iosif V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 12 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoie izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1954), 118, 135.

¹¹ Nick Baron, *Soviet Karelia. Politics, Planning and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1920–1939* (London: Routledge, 2007), 99.

¹² Makariev, “Nauka — na sluzhbu sotsialisticheskomu stroitel'stvu,” 24–25.

itself, demonstrated interests that did not fit the immediate needs of the regime. A clear example is the creation of the Kivach nature reserve as part of the forestry section in 1931. This was a 4,000-hectare reserve that was the subject of debate among specialists. Some were in favor of combining the protection of its species with a rational use of its resources, while others supported eliminating all economic activity within the reserve. Finally, in 1934 it won the position favorable to protecting the space by combining it with research on its species.¹³

The first research activities of the section of ‘natural productive forces’ were focused on other natural resources of Karelia. As in the case of the forestry and wood industry section, the economy was given priority in those early works. On the one hand, the section studied the potential sources of energy in the republic, such as hydroelectric power or wind energy. Work was also done to recognise the mineral resources and the flora and fauna of the region. To start these works, the section was equipped with considerable means, for example, a meteorological station, a laboratory of construction materials, another botanical laboratory or a dendrological nursery that would start working in 1932.

In addition, between 1931 and 1932, the section collaborated with research groups independent of the KNII, for example, with the Karelian Fishery Research Station, created by the Ichthyological Institute of Scientific Research of Leningrad, in reconnaissance studies for fishing in Lake Onega. It also carried out studies on fishing in the White Sea with the Karelian branch of the State Oceanographic Institute (GOIN), where the studies on the construction of collective fish farms are noteworthy. Finally, the section of natural productive forces also collaborated with the Borodinskaia Biological Station in Konchezero and the Onega expedition of the State Hydrological Institute (GGI) in diverse studies of recognition of the territory and the hydric resources of Karelia.¹⁴

Returning to the concept of the ‘socialist construction’ and the Stalinist principle that put science at the mercy of this project, the agricultural section of the KNII played a significant role in this ‘socialist offensive’ in the Karelian countryside. Between 1930 and 1931, collectivisation and dekulakisation (the repressive campaign against the *kulaks*, i. e. prosperous peasants) radically transformed all aspects of reality in the countryside. NEP agriculture, still governed in part by the rules of a highly regulated market, was annihilated and in its place a new ‘socialist’ agriculture based on state and collective farms was built. The aim of the agricultural section of KNII was to face the new challenges related to these new ways of economic organisation.

In the work plan for the years 1931 and 1932, the section was divided into five sectors. The first sector was meant to contribute to the organisation of ‘socialist’ livestock farming on a large scale. To this end, it carried out various studies and research

¹³ Filimonchik, *Razvitiie nauki v Sovetskoj Karelii*, 38.

¹⁴ Makariev, “Nauka — na sluzhbu sotsialisticheskomu stroitel’stvu,” 25–28.

on the viability, growth prospects and rationalisation of this new form of livestock farming. The second sector focused on the study of forage. On the one hand, it began to work on a programme of fodder production for the Second Five-Year Plan, within the hay plan. It also looked for the best types of fodder for livestock and tried to implement mechanised processes to introduce this fodder in collective farms. The third sector of the agriculture section was dedicated to the study of feeding and breeding of livestock. As did the second sector, it also carried out studies on forage, however, its main priority was breeding. For example, it researched livestock breeding to improve species and developed artificial insemination programmes. The fourth sector dealt with livestock hygiene. Finally, the section's plan specified a sector working on 'kolkhoz construction and horticulture.' The mission of this sector was perhaps the least concrete. On the one hand, according to the plan, it was to organise the greenhouses on the territory of Karelia. However, on the other hand, it was also specified that the section should participate in the 'class struggle in the construction of kolkhozes.' Finally, as in the case of the forestry and wood industry section, this sector of the agriculture section also participated in the research of new forms of work organisation.¹⁵

The socio-economic section of the KNII was also tasked with contributing to the specific aspects of economic construction, however, the section had to deal with more varied issues. It should also be noted that, partly because of the difficulty in creating a section that responded to all sorts of issues related to the economy, the section was the last to start working. At the time of the institute's creation, it was proposed to divide it into seven sectors: the industry and transport sector, the agricultural economy sector, the planning sector, the economic accounting sector, the rationalisation sector, the 'construction of soviets' sector and finally, the sector for labor and its regulation. With the establishment of the agricultural section, the sector of agricultural economy ceased to be considered part of the socio-economic section and the former took over its functions.

The names of the sectors well illustrate the first tasks of this section. Primarily, all efforts were focused on improving the functioning of Karelia's economy in the Second Five-Year Plan. However, the section for 'constructing the soviets' stands out, about which we unfortunately do not have much information. In the words of deputy director Makariev, this sector was to 'contribute to the movement of the soviets and kolkhozes,' deepen Karelisation and study 'differentiated labor management through the soviets.'¹⁶ Presumably, this was a fundamental part of the Stalinist idea of 'constructing socialism,' since it studied the core of a new way of organising society, as well as its starting point.

¹⁵ NA KNT's RAN, f. 1, op. 3, d. 4, fol. 86–89.

¹⁶ Makariev, "Nauka — na sluzhbu sotsialisticheskomu stroitel'stvu," 28–29.

Finally, the first activities of the sections for the social sciences also organised their activities based on the idea of ‘constructing socialism.’ However, the collaboration of these disciplines in that idea was different. In the case of history, the historical-revolutionary section aimed at the study of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War. In 1931, for example, the Central Committee of the Party accepted Maxim Gorky’s proposal to write a *History of the Civil War*. The research institutes of the republics collaborated on this project and began to work on the publication of other monographs on the same subject. This was the case of the historical-revolutionary section of the KNII that in 1932 published *The History of the Civil War in Karelia*. For these early section works, the KNII hired Finnish communists Eero Haapalainen and Lauri Letonmäki, both veterans of the losing side in the Finnish Civil War.¹⁷

The last section, that of ethnography and linguistics, aimed at studying the cultures and folklore of the peoples of Karelia within the frames of four main disciplines: ethnography, linguistics, archaeology and anthropology. It was one of the sections that carried out more expeditions during the first two years of activity of the centre. In ethnographic matters, several expeditions were carried out to the regions of the republic in order to compile the stories and traditional songs of their peoples. In linguistics, a key point for the institute’s leadership, which described language as the ‘sharpest weapon of the class struggle,’ the expeditions were carried out to compile the linguistic wealth of Karelia. During these years, the archaeologists of the centre focused their efforts in classifying the results of the excavations of previous years, so that the excavations were paralysed. Finally, the anthropological sector had the purpose of collaborating with the other sections of the KNII to analyse the social changes in the republic.¹⁸

In conclusion, between 1930 and 1932 we observe the creation and the start of the first academic research institute in Karelia. Its different branches had the task of expanding academic knowledge in the autonomous republic, however, for all of them science was not an end, but rather a means. The end was the ‘construction of socialism,’ for what each section had a particular aspect to contribute. Evidently, the specialists of the centre sometimes had an agenda different from the priorities of the republican and central leaders. During these years, despite the ‘Academic Trial’ of the years 1929 and 1930, the specialists of the centre had the possibility of having initiative at work. However, progressively this freedom was reduced considerably.

¹⁷ Filimonchik, *Razvitie nauki v Sovetskoj Karelii*, 42–43; Filimonchik, “Rol’ nauchno-issledovatel’skikh institutov Karelii,” 106.

¹⁸ Makariev, “Nauka — na sluzhbu sotsialisticheskomu stroitel’stvu,” 30; Filimonchik, *Razvitie nauki v Sovetskoj Karelii*, 47–48.

The role of the KNII at the beginning of the Second Five-Year Plan

On April 13, 1932 the First Session of the Karelian Research Institute was opened in the city of Petrozavodsk. The event, in the format of a conference, brought together the scholars of the centre to discuss the new priorities of the institute in view of the Second Five-Year Plan which was being drawn up at that time. In all, 43 reports summarising the results of the first research results and the prospects for the next five years of the new economic plan were presented. The session had a considerable impact in Karelia. The main newspaper in the republic, *Krasnaia Kareliia*, reported on its discussions and published some of its most notable reports. It also echoed, for example, the words of Gustav Rovio, the first secretary of the Karelian Regional Party Committee, who praised the economic growth of his region and wished that the institute would be able to 'raise scientific thinking to the appropriate height' in the coming years.¹⁹

Reflecting on the significance of this meeting, Deputy Director Makariiev explained that the event was a response to the 'crucial moment' in the 'socialist construction.' As the basis for this construction, science in the new economic plan needed to respond to new practical problems and these, in turn, needed to be reflected in the institute's future research plans. The task of the First Session of the KNII was, therefore, to agree on new lines of research for this new stage of the 'socialist construction.' Makariiev also stressed the political importance of the meeting. In his view, the correct application of the 'national policy' had enabled Karelia to develop 'its full potential' by triggering stimulating economic growth. This growth required a boost to the scientific work of the KNII, which had to improve its organisation and planning.²⁰

In this way, the objective of the First Session of the KNII was to adapt the academic work in the republic to the demands of the Second Five-Year Plan. This plan emphasised the role of heavy industry, which received most of the planned investments, even in Karelia, where investments in heavy industry exceeded those in the forestry and timber industry. The plan was also characterized by the acceleration of the pace of industrialisation and its unattainable production quotas, which had to be revised downwards on more than one occasion.²¹

During the first two years of the Second Five-Year Plan, there was considerable growth in the KNII. It acquired infrastructure and at the same time increased its capacity to carry out academic research. In 1933, the previously independent experimental biological stations of Petrozavodsk and Loukhi were incorporated into the centre. In addition, the Karelian Fishery Research Station, with which the institute worked jointly

¹⁹ "Otkrylas' pervaya sessiya Nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta" *Krasnaia Kareliia*, April 15, 1932: 1; *Krasnaia Kareliia*, April 16, 1932: 3–4.

²⁰ Stepan A. Makariiev, "1-ia sessiya Karel'skogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta" *Sovetskaia Kareliia*, 3–4 (1932): 20.

²¹ Baron, *Soviet Karelia*, 157–159.

during the first two years of activity, also became part of KNII as a ‘self-dependent subdivision.’²²

The research plans of the sections also show the qualitative growth of the KNII. As agreed in the First Session, in order to put science at the service of the ‘socialist construction,’ to use Gylling’s words,²³ between 1933 and 1934 researches reached a higher degree of specialisation compared to the first two years of the institute. The research topics of the agricultural section, for example, show a deeper insight in comparison with the first two years. While the 1932 plan included the need to study different aspects of fodder, the 1933 and 1934 plans specified more specific research, such as the study of mineral nutrition of livestock and experiments on the processing of fodder by microbiological processes. The greater political and economic demands of the new phase of the ‘construction of socialism’ are also reflected in the work of this section, more specifically, in the sector responsible for studying the organisation of labor and the construction of kolkhozes. Bearing in mind that the construction of socialism was not only about construction and economic development, but also involved the radical and complete transformation of reality, this sector had to deal with the functioning of the new form of producing goods. To this end, the plans for these two years provided for the section to participate in improving the new socialist agriculture by identifying the practices of work in brigades, implementing the method of ‘piecework’ and seeking an increase in the production and income of the collective farms. By 1933, their goals were to reach ten percent of all Karelian kolkhozes.²⁴

Compared to its early work on the classification and organisation of forest resources, between 1933 and 1934 the forestry section of the KNII began to explore the full potential of Karelian forest resources. As we have already noted, although Karelia was recognised for its specialisation in forestry, the Second Five-Year Plan had allocated more capital to heavy industry. The forestry section, in addition to delving into the timber industry, also studied the use of wood in other industries. For example, the 1933 thematic work plan included a study of the properties of Karelian wood for use in the chemical industry.²⁵

In the case of the social sciences, the influence of the Second Five-Year Plan on research plans was not so pronounced. During these two years, the section of ethnography and linguistics continued the projects to compile the folklore of the peoples of Karelia by carrying out expeditions through their territory. In addition, it began to compile a Karelian-Finnish-Russian dictionary and produced a compilation of Karelian-Finnish grammar. Taking into account the linguistic implications

²² Filimonchik, *Razvitiie nauki v Sovetskoj Karelii*, 38.

²³ Edvard Gylling, “Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel’stvo i nauchno-issledovatel’skaia rabota v Karelii” *Karelo-Murmanskii krai*, 3–4 (1932): 8.

²⁴ NA KNTs RAN, f. 1, op. 3, d. 49, fol. 42, 47; *ibid.*, f. 1, op. 3, d. 95, fol. 9–10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 1, op. 3, d. 49, fol. 41.

of Kareliisation in the education of the republic, which meant that most of the teaching was given in Finnish,²⁶ the section also developed a methodological guide for the improvement of the Finnish language in schools.²⁷

The historical-revolutionary section continued the works related to the Civil War in Karelia. In order to compile the biographies of the participants, in 1934 questionnaires were sent to the districts of the republic, receiving 600 answers in total. As it happened with his initiative to write the history of the Civil War, Gorky's proposal to undertake the elaboration of the history of factories in the USSR also had its effect among the researchers of this section. The 1934 plan included a study of the metallurgical factories in Karelia and another one of the sawmills and the ski factory in Petrozavodsk. Finally, this plan also included the project of collecting materials on banditry in Karelia and the study of the revolutionary movement in Finland.²⁸

In short, 1933 and 1934 were years of adaptation. The First Session of the Karelian Research Institute reiterated the function of science in the service of 'constructing socialism,' the same idea with which the KNII was formed. However, during the Second Five-Year Plan, the demand on science was greater. On the one hand, the KNII had the ever-increasing task of transferring scientific knowledge to Karelian economy to boost its growth. On the other hand, it also had to participate in the creation of new forms of economic and social organisation in the republic.

1935: the year of the real break

Despite the recent death of Sergei Kirov in December 1934, 1935 began as a year of triumphalism in Soviet Karelia. The local press praised the economic growth of the republic, its socialist industrialization and the growth of its kolkhozes.²⁹ All this euphoria was projected in the Tenth All-Karelian Congress of Soviets, celebrated in January of that year with evident samples of optimism. Moreover, hopes for socialism as a system that would solve the misfortunes of the old capitalist world were also combined with celebrations for two anniversaries of extraordinary importance in the hegemonic agenda that was imposed since the arrival of the 'Red Finns' to the region.

²⁶ Aleksandra I. Afanas'eva, "Sozdanie sovetskoi natsional'noi avtonomii i nekotorye voprosy iazykovogo stroitel'stva v Karelii (1920–1940 gg.)" *Voprosy istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*, (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1987): 57; Svetlana N. Filimonchik, "Provedenie shkol'nykh reform v Karelii v 1920–30-e gody" *Izvestiia Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo tekhnicheskogo universiteta. Seriya: Problemy sotsial'no-gumanitarnogo znaniia*, 9 (2013): 172–178, www.vstu.ru/uploadiblok/files/izvestiya/archive/6/2013-09.pdf (accessed December 12, 2020).

²⁷ NA KNT's RAN, f. 1, op. 3, d. 95, fol. 10.

²⁸ Ibid., f. 1, op. 3, d. 95, fol. 10; Filimonchik, *Razvitie nauki v Sovetskoi Karelii*, 46.

²⁹ For example: *Krasnaia Kareliia*, January 5, 1935: 2.

On the one hand, February 1935 marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of the Finnish epic *Kalevala* by Elias Lönnrot. The work is a fundamental piece of Finnish romantic nationalism, which places in Karelia the origin and essence of the immutable idea of the Finnishness. On the other hand, in July the fifteenth anniversary of Karelia's autonomy was celebrated, without a doubt the most important one between the two. The public celebrations of these two anniversaries vertebrated the development of events in the year 1935 that, finally, would trigger the beginning of the lamentably famous tragedy of 1937 and 1938.

Throughout 1935, the KNII was at the same time an actor, a witness and a battlefield in the events and radical changes that the autonomous republic lived through. By then, the institute was already a settled institution, with 109 employees compared to 10 in its first year.³⁰ As for the scholarly aspect, the year began with a plan suited to the particularity of the date. The ethnography and linguistics section had the leading role; most of its programmed activities were related to the centenary of the *Kalevala*. The main area of research was the study of the origin of Lönnrot's work and its different uses at that time. The results of these studies were to be published in the form of articles. In addition, in connection with the February celebrations, the section also planned a collection of materials by Lönnrot and a Finnish ethnographer Matthias Castrén in Finnish and Russian to commemorate the anniversary.³¹

Other sections of the institute did not include specific activities related to anniversaries in their plan. Thus, no section of KNII planned any work related to the fifteenth anniversary of autonomy. The historical-revolutionary section, for example, followed the trend of 1933 and 1934, continuing its study of banditry in Karelia and collecting autobiographies of Civil War participants. In addition, it incorporated into the plan two new topics — the history of Sovkhoz No. 2 and of the commune *Säde* ('Sun Ray' in Finnish), populated by Canadian immigrants who arrived after the world economic crisis of 1929.³²

Beyond the activities included in the annual thematic plan, the KNII participated in various ways in the celebration of the anniversaries. The centenary of the publication of the *Kalevala* was celebrated between February 28 and March 6, 1935, a week full of cultural events where the press invited the citizens of Karelia to learn about the centenary epic. The activities and their contents were organised practically in their entirety by the institute. The week started with an extended meeting of the KNII management devoted to the research on Lönnrot's work and held at the Palace of National Culture in Petrozavodsk. Invited to the meeting were members of the regional

³⁰ Filimonchik, "Rol' nauchno-issledovatel'skikh institutov Karelii," 104.

³¹ NA KNT's RAN, f. 1, op. 3, d. 133, fol. 67–68.

³² Ibid., fol. 68–69.

government, the Party, trade unions, personalities of the Karelian theater and literature, a representative of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and various representatives of other republics.

In the same place, open to the public, an exhibition divided into five panels was inaugurated. The first panel was dedicated to the creation of the *Kalevala* from the point of view of literature. The second presented the scientific research work of the KNII on this subject. The third panel presented the legacy of the *Kalevala* in the visual arts. The fourth, entitled 'The *Kalevala* in the service of the Finnish bourgeoisie and Finnish fascism,' presented Finland's 'uses' of this work. Finally, the fifth panel was dedicated to the 'old and new Karelia' exalting the Bolshevik national policy: socialist in content, national in form. Furthermore, in order to ensure the success of the exhibition and to spread its message to the whole population, the goal of the celebrations, the Society of Proletarian Tourism organised excursions to Petrozavodsk for the inhabitants of Karelia. These activities were accompanied by the publication of the collection of materials planned by the KNII, which included the contributions of the researchers of the centre, as well as materials gathered and published by Lönnrot.³³

In July, public celebrations were back in Karelia, this time for the fifteenth anniversary of its autonomy. While the centenary of the *Kalevala* took place in a form of a cultural week with propagandistic and commemorative purposes, the anniversary of the foundation of Karelian autonomy was a classic Stalinist mass celebration with regional particularities. In May of the previous year, the organising committee was formed with seven members, among them Stepan Makariev as the secretary of the governmental committee. The task of the body was to plan and organise all aspects of the July 1935 festivities, which would ultimately have to be accepted by the Karelian Central Executive Committee.³⁴

Among the never-ending list of activities organised by this commission, the KNII occupied a significant place providing content to the celebration. The centre's director, Gylling, who was also the chairman of the Karelian Sovnarkom, deputy director Makariev and other centre researchers such as Haapalainen, actively participated in writing and publishing anniversary propaganda materials. Although not included in the annual thematic plan of the historical-revolutionary section, a collection of historical archival documents on the revolutionary movement in Karelia since 1900 was also published. On the other hand, researchers Petrov and Sokolov arranged for the publication of a special anniversary volume on the work of the KNII.³⁵ The Karelian Fishery Research

³³ Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Kareliia (NARK), f. P-3, op. 3, d. 358, fol. 18; *Krasnaia Kareliia*, February 28, 1935: 4.

³⁴ NARK, f. R-689, op. 5, d. 37, fol. 1.

³⁵ Ibid., f. R-689, op. 5, d. 37, fol. 7–8.

Station, despite being included in the KNII discipline, also published its own collection of works to celebrate the date.³⁶

In this way, the KNII participated in the public celebrations organised by the republican leaders. Through these events, the ‘Red Finns’ did not only intend to celebrate them as anniversaries, but also to use them as social practices that would create new realities and subjectivities. The celebration was just another instrument for the construction of a new society with new ideas and values. The ‘successful application of the nationality policy of Lenin and Stalin’ was one of the great slogans repeated in these acts, since it was in fact the main guarantor of the political legitimacy of the republican leadership in the face of the state powers and the main bulwark of the political autonomy that Lenin had granted fifteen years earlier. Holding such acts was, therefore, one of the few ways in which the regional powers could defend their position against Stalin’s political office in the mid-1930s.

The political events that occurred in Karelia from August 1935 onwards, however, call into question the effectiveness of these techniques and procedures. In the midst of a rain of criticism and accusations of bad political leadership by the high instances of power, especially by the leader of the Party in Leningrad, Andrei Zhdanov, at the end of that month Gustav Rovio was removed from his position at the head of the Party in the republic. The same happened to Gylling, who on October 31 would also be deposed from his position as Chairman of Sovnarkom.³⁷ This ‘coup,’ executed with Stalin’s personal permission, was a break in the history of Karelia and the first step towards the mass terror of 1937 and 1938.³⁸

Political restructuring quickly reached other spheres of society and, because of its significance, the KNII was one of the first to suffer from it. Gylling’s dismissal was not limited to his position as Chairman in the Sovnarkom, but he was also relieved of his seat in the KNII government as well as his entire leadership, Makariev included. On October 15, 1935, the institute’s new leadership, with Vladislav Iakovlevich Nikandrov as director and Nikolai Osipovich Sokolov as deputy director, organised a meeting to discuss the past, present and future of the institute. Makariev was a guest. The minutes of the meeting revealed the deeply critical views of the new leadership on the activities of the past, some of which were shared by Makariev at the meeting of the Regional Party Committee in June of that year before his dismissal.³⁹

The Stalinist concept of the ‘construction of socialism’ was at the heart of these criticisms. According to the new direction, the institute’s annual thematic plans did not

³⁶ Ibid., f. R-689, op. 5, d. 37, fol. 31.

³⁷ Irina Takala, “Delo Giullinga — Rovio” in Anatolij Tsygankov (ed.) *Ikh nazывali KR* (Petrozavodsk: Kareliia, 1992), 45–46.

³⁸ Oleg Khlevniuk *et al.*, *Stalin i Kaganovich: Perepiska 1931–1936 gg* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 617.

³⁹ Titov and Savvateev, *Karel’skii nauchnyi tseñtr*, 14.

correspond to the 'growing demand' for the 'socialist construction,' since they did not address its 'fundamental tasks.' These tasks were, for example, the mechanisation of agriculture, the development of industry, the study of the history of Karelia and the 'questions of the class struggle' in relation to language policy. The criticism was not limited to the old direction, it was also extensive to the scientists who formed the centre, who were accused of not being prepared, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to fulfill the objectives set. The historical-revolutionary section was especially reprimanded at the meeting. It was stated that their work and their choice of themes were not the right ones and that the section needed a serious correction. They cited as an example their work on banditry in Karelia, which was considered 'politically illiterate.' In other sections, the tone of criticism was softer, although all highlighted the alleged shortcomings.⁴⁰

From this meeting, the history of the institute changed radically. The new direction, with the trust of the new republican rulers, was born out of the denial of the work previously done. It should also be noted that the concrete work of the researchers, as well as their freedom, was also progressively modified. During the year 1935 we find the first cases of censorship within the academic works. The researcher Mashezerskii, for example, who participated in the works on the Civil War in Karelia, was accused of 'political myopia' and his works in the magazine *Sovetskaia Kareliia* were censored.⁴¹

In Karelia, 1935, the year of the real break, embodied the main paradoxes, dynamics and contradictions of Stalinism. The triumphalism and public celebrations of the first half of the year ended with the dismissal of the 'Red Finns' and the arrival of new leaders of whom Moscow and Leningrad were confident. The KNII experienced these events first-hand, first by organising and participating in the celebrations and later by becoming a territory that the new regional elites wanted to control and dominate. The arguments used to put an end to the old leadership of the centre do not correspond to reality. The thematic plans of the old management, to which they refer in the October meeting, also aimed at meeting the needs of the 'socialist construction' with concrete practical activities. This shows the ambiguous and subjective nature of the concept 'socialist construction,' which was far from being a defined programme.

New leadership, reorganisation and dissolution of the KNII (1936–37)

It is not easy to determine, at least in terms of academic activities, how the new leadership of the centre understood scientific research in relation to the 'construction of socialism.' This is mainly due to the paucity of documentation about the period and the few months of the leadership's tenure before the institute's reorganisation and practical decomposition in January 1937. In fact, 1936 was the year of preparation for that reorganisation, the main priority of the new republican leadership in academic

⁴⁰ NA KNT's RAN, f. 1, op. 3, d. 126, fol. 27–33.

⁴¹ Filimonchik, "Rol' nauchno-issledovatel'skikh institutov Karelii," 107.

matters. Moreover, the growing repressive climate in the republic from 1935 onwards may lead us to magnify the role played by scientific research during this period.

While during 1935 and 1936 the repression throughout the USSR was mainly political, directed at members of the upper spheres of power, in Karelia the terror was extensive to the population, preempting the years 1937 and 1938. From 1935, for example, we observe the operation against the Resettlement Administration, the body in charge of coordinating the arrival of Finnish political immigrants from the United States and Canada, which put Karelia's ethnic minorities in the regime's sights.⁴²

In the field of academia, this period was characterised by the growing importance of history within the Stalinist imaginary. In order to promote 'Soviet patriotism,' from the mid-1930s the regime made it a priority to pay attention to the teaching of this discipline in schools throughout the country. In 1934, the Union Sovnarkom issued a decree *On the teaching of civil history (grazhdanskaia istoriia) in the schools of the USSR*. The order explained the importance of teaching history in a 'more entertaining' and less abstract way. The decree *On history textbooks* of January 1936 is another example of these efforts. The Sovnarkom organised a commission to review, improve, and if necessary, rework the country's textbooks in a battle to control the 'historical front.'⁴³

The new leadership of the KNII was aware of the growing importance that history had acquired within the 'cultural construction' and to a great extent, for that reason, the historical-revolutionary section was the most reprimanded at the October 1935 meeting. Under the new mandate, the thematic plans reflect the desire to write a general history of Karelia from the period of feudalism to the Civil War for the first time since the founding of the centre. The project foresaw the publication of an essay divided into five major chapters by 1938. The first chapter was dedicated to the emergence of feudalism in Karelia. The second covered the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the time of Karelia as 'a colony of feudal serfs' of Russia. The third chapter, also chronological, focused on the second half of the nineteenth century. The fourth chapter was thematic and studied the nationality and colonial policy of the tsarism, as well as the 'aspirations of the Finnish bourgeoisie' during the 20th century. Finally, the last chapter was dedicated to the First World War, the October Revolution and the Civil War in Karelia. Compared to the thematic plans of the old management, the new plans also included the study of the history of the factories in Karelia. The 1937 plan, for example, mentioned an investigation of the Onega factory, founded in the 18th century and

⁴² Alexey Golubev and Irina Takala, *The Search for a Socialist El Dorado. Finnish Immigration to Soviet Karelia from the United States and Canada in the 1930s* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 126.

⁴³ *Krasnaia Kareliia*, January 28, 1936: 1; *Sobranie zakonov i rasporyazhenii raboche-krest'yanskogo pravitel'stva Soiuzna Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik za 1934 g.* (Moscow: Upravlenie delami Soveta ministrov SSSR, 1948), 368.

restructured with the arrival of the Bolsheviks to power, and another one about the history of 'one of the wood factories' of Karelia.⁴⁴

In general, the activities of the ethnography and linguistics section did not undergo major changes with the new direction. The section continued with a broad thematic plan where the various aspects of the folklore, traditions and languages of the peoples of Karelia were covered. The research group dedicated to the languages was the one that registered more changes. While the Finnish language was the protagonist between 1931 and 1935, with the new direction and the well-known controversy between the Finnish and Karelian languages, the second one was consolidated as the national language of Karelia. Between 1936 and 1938, most of the research in this field was focused on the Karelian language, while Finnish was relegated to the background. In other research groups the differences are practically imperceptible between the old and the new direction. The folklore group continued to collect epics and traditional stories, while the ethnography and linguistics group followed the thread of their previous research.⁴⁵

In short, in the thematic plans of 1936 and 1937 that we have been able to study, two points stand out above others: the project of elaborating a general history of Karelia and the impulse to the Karelian language to the detriment of Finnish. The introduction of these two topics in the research plans responds to political reasons of great priority of the new direction of the centre. The 'coup' of Moscow and Leningrad in 1935 was caused by the great campaign against 'bourgeois nationalism.' The 'Red Finns' were accused of promoting that nationalism by putting the security of the USSR at risk.⁴⁶ It is not by chance, therefore, that one of the chapters of the essay prepared by the KNII with the new leadership dedicated a chapter to this issue. Another of the great accusations was that of exaggerating the 'Finnish' character of Karelia, more specifically, over-representing the Finns in the administration or with the excessive use of Finnish in the public sphere. Therefore, the departure of the old republican leadership implied in turn the progressive decline of the Finnish language as the national language. The incorporation of these two topics in the research plans gives a glimpse of the political significance that the new rulers attributed to the KNII.

After a year of elaboration, the reorganisation of the institute came with a decree of the Sovnarkom of Karelia on January 11, 1937. The decree included a fierce criticism of the history of the centre based on arguments substantially different from those of the October 1935 meeting. The decree pointed out that, despite the intentions of the old leaders to resolve the main issues of the economy and culture, the centre was unable to resolve "a single one" of those issues because of its own structure, which led

⁴⁴ NA KNT's RAN, f. 1, op. 3, d. 222, fol. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., f. 1, op. 3, d. 222, fol. 2–4.

⁴⁶ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 495, op. 16, d. 72, fol. 4–7.

to the dispersion of its forces. Thus, the Sovnarkom stated that the institute should stop being organised as a complex, since its variety of specializations prevented the centre from being able to devote itself to the problems of Karelian culture. In fact, this assertion implied that the new republican leadership did not count on the KNII except for the study and culture of Karelia, and discarded the previous idea that the KNII could play a central role in the material aspect of the ‘socialist construction.’

The core of the decree was the announcement of the reorganisation of the KNII and its conversion into the Karelian Research Institute of Culture (*Karel'skii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut kul'tury*), whose activity would be limited to linguistics, history, archaeology, folklore and ethnography. The sections that did not belong to the humanities were handed over to other institutions and departments of the republican government. The agricultural section and its experimental stations, for example, became part of the Karelian Narkomzem (People's Commissariat for Agriculture). Other facilities such as the scientific library and the publishing sector were reorganised and eventually eliminated.⁴⁷

The reorganisation meant the dissolution of the KNII as it was thought by the leadership of the ‘Red Finns’ in the early 1930s. The years 1936 and 1937 show that the new leadership of the centre and the republic was born from the denial of the work of the old leaders, although it cannot be said that they were against the idea of academic research in the service of the ‘socialist construction.’ With the restructuring, a large part of science served in government departments without the intermediation of an institute. Meanwhile, the KNII dedicated itself solely to the cultural sphere, an idea diametrically opposed to the original.

Conclusions

During its six years of existence, between 1931 and 1936, the KNII was the epicentre of science in the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Karelia. The ‘Red Finns,’ at the head of the republic since the early 1920s, considered that, to face the demands of academic knowledge of the First Five-Year Plan, it was necessary to create an institute that put science ‘at the service of the socialist construction.’ Despite its short life, the history of the centre testifies that this conception of science and research was central to all its activities.

By its own structure, the KNII tried to respond to all the scientific needs of the Stalinist modernisation project in the northern periphery. For this reason, the first activities of the institute were not only focused on the recognition of Karelia's surroundings, but also on the keys to Stalinist modernisation. The distinctive feature of this modernisation was the will to transform all the aspects of the material and ideal

⁴⁷ NA KNTs RAN, f. 1, op. 3, d. 221, fol. 9–10.

reality. According to Leninist thinking, the core of this transformation was a new form of production. The sections of agriculture or forestry, for example, were devoted to studying how to implement these new forms of organising economic activity. On the other hand, the humanities within the KNII were dedicated to the ideal facet of modernisation within the framework of ‘cultural construction.’ The clearest examples are the celebrations of 1935, where the republican government, with the collaboration of the KNII, tried to build new subjectivities, values and ideas through public ceremonies.

The optimism about the capabilities of science in socialist transformation gradually evaporated after 1935. The change in the centre’s direction was accompanied by a profound criticism of the institute's activity since its foundation. According to the new leadership, the institute had not been able to meet the needs of the ‘socialist construction’ in Karelia. However, its early work does not seem to corroborate this statement. The origins of the criticism respond to two main factors. On the one hand, behind the critique lies the denial of the work of a direction vetoed because of its supposed relationship to Finnish nationalism. On the other hand, behind these accusations is the very nature of the ‘socialist construction,’ which far from being a historical period as Stalinism believed, was a political myth of an extraordinarily complex nature.

The myth was based on the belief that the USSR, thanks to the leadership of the Party and accompanied by its proletariat, was heading towards a classless society and the infallible ‘Marxist-Leninist science’ dictated the steps in that transition. The disappointments in that transition process, the poor economic results harvested by Karelia during the Second Five Year Plan,⁴⁸ for example, could not be explained under the Leninist viewpoint in any other way than by the incorrect application of that ‘science.’ In conclusion, the overestimation of the capabilities of science in the process of ‘constructing socialism,’ together with the regime's inability to question its dogmas, condemned the KNII to disappear.

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⁴⁸ Baron, *Soviet Karelia*, 170.

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