

Annual report

Svalbard Science Forum



Guest at the SSF workshop 'Joint Cooperative Initiative' August 2009

(Photo: K. Holmén)

2009

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SVALBARD SCIENCE FORUM 2009

Introduction

The Research Council of Norway holds strategic responsibility for Arctic research in Norway. On the basis of the report "Organization of Research on Svalbard", the Research Council's board of directors adopted the "Strategy for development of Svalbard as a research platform" in February 1998, and established the Svalbard Science Forum (SSF) as a three-year programme. The programme was prolonged with a revised mandate in 2001. In 2005 SSF was revitalized and reorganized by the Norwegian Interministerial Committee on Polar Affairs. The Forum was given a new mandate (See Appendix 1) with strategic tasks related to the coordination of research in Svalbard and facilitation tasks related to information for scientists and functions as networking and meeting place.

The Svalbard Science Forum Board

In 2009, the SSF board members were:

Karin Refsnes, Project director, Division of Strategic Priorities, Department of Energy and Environment (Head of the SSF board)

Kim Holmén, Research Director, the Norwegian Polar Institute (NPI)

Gunnar Sand, Director, The University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS)

Jon Erik Nygaard, replaced by **Roger Jakobsen** from December 2009, both: Director, Kings Bay AS (KB)

Roland Neuber, Alfred Wegener Institute, Germany, deputy head of NYSMAC

Lisa Baddely, EISCAT and representative for the Longyearbyen Science and Education Forum (LySEF), replaced by **Christin Kristoffersen** from October 2009, Head of the Academic and Research Department, UNIS, Head of LYSEF

Observers to SSF Board

The Governor of Svalbard (**Tor Punsvik**)

Barentsburg research community (**Sergey Priamikov**)

Polish Polar Station in Hornsund (**Piotr Glowacki**)

The SSF office is located in the Svalbard Science Centre in Longyearbyen and it is staffed by two research coordinators: Christiane Hübner and Marzena Kaczmarek (in a 25% position). The research coordinators are employed through a contract with the Norwegian Polar Institute.

Two SSF board meetings were held in 2009 – on 21/22 April (Longyearbyen), and 20 October (Oslo). Board meeting minutes can be found at <http://www.ssf.polar.no/pages/boardMinutes.htm>.

Activities of SSF in 2009 related to the mandate

1 Strategic tasks:

1.1 Implement scientific coordination in accordance with strategy documents (including policy documents from the Research Council of Norway)

Research in Svalbard RiS database

SSF runs in cooperation with NPI the Research in Svalbard RiS database - <http://www.svalbardscienceforum.no/pages/database.htm>. The RiS database has been widely accepted and has evolved to a useful tool for scientists, logisticians and managers within Svalbard research. In 2009, 170 new projects were added (Fig.1) and in combination with projects added prior to 2009, a total of 521 projects active in 2009 were registered.

The readiness to register data sets into the RiS database is much less and most registered data sets originate from an internal NPI database and IPY projects that are obliged to register their data sets. In 2009, 39 new data sets were added (Fig. 2), resulting in 201 registered data sets in total.

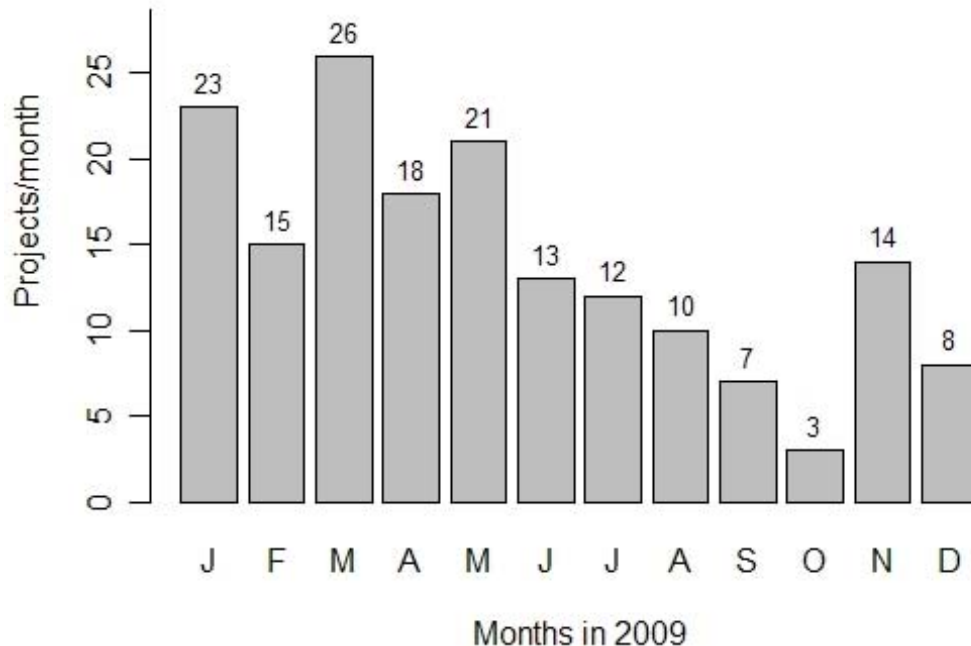


Figure 1. Use of the RiS database project registration. Number of registered projects/month in 2009. The sudden increase in November is due to the registration request for the Arctic Field Grant proposals.

In autumn 2009, SSF, in cooperation with NPI, The Governor of Svalbard, Kingsbay AS and AWI commenced the work with the development of a one-stop shop for project

registration, booking and permit application as an extension of the RiS database. The new system is based on current databases and information retrieving systems of SSF, the Governor, Kingsbay AS and the individual stations in Ny-Ålesund and will simplify the process for scientists coming to Svalbard. The scientist will have to deal with one user interface only instead of having to provide (partly similar) information to all partners separately. The system will be extendable to other research stations and authorities in the future.

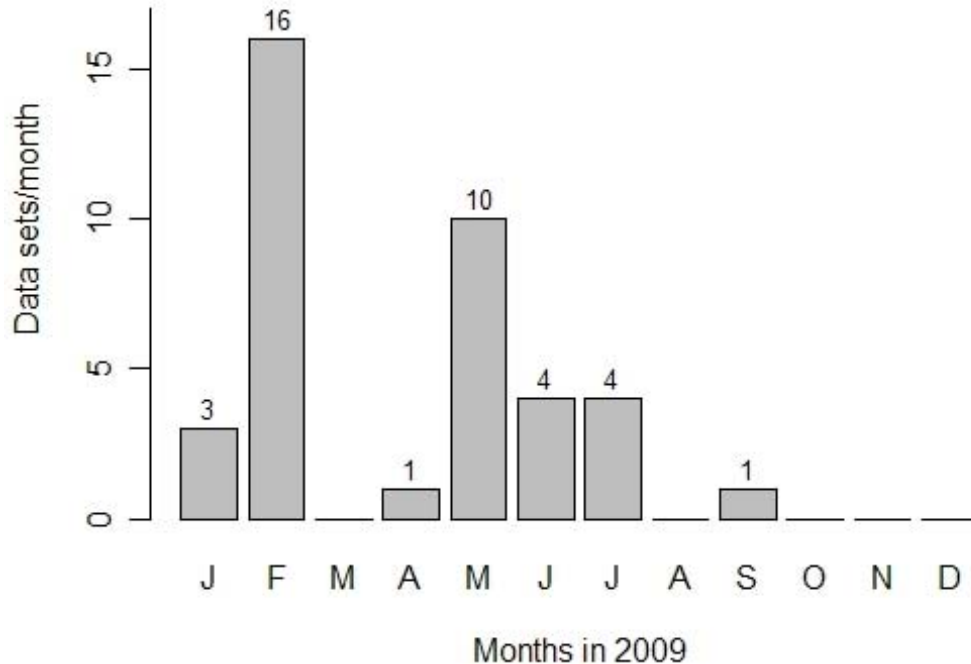


Figure 2. Use of the RiS database data set registration. Number of registered data sets/month in 2009.

SSF workshops

SSF has arranged two workshops in 2009. A workshop on **Terrestrial Ecosystems** was held in Oslo, 6-8 May. The workshop initiated the third flagship programme in Ny-Ålesund. 24 researchers from 11 nations participated. Participants gave talks about current and planned research activities. There was broad consensus about Ny-Ålesund being a unique area for terrestrial Arctic research (high heterogeneity of habitats and conditions; long-term data series of abiotic parameters, etc). It was emphasized the need to further develop Ny-Ålesund as terrestrial research observatory in the High Arctic, incl. long-term reference sites, large scale manipulations and a coordinated effort with other Arctic research facilities (both within Svalbard and pan-Arctic). Four integrated system study proposals were developed during the workshop. The concluding document is published on the SSF website:

www.svalbardscienceforum.no/documents/Flagship_TerrestrialEcosystem_2010.pdf

The second workshop, **Pan-Svalbard Cooperation** was the first one in SSF Joint Cooperation Initiative workshop series. It was held on board of a Polish research vessel

Horyzont II, 17-21 August. Due to boat capacity the number of participants was limited to 30, participation was by invitation only in order to discuss possible overarching cooperation mechanism that could be used for joint, Pan-Svalbard research projects. In addition to the research managers, senior scientists in both glaciology and upper atmosphere were invited to attend. The future cooperative projects were in focus, the participants had a unique opportunity to visit four main research bases in Svalbard: Longyearbyen, Hornsund, Barentsburg and Ny-Ålesund to become aware of similarities and differences between them and to find common research grounds as well as establish networks across the stations. The concluding document of this workshop is published on the SSF website:

www.svalbardscienceforum.no/documents/Workshop_Report_SSF-JCI2009.pdf

For 2010, another two workshops are planned. The first one is organized in cooperation with the office of the Governor of Svalbard (Tor Punsvik) and it will focus on: Research Access to Eastern Areas in Svalbard. The second one will refer to Svalbard geology and it should be held late in 2010.

The closing document from the Atmosphere research in Ny-Ålesund flagship programmes is also being currently finalized.

The full overview of all SSF workshops can be found at:

www.svalbardscienceforum.no/pages/ssfworkshop.htm

1.2 Initiate new, update and revise science plans as well as other documents related to the coordination of research in Svalbard

SSF continued the work with Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System (SIOS) – a proposal to the European Strategy Forum on research Infrastructures ESFRI. The SIOS Preparatory Phase application was submitted in December 2009 by the Research Council of Norway (www.forskningsradet.no/sios/).

1.3 Promote the interests of science in matters that will influence scientific activities in Svalbard

SSF has emphasized to be updated on matters that will influence scientific activities in Svalbard and has worked with strategy plans. SSF participated in all NySMAC and LySEF meetings in 2009, and continued the close cooperation with Kings Bay AS and the Department for Environmental Affairs of the Governor of Svalbard.

1.4 Award ear-marked funds for field research in Svalbard: Arctic Field Grant

Arctic Field Grant is steadily gaining in popularity among the scientists and students. Total of 70 applications (22 from PhD students, 18 from MSc students and 33 from

researchers) were received in 2009. The total sum applied for was NOK 4 766 876 NOK. The deadline for applications to AFG was 20 November 2009, 16:00 local time.

The application procedure has been changed and it is currently being done directly online. The cooperation with NPI made it possible to implement the new applying method already in the current round and it seems to be working without much trouble. There is a need for further improvements in order to make the work of the evaluation committee easier in the future however this task is not urgent and can be implemented after RiS and One-Stop Platform are being further developed.

The applications were delivered to the AFG internal committee (RCN, NPI, SSF, external reviewer) several weeks before their planned selection meeting (due in early February 2010). 3 researchers withdrew their applications, 7 other applications did not fulfill the criteria for funding and were rejected. In total, 2 867 000 NOK are available for the applicants.

SSF office hopes for extension of AFG funds to international applicants and for implementation of a robust evaluation of the scientific value of the incoming proposals to avoid duplications and to prioritize these projects that are in agreement with the existing science plans (e.g. science plan for Ny-Ålesund).

2 Facilitation tasks:

2.1 Inform about the availability of infrastructure, including logistics, laboratories, field stations, observatories, office space, necessary applications and permissions, etc.

In 2008, the SSF web portal (www.svalbardscienceforum.no) has been further improved and continuously updated. SSF office receives enquiries by phone, mail and in personal fairly frequently.

Researchers seek help in solving practical logistical topics, as the choice of a study location, help with applying for permissions from authorities, funding opportunities, booking procedures, availability of data or cooperation possibilities.

SSF office is being occasionally asked to give talks in Longyearbyen, and the staff has participated in the following scientific meetings in order to promote Svalbard within the scientific community:

- Arctic Science Summit Week in Bergen, 23-28 March 2009
- Glaciology in IPY Symposium, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 27-29 July 2009

More than 90 researchers visited the SSF secretariat in the Svalbard Science Centre and provided information about their work as well as received information from the secretariat.

SSF published 86 news-items in 2009, excluding planned projects, events, workshop documents and other related news and practical information for researchers in Svalbard.

2.2 Maintenance of a web-portal with important information for both Norwegian and foreign scientists

In 2009, the SSF web portal www.svalbardscienceforum.no was on average visited by 68 visitors per day, including weekends. This is a further increase of visits compared to 56 visitors/day in 2008 (Figure 3). The visitors came mainly from Europe, but visits from all over the world were registered.

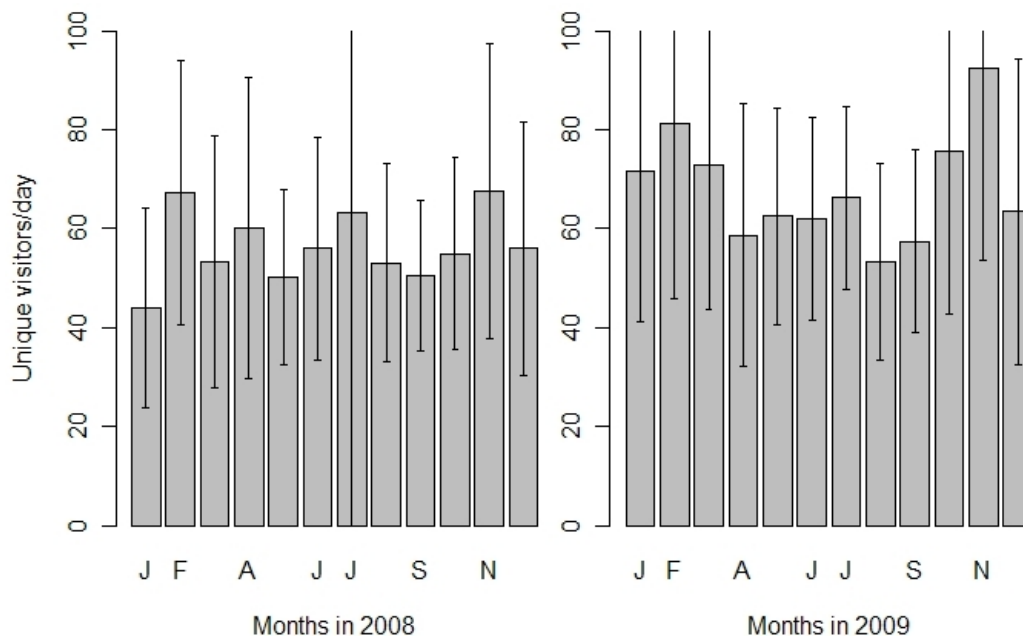


Figure 3. Use of the SSF webportal start page. Number of unique visitors/day averaged for each month +/- standard deviation in 2008 and 2009. The variable 'unique visitor' includes every IP-address only once/day, i.e. a person visiting the page several times during one day will only be counted once.

The portal includes following sections:

- Information about SSF including publications in pdf-format, eg. annual reports, board meeting minutes and the Ny-Ålesund Science Plan.
- Practical information related to fieldwork including information about legislation and regulations, logistical considerations, contact information, and general information about climate and nature.
- Information about research activities including descriptions of the research bases, SSF workshops with downloads of the concluding reports and documents, scientific talks held at seminars in Ny-Ålesund and Longyearbyen, links to blogs of scientific field work, the RiS database and information about IPY activities in Svalbard.

- Information about funding possibilities and upcoming scientific events in Svalbard
- News and news archive. The aim is to establish the SSF web portal as portal to science in Svalbard.
- Portal to the RiS database (see description above in chapter 1.1).

Users can subscribe to a weekly newsletter about the recent news articles published on the web portal. In December 2008 the newsletter had 152 subscriptions (2008: 117subscriptions).

2.3 Communicate the societal significance of science in Svalbard

SSF office has given talks about SSF and Svalbard as research platform to the public and interested groups a few times in 2009. In addition the board members have been actively promoting SSF in numerous public appearances.

SSF office receives requests from administrative and governmental authorities about statistics on research in Svalbard, e.g. if there was an increase in the research days in Svalbard. Local companies and authorities used SSF as source for information related to research in Svalbard. SSF was also contacted by several artists who were interested in cooperation with researchers, as well as journalist interested in information about research topics and seeking contacts with researchers. These requests indicate that knowledge about the service that SSF can offer has been spreading towards to different groups in Norway and abroad and strengthens the role of SSF within outreach activities.

The Open Day at the Svalbard Science Centre in Longyearbyen was arranged in the last week of November 2009 in cooperation with UNIS and NPI. Many activities were related to evolution, a tribute to Darwin in the Darwin Year 2009. The focus this time was on schoolchildren. SSF provided general assistance to organization of the event and contributed with a quiz about nationalities and locations of the main research stations in Svalbard.

3 Other activities

SSF participated in following meetings during 2008: NySMAC meetings (23 March, Bergen, Norway; 3/5 November, Incheon, South-Korea), LySEF meetings (15 May, 10 December), SIOS meetings (4/5 February, 6-8 October) and several other meetings with UNIS, NPI, Kings Bay AS and the Governor of Svalbard.

SSF met the committee for foreign affairs of the Norwegian Parliament during their visit to Svalbard in May in connection with the publication of the White Paper 22 for Svalbard.

4. Conclusion

SSF had a busy year, also in 2009. An important part of the work in the secretariat was related to the workshops, including planning and arranging the workshops as well as writing the concluding documents together with the planning groups. The workshops have resulted in very positive feedback within the scientific community and should also be in the future one of the main activities of SSF. In combination, the RiS database, the workshops and the information activities build a good base for the coordination tasks of SSF. The development of a common user interface, or “one-stop shop”, for researchers in Svalbard will contribute in facilitating the access to Svalbard and thus, further promote Svalbard as international research platform.

Appendix 1

Mandate and terms of reference of Svalbard Science Forum

A plan for reorganising Svalbard Science Forum was approved by the Interministerial Committee on Polar Affairs in January 2005. In June 2005, SSF was reorganized and given new tasks related to the coordination of research in Svalbard.

SSF reports to the Research Council of Norway through the Norwegian National Committee on Polar Research. The Research Council reports the activity of SSF on an annual basis to the Interministerial Committee on Polar Affairs.

Present members of SSF are: The Research Council of Norway (Head), The University Centre in Svalbard, Norwegian Polar Institute, Kings Bay AS, Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee (NySMAC), and Longyearbyen Science and Education Forum (LySEF).

Strategic tasks

- Implement scientific coordination in accordance with strategy documents (including policy documents from the Research Council of Norway)
- Initiate new, update and revise science plans as well as other documents related to the coordination of research in Svalbard
- Promote the interests of science in matters that will influence scientific activities in Svalbard
- Award ear-marked funds for field research in Svalbard

Facilitation tasks

- Information
- Inform about the availability of infrastructure, including logistics, laboratories, field stations, observatories, office space, necessary applications and permissions, etc.
- Maintenance of a web-portal with important information for both Norwegian and foreign scientists
- Communicate the societal significance of science in Svalbard
- Meetings - Arrange relevant workshops, conferences etc. – networking and ”meeting place” functions.