

Children of the *Hexenkreis*: INFUSE, COPIUS, REMODUS, and beyond

For the purpose at hand, it has been lost to the mists of time when exactly the unholy trinity of Marianne Bakró-Nagy, Elena Skribnik, and the jubilarian took shape in a meaningful manner. That is to say: we, the authors, consulted the two named individuals, but they both agreed that the only member of their group who would remember the details is the jubilarian. Coaxing details out of her would have wholly jeopardized the clandestine nature of this enterprise.

Be it as it may, by the early 2010s, these three scholars had established a firm alliance, self-described as a *Hexenkreis*¹, that had a clearly established mission: *to do stuff*. One central undertaking spearheaded by the three scholars, the *Oxford Guide to Uralic Languages* (published in 2022), is described in the annotated bibliography contained in this volume (see page 41). The other big thing cooked up in their cauldron were the Winter Schools of Finno-Ugric Studies, which were the starting shot of an internationalization effort in our discipline which continues till today. In this contribution, we as scholars in the network that were, however, not involved in the conception of said network, wish to share some impressions on how this infrastructure changed us, and changed our discipline.

Inception of internationalization

Thanks to funds from the EU Lifelong Learning Programme procured by the jubilarian, the 1st Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies² took place in Vienna between 17 February and 2 March 2013. It involved scholars and students from (in alphabetical order) **Hamburg, Helsinki, Munich, Szeged, Tartu, and Vienna**. The two-week course featured two week-

¹ The authors of this chapter hope it was not presumptuous of them to assume h-word privileges.

² inter-finno-ugric.univie.ac.at/home/winter-school-2013-vienna/

long language courses (Northern Khanty taught by Zsófia Schön, Mária Sipos, and Valentina Solovar; Nganasan taught by Beáta Wagner-Nagy and Sándor Szeverényi) as well as myriad thematic workshops and lectures on topics such as language revitalization (Janne Saarikivi and Annika Pasanen), e-grammars (Veronika Bauer and Gábor Fónyad), historical linguistics (Marianne Bakró-Nagy and Johanna Laakso), and poster design (Veronika Bauer). Everything taught at the winter school had one thing in common: it was something you could learn at *one* university in the consortium, but not at *all* universities in the consortium. It was conceived as an international sharing of know-how; it aimed to broaden the thematic range available to students at participating universities without changing anything on the ground (e.g., curricula) at any one participating university.

Students from the various participating universities seemed to enjoy the courses (and the possibility to engage in extra-curricular activities with others studying the same arcane subjects), and so roughly one year later and within the same financial framework, the 2nd Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies³ took place from 19 January to 1 February 2014 in Szeged, featuring courses on both Meadow and Hill Mari (taught by Jeremy Bradley, Tatiana Yefremova, and Julia Kuprina) and Nenets (taught by Lotta Jalava), and once again a wide range of thematic lectures (Janne Saarikivi: “Ethnographic knowledge & fieldwork”, Anna Fenyvesi: “Bi- and Multilingualism”, Elena Skribnik and Gerson Klumpp (Tartu): “Typology and Finno-Ugric Studies”) and workshops (Peter Austin, Elena Skribnik, and Zsófia Schön: “Methods of linguistic field work”, Johanna Laakso and Jeremy Bradley: “Scientific writing”, the *Hexenkreis*: “Language change under language contact”). It was immediately clear that the 2013 Winter School was not a flash in the pan, but that there was persistent appetite for such an event within our scene.

For lack of a grant ...

By February 2015, the EU Lifelong Learning Programme had come to an end. In only two years, however, the Winter Schools had become an institution – involved scholars could no longer envision the discipline without

³ inter-finno-ugric.univie.ac.at/home/winter-school-2014-szeged/

them, and students at Finno-Ugric institutes all over Europe would ask when and where the next one would take place. It was thus decided to try to make one Winter School work somehow, in complete absence of centralized funding, by making use of travel grants etc. available at participating universities. The third Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies was carried out between 9 and 14 February 2015 in Munich and featured a course on Kildin Saami taught by Michael Rießler, workshops on new approaches in historical Uralic phonology and etymology (Ante Aikio, Marianne Bakró-Nagy, Janne Saarikivi) and corpus linguistics (Jeremy Bradley, Maximilian Murmann, and Zsófia Schön), as well as three guest lectures: “Corpus linguistics and its theoretical basis” (Hans-Jörg Schmid), “Uralic historical phonology and the search for new etymological cognate words” (Ante Aikio), “Language change and motion charts” (Martin Hilpert). The latter lecture was the first online lecture held at a winter school and was a harbinger of things to come. The consortium was widened, with **Turku** and **Uppsala** joining the club and sending staff and students, who vividly contributed to the Winter School and the surrounding social program. Given the financial constraints, this winter school lasted only one week, but it was plainly evident that this was also preferable: while it limited the amount of material we could cover, it also greatly reduced logistical headaches that had surrounded the two previous winter schools and gave more students the possibility to participate; many also said that two weeks were just too long. It was decided that, going forth, our internationalization efforts would be distributed: in addition to the now shorter winter schools, we would aim to carry out other in-person as well as online teaching events throughout the academic year.

We can only hope that the improvised 2015 Winter School never is taken as evidence that Uralicists are so assiduous that they do not actually need funding – they will keep on doing cool stuff no matter what.

INFUSE-ing our discipline with new life

From 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2018, the European Union’s Erasmus+ programme graced us with a formal and financial framework for our discipline: the strategic partnership *Integrating Finno-Ugric*

Studies in Europe (INFUSE),⁴ headed by Elena Skribnik at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, but conceived by our consortium as a whole, gave us the means to organize three more winter schools:

- 4th Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies, Tartu, 1 – 6 February 2016, featuring Komi (taught by Nikolay Kuznetsov), workshops on transcription, transliteration, and orthographies (Jeremy Bradley, Gwen Eva Janda, Elena Skribnik, and Johanna Laakso) and Uralic syntax & information structure (Elena Skribnik, Gerson Klumpp) as well as the lectures “Uralic phonetic studies: state of the art” (Pärtel Lippus and Eva Liina Asu-Garcia) and “The criteria of a loanword etymology” (Santeri Junttila).
- 5th Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies, Turku, 27 February – 4 March 2017, featuring Moksha (taught by Valentina Katainen), workshops on cognitive linguistics (Krista Ojutkangas, Tuomas Huumo) and text analysis & corpora (Jorma Luutonen), as well as the lectures “Etymology and expressive words” (Ulla-Maija Forsberg) and “(Finnish) folkloristics within Uralistics and beyond” (Sirkka Saarinen).
- 6th Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies, Vienna (again), 26 February – 3 March 2018, featuring Udmurt (taught by Dmitri Efremov and Christian Pischlöger), workshops on the grammar of social cognition (Elena Skribnik, Nicholas Evans, Danielle Barth) and minority languages, multilingualism, language policy (Johanna Laakso), as well as the lectures “Language maintenance as an object of sociolinguistic study” (Eva Vetter) and “Minority, majority, or foreign: Languages in education” (Anneli Sarhima).

By the time we wrote our application for INFUSE, a yearly week of Finno-Ugric Woodstock no longer was commensurate with the role our network played in the scene. We thus committed ourselves to carrying out a string of blended learning teaching events: a semester of e-learning was capped off by a week-long summer workshop at one of the participating universities. The three blended learning events were:

⁴ www.infuse.finnougristik.uni-muenchen.de/

- Lexical typology (summer term 2016 with concluding workshop in Szeged, 6–10 June 2016).
- Samoyedic (summer term 2017 with concluding workshop in Hamburg, 18–22 September 2017).
- Minor Finnic languages (summer term 2018 with concluding workshop in Uppsala, 18–22 June 2018).

More perfect than the Permyak, more COPIUS than the Komi.

With ELTE University (**Budapest**) joining our consortium on the way, the now nine universities successfully put forth a continuation of previous efforts: the strategic partnership *COPIUS “Community of Practice in Uralic Studies”*⁵, headed by Rogier Blokland at Uppsala University but once again conceived by our consortium at large, received funding from the Erasmus+ programme from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2021. Readers of this contribution who spent at least part of this time window as inhabitants of Planet Earth might already suspect that internationalization efforts and academic mobility were especially challenging in this round of our collaboration, but nevertheless, we could successfully carry out three winter schools once again:

- 7th Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies, Hamburg, 4–9 February 2019, featuring Nganasan (taught by Josefina Budzisch and Beáta Wagner-Nagy), workshops on information structure and information status (Hannah Wegener and Chris Lasse Däbritz), evidentiality (Sándor Szeverényi and Katalin Sipőcz), and the CLARIN infrastructure (Hanna Hedeland and Jack Rueter), as well as the lectures “Evidentiality and its relation to modality – what is known thus far?” (Vladimir Plungian) and “Patterns of multilingualism on the Taimyr Peninsula” (Eugénie Stapert).

⁵ www.copius.eu

- 8th Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies, Budapest, 27 January – 1 February 2020, featuring Komi-Permyak (taught by Nikolett F. Gulyás and Vasily Epanov), workshops on linguistic typology and Finno-Ugric languages (Erika Asztalos, Nikolett F. Gulyás, Laura Horváth) and linguistic contacts between Uralic and Turkic (András Czentnár), as well as the lectures “Typology to the rescue” (Ksenia Shagal) and “Identity, archeology, and related questions” (Bence Gulyás).
- 9th Winter School of Finno-Ugric Studies, the vast expanses of the Internet (but organized by Helsinki), 1–5 February 2021, featuring Inari Saami (taught by Petteri Morottaja) and a workshop “Online resources for Uralic languages” (Ksenia Shagal), as well as the lecture “Online resources for Uralic languages” (Trond Trosterud).

As obnoxious as it is when calamities are framed as opportunities, it is hard to deny that COVID-19 pandemic forced even our most digitally diffident friends and colleagues to appreciate the value of, and acquire skills in, online teaching. When we met for the 2020 Winter School in Budapest, COVID-19 was a faraway spectre with implications that were still too abstract to comprehend. When we were supposed to meet for the 2021 Winter School in Helsinki, not only were no explanations necessary (neither for prospective students nor for our financiers in Brussels) as to why this would not be feasible, everybody already had had almost a year of experience dealing with learning and teaching in digital environments. Consequently, while the online winter school could of course not fully live up to the experience the previous winter schools had been, it still feels like a highly successful event worth mentioning in one breath with all the other winter schools. Ksenia Shagal deserves special praise here for not only managing to organize the academic side of a winter school in an online environment, but the social one as well: the online social events she organized were warmly received by staff and students.

As was the case with INFUSE, we had committed ourselves to carrying out hybrid teaching events in COPIUS – only the first of these, however, could be carried out as intended. The second and third teaching events had to be turned into online-only events. The topics covered were:

- (Meadow and Hill) Mari (summer term 2019 with concluding workshop in Turku, 10–14 June 2019).
- Linguistic fieldwork (summer term 2020 with concluding online workshop organized from Tartu, 17–21 May 2021).
- Etymology (online workshop organized from Vienna, 9–13 August 2021).

A silver lining of the necessity to move all our teaching events into digital spaces was that we had to prepare teaching materials for online tuition and presentation anyway. This allowed us to go far beyond our initial ambitions and promises in creating the COPIUS website, www.copius.eu: it became a *Collection of Pretty Interesting Uralic Stuff* that remains pertinent beyond the end of this partnership. It gives a home not only to the deliverables we had committed ourselves to publishing, but also to materials we as a consortium agreed should be openly accessible throughout our scientific community and beyond, but that were just too miscellaneous for any of the existing publication channels:

- *Introduction to Uralic (Finno-Ugric) Studies* (www.copius.eu/intro), a slide set that represents a general introduction to the discipline of Uralic studies for students, scholars, and enthusiast with no prior knowledge of Uralic languages and linguistics. It was compiled by Bogáta Timár based on teaching materials used throughout our consortium.
- *Mari* (www.copius.eu/mari), an audio-visual course of (Meadow) Mari consisting of over 92 hours of thematically indexed video material. It was created by Jeremy Bradley and edited by Mikke Mayer based on classroom recordings made in the Meadow Mari e-learning course held for COPIUS. It allows future autodidacts of Mari using teaching materials of the Mari Web Project (www.mari-language.com) to vicariously join a learning group from years gone by.

- *The Fieldwork Manual* (www.copius.eu/field), compiled by Fedor Rozhanskiy, introduces readers, both from Uralic studies and other linguistic disciplines, into methods of linguistic fieldwork as presented by a scholar with an ample amount of hands-on experience with the matter at hand; it is the only fieldwork manual with specific Uralic examples.
- *Foundations of Uralic Etymology* (www.copius.eu/etymology), compiled by Janne Saarikivi and Niklas Metsäranta, is an expansive slide set aiming to make the diachronic study of Uralic languages more accessible to individuals who do not happen to be bearded young men living in Helsinki.
- *COPIUS: Lessons learned* (www.copius.eu/lessons/) is a hexalingual (English, German, Swedish, Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian) ~20-page overview of the critical experiences we gained during this phase of our collaboration. Given that we present our network as a model for other low-volume disciplines, our aim here was to give prospective emulators an honest glance at what worked well, and what worked less well, for us.
- *A. N. Balandins Einführung in das Mansische* (www.copius.eu/mansi) is a German-language adaptation and translation of A. N. Balandin's 1960 Russian-language Mansi textbook. Timothy Riese had created a rough version of this adaptation for his many Mansi classes at the University of Vienna; Jeremy Bradley edited it for online publication with substantial help from his students as part of a classroom project.
- *Марым, лэся... – Udmurt for Beginners* (www.copius.eu/udmurt) is the start of an English-language adaptation of Igor' Ganeyev and Yuriy Perevozchikov's Udmurt textbook, created by Christian Pischlöger and Jeremy Bradley for the 2018 Winter School – i.e., its creation preceded the COPIUS partnership, but the COPIUS website was deemed a more logical space for it. An Udmurt paradigm generator was created as well and was published alongside the proto-textbook.
- *The Transcription & orthography toolset* (www.copius.eu/ortho) is a collection of tools assisting in the transcription and transliteration between different writing systems used for a number of Uralic languages (Mari, Udmurt, Komi, Erzya, Moksha, Mansi) and important contact languages (Russian, Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash). It was originally created

and published for the Mari Web Project (trans.mari-language.com), but given the wide range of applications for these tools that have nothing to do with Mari, the COPIUS website seemed like a more accessible home for them.

- The *Uralic Core Bibliography* (www.copius.eu/biblio) is a 2000+ page (living) document containing a listing of the issues of the most important series pertaining to Uralic studies, and the indices of the most important journals. Jeremy Bradley created this document during a systematic literature survey during his doctoral studies; it seemed like a shame not to make it accessible to future generations of scholars and spare them hours and hours spent digitizing the indexes of all accessible Uralic journals and series⁶.

All of these materials were published online in late 2021, i.e., at the worst possible time for in-person promotion events. We remain hopeful, but not confident, that calmer times lie ahead, in which we can give these materials the promotion they deserve.

Looking ahead: REMODUS and beyond

Sometimes, lightning will even strike thrice: on 29 September 2021, we were informed that our application *The (Re-)Making of a Discipline. Digital Transformation and Internationalization in and beyond Uralic Studies (REMODUS)* was going to receive funding from Erasmus+. With all previously involved universities still on board, and now also enhanced by the participation of the University of Latvia (**Riga**), our 10-member consortium is now inching ever closer to encompassing Uralic/Finno-Ugric academia within the European Union in its totality. The partnership launched on 1 January 2022 and is scheduled to last up to and including 31 December 2024. If you are reading this contribution within that time window, you can inform yourself of your activities from our website⁷ – unless, of course, you, esteemed reader, are the jubilarian herself. In this case you already know all about it. If you are reading this contribution at

⁶ Rogier Blokland notes that we are aware of the fact that doing something like this might actually occur only to Jeremy.

⁷ remodus.univie.ac.at/

some point after the runtime of the strategic partnership, you can inform yourself of our activities from many of the numerous sustainable proliferation channels we are sure to have picked and developed during the project.

At the time of us writing this contribution, the 10th Seasonal School of Finno-Ugric Studies (held in spring rather than winter due to the ongoing pandemic, though the weather deities were not informed of this, and we received more snow than usual during the week) was held in Tartu from 4–9 April 2022. It featured a course on Old Komi (taught by Gerson Klumpp), an extensive workshop on genetics, linguistics & prehistory including an introduction to R and mapmaking (Outi Vesakoski, Meeli Roose, Timo Rantanen, Michael Dunn, Yingqi Jing, and Miina Norvik), and the lecture “Genetic diversity of North-Western Eurasia” by Kristiina Tambets. With this being the 10th event of its kind, we resisted the temptation to commit an off-by-one error and celebrate the 10-year anniversary of our network a mere nine years and two months after the first winter school. A special challenge at this winter school was that it was attended by the jubilarian during the hottest phase of this volume’s editorial process, and the editor-in-chief frequently had to share his screen with both the lecture hall and online participants (and every time had to fear that something on his computer screen would give the whole operation away), and on more than one occasion found himself discussing the volume with fellow scholars when the jubilarian was closer than anticipated. As far as we can tell, though, we did not actually unwittingly reveal the enterprise to the jubilarian – and if we did, she has been kind enough not to tell us, in spite of the ample opportunities she would have had⁸.

The brave new world in which our teaching events take place have allowed us to embrace internationalization beyond the limitations of our funding framework. While our consortium still formally “only” spans ten universities in seven EU countries, the hybrid and digital

⁸ On one occasion the authors of this contribution realized they had been discussing the still-secret *Festschrift* in front of a hot mic in a coffee break: their ostensibly private discussion turned out to have been broadcast over Zoom. In a reaffirmation of our faith in humanity, no students have come forward with blackmail proposals.

nature of our teaching events allow us to welcome scholars from across the globe, provided they have the needed technological means, language competencies, and academic foundation. In our various teaching events, we have been able to welcome scholars and students from Brazil, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, India, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Our consortium has become *Uralic Studies Without Borders*.

The ultimate aim of these endeavours has been to make everything which we teach at all our universities available to all students, and the most logical way to advance towards this impossible goal has been through the concept of the 'winter school' and 'summer workshop'. That these are well-received we know because we are there ourselves and see how much fun everybody is having. The slightly (but only slightly) more official student evaluations, carried out at the end of these events, have then also always made for interesting and profitable reading, but interestingly many of the comments there would be equally valid from the teachers' point of view, such as this one from the Tartu 2022 winter school, which seems to sum up the whole decade-long project perfectly: "I met very interesting people and I became very interested in linguistics."

As of today, two thirds of the *Hexenrunde*, though still active and vivacious as ever, have formally retired. The jubilarian is the only member of the trinity still holding the position from which the internationalization effort was launched. As most people who receive a *Festschrift*, though, her retirement is also on the horizon. What is not, however, on the horizon is an end of the internationalization effort started by the jubilarian and her colleagues all those years ago: seemingly impervious to friction, that ball just keeps on rolling. While we cannot say what exactly we will do, and where exactly we will be, once REMODUS has been concluded (given that this partnership, at the time of this contribution being authored, was only one month into its 36-month run time, contemplations on the time after the project are premature and a distraction from the tasks acutely at hand right now), but we are confident that the Children of the *Hexenkreis* will persist.