

SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT**Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects**

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 65/17

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Project title: **Russia in Space: Continuity and Change in Russian Space Policy**

1. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

1. We observed a surprising lack of ambitious “great power” ambitions in post-Soviet Russian space policy. This observation led us to discover and emphasize how great power identity cannot only be expressed by the strive towards hegemony, but also by strive for “equality” and “not lagging behind”. (See our answer to question 3 below.)
2. Despite growing authoritarianism and state control in contemporary Russia, we have discovered several alternative space visions in Russian popular culture and among space experts. Notably, there is an “underground” popular space culture in Russia, which largely exists “under the radar” of the Russian state, although some elements express sympathy with the Russian space program, and with the more ambitious Soviet goals of exploring and conquering outer space. Application of postcolonial and assemblage theory has helped us conceptualize these alternative visions.
3. Our project has reinforced our initial assumption on the importance of studying space visions within and across several domains – notably official state policy, expert communities, and popular culture. This contributes to the cultural turn in Political Science and International Relations.
4. Notably, the relevance of popular culture and links across the state, expert, and popular cultural domains is not limited to liberal democracies, but also applies to autocracies such as contemporary Russia. Discovering and researching alternative societal and political visions in a country like Russia is increasingly difficult in practice, but our project confirms both the existence of such alternatives and the relevance of looking for them. Specifically, space visions fulfil multiple functions in relation to state politics – including legitimation and critique, but also utopianism and escapism (expressing a dream of escaping [especially imperial state] politics and power altogether).

2. The project's contribution to the international research frontline

As stated above, the project contributes to:

1. Theorizing great power identity, which can be expressed not only by imperial ambitions of hegemony but also by efforts to maintain status as an “equal” or prevention of “lagging behind”;
2. Showing the existence and multiple functions of alternative visions of the future in general (and space in particular) in autocratizing states (e.g. legitimation, critique, utopianism and escapism).

3. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

1. Russia's post-Soviet space visions has been a blind spot in past research, which this project has alleviated. Past research on post-Soviet space policy and visions is very limited, and mainly covers developments until the late 1990s and very early 2000s, a period characterized by economic difficulties and structural problems in the Russian take-over of the Soviet space program and space infrastructure. Moreover, past research is mainly descriptive, and does not apply or do not contribute to any significant theoretical debates. Both empirically and theoretically, our present project makes significant contributions.

2. The absence of ambitious great power posturing in post-Soviet space policy has been described and explained. One of the major puzzles motivating this project in the first place was early empirical indications of a lack of Soviet-style ambitious Russian plans for outer space. These preliminary observations have not only been confirmed but have now also been explained – by acknowledging a widened understanding of great power identity, which does not necessarily imply striving for hegemony, but which can also imply striving for great power “equality”, status as a “respected” state with major space launch capacity, and not “lagging behind”. Moreover, Russia's lack of ambitious space goals (e.g. being the first to set foot on Mars) is explained by economic imperatives, as Russia maintained a decade-long monopoly on manned launched to the International Space Station, as the US unilaterally abandoned their launch capacity from 2011 until 2020, when the American private space enterprise SpaceX for the first time sent humans to ISS. (See publications 1,2 and 3).

3. The value of a multidisciplinary approach to understand the significance of post-Soviet space visions has been reaffirmed, specifically the relevance of looking at both official state visions and alternative (non-state) visions in popular culture.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

1. What is the significance of linkages between politics and popular culture in autocratic states, such as contemporary Russia? What room is there for unofficial and critical expressions of popular culture?

2. How can space collaboration that continues between Russia and the West after Russia's 2023 invasion of Ukraine be explained?

3. How is Russia posturing itself in relation the new space race where China and (US) private space industry play significant roles?

4. How is popular culture in autocracies such a Russia both shaping and being shaped by public opinion and state policy? Under what conditions can alternative visions (not legitimating the state) help change the course of politics?

5. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

The project resulted in 15 publications: 1 doctoral dissertation (compilation thesis); 11 peer-reviewed journal articles (5 published, 6 under review); 5 other publications

Publications marked with a * are included in Roman Privalov's doctoral dissertation.

In addition, the project resulted in 6 talks/conference presentations, and 6 podcasts/broadcasted interviews.

Doctoral dissertation

1. Privalov, Roman (2023) *After Space Utopia: Post-Soviet Russia and Futures in Space*. Doctoral thesis (compilation thesis) successfully defended on 12 May 2023, Södertörn University, School of Social Sciences, Department of Political Science. [Available here](#)

Peer-reviewed journal articles (published)

2. Eriksson, Johan & Lindy Newlove-Eriksson (2023) "Outsourcing the American Space Dream: SpaceX and the Race to the Stars", *Astropolitics*, 21(1): 46-66. [Available here](#)
3. Eriksson, Johan & Roman Privalov (2023) "Ryssland i rymden: nostalgi, futurism och stormaktspolitik", *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 123(1): 99-120. [Available here](#)
4. *Privalov, Roman (2022) "Through the Thorns to Where? The Politics of Alternative Appropriations of Soviet Space Culture in Contemporary Russia", *Space Policy*, 61. [Available here](#)
5. *Eriksson, Johan & Roman Privalov (2021) "Russian Space Policy and Identity: Visionary or Reactionary?", *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 24(2): 381-407. [Available here](#)
6. *Privalov, Roman (2021) "Is the Future Soviet? USSR-2061 and the Reality of Utopia", *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, 41(3):123-228. [Available here](#).

Peer-reviewed journal articles (under review/in prep)

7. Vidal, Florian & Roman Privalov (2023) "Russia in Outer Space: Between Strategic Deterrence and Political Autarky." *Space Policy* (under review).
8. Eriksson, Johan (2023) "Autocracy and the Peaceful Use of Outer Space? Russia, the UN and Global Space Politics", *Space Policy* (in prep.).
9. *Privalov, Roman (2023) " 'It Will Develop with or Without Us': Russian Space Experts, Space Advocates and Russia's Stance in International Space Projects", *Astropolitics* (under review).
10. *Privalov, Roman (2023) "Lines of Flight from Space Empire: Political Futures of Global Space Expansionism through Russian Imperial Space Fiction.", *International Political Sociology* (under review).
11. Eriksson, Johan & Lindy Newlove-Eriksson (2023) "Extraterrestrial Politics: Space for Democracy?" *Global Affairs* (in prep.).

Other publications

12. Eriksson, Johan (2023) “Den nya rymdkapplöpningen: diktaturer och entreprenörer på frammarsch”, *Tidskriften Ikaros – om människan och vetenskapen* (forthcoming). [Available here](#)
13. Eriksson, Johan & Giampiero Giacomello (2022) “Space and the New Iron Curtain”, *Crisis Response Journal*, 17(2). [Available here](#)
14. Privalov, Roman (2022) “Space Nostalgia: The future that is only possible in the past”, *Baltic Worlds*, 15(1-2): 52-56. [Available here](#)
15. Eriksson, Johan and Giampiero Giacomello (2022) “Cyberspace in Space: Fragmentation, Vulnerability, and Uncertainty”, in *The Politics of Cyber Security: Socio-Technological Transformations and Political Fragmentation*, edited by Myriam Dunn-Cavelty and Andreas Wenger, Chapter 7, pp. 95-107. Routledge. [Available here](#)

Panels and talks

1. Presentation of paper co-authored by Johan Eriksson & Lindy Newlove-Eriksson at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, 15-18 March 2023, Montréal, Canada. Paper title: “Extraterrestrial Politics: Space for Democracy?”. Panel: “Global IR and Environmental Governance”.
2. Presentations at the popular science “Space Day” (“Rymddagen”) at Södertörn University, organized in collaboration with the Swedish Space Agency, 25 November 2022. Johan Eriksson gave a talk on “Who’s got power in outer space?”, and Roman Privalov gave a talk on (post)colonization in space discourse.
3. Johan Eriksson organized the panel “Space: Politics of the Final Frontier” at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Nashville, Tennessee, March 28 – April 2, 2022. The panel included four papers (by Marco Aliberti from the European Space Policy Centre; Roman Privalov, Södertörn University; and Johan Eriksson & Lindy Newlove-Eriksson, Södertörn University & Swedish Defence University).
4. Presentation by Johan Eriksson on international space politics and security, seminar with Folk och Försvar, Stockholm, March 2021. This was also broadcasted by Swedish public TV (SVT Forum).
5. Presentation by Johan Eriksson on “Russia in Space” at the BASEES (British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies) conference at Cambridge University, April 2019.

6. Presentation by Johan Eriksson on “cyberspace in space”, at the State of the Art of Cybersecurity and Cyberconflict Research Conference, ETH Zürich, September 27-29, 2018.

Media appearances (radio, TV, podcasts)

1. In April 2023, Roman Privalov was interviewed by Södertörn University for a longer podcast about his doctoral thesis in general, and space colonization in particular, available here: <https://shows.acast.com/forskarpodden/episodes/del-2>
2. In May 2022, Johan Eriksson, together with astronaut Christer Fuglesang , was interviewed by Swedish Science Radio (Vetenskapsradion) about Russia’s space policy and the future of the International Space Station: <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/kallt-krig-i-rymden-kan-folja-nar-ryssland-lamnar-rymdstationen-iss>
3. In April 2021, Johan Eriksson participated in a podcast on space and science fiction, organized by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, available on Spotify and elsewhere: <https://www.ui.se/utblick/utblick-10-rymden-politiken-popularkulturen--sa-hanger-de-ihop/>
4. In March 2021 Johan Eriksson gave a talk on international space governance (in Swedish), hosted by Folk & Försvar, broadcasted by Swedish Television: https://folkochforsvar.se/event/sakerhetspolitiska-trender-i-rymden/?fbclid=IwAR2puGwzYAf0xmtNcGmR_YbgYpolhW_DMExVYb3Tv-OKgcy4ifMip7kUoNE
5. In the Fall of 2020, Johan Eriksson was interviewed for a radio podcast on space politics (in Swedish), available on Spotify and elsewhere: https://open.spotify.com/episode/5HSb1N1VA2jw1CZDA0uDSH?si=0_Hcy8u4SfesVtFW3ubRA
<https://xn--harvikttillmarsn-9nbh.se/02-den-internationella-rymdstationen/>
6. In 2018 Johan Eriksson was interviewed by Södertörn University for a longer podcast on international space politics, available here: <https://soundcloud.com/sodertornshogskola/johan-eriksson>