

By Eli Kintisch

The science of schmoozing

Watching Hugues Lantuit work the cocktail hour at Arctic Change, a Canadian research conference held in Ottawa in December, is a master class in networking. He's gracious. ("It is very nice to meet you," he tells a graduate student, shaking with two hands.) He's self-deprecating. ("I'm sure I have no shot at that job.") He's a little coarse. ("I tried for half an hour to tie this f***ing bow tie; can you help me?") He is constantly introducing one person to another. "Ah, you work at the Yukon Research Centre," he says to the stranger he's persuaded to tie his bow tie, as a crowd forms. "We are actually collaborating on a multimillion-dollar grant proposal. So if we get it, I will remember this moment as a formative step." Laughter all around.

In the burgeoning world of Arctic research, nearly everyone knows Lantuit, a professor at the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI) in Potsdam, Germany. At age 37, he's leveraged his deep network of contacts to build an impressive career. In 2006, he co-founded the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS), which now has more than 5000 members. Five years later, he became co-principal investigator on a 5-year, €9 million project to study permafrost in the Arctic. He serves on major international research committees. The research program he manages, on Herschel Island in the Canadian Beaufort Sea, is at an important site for monitoring erosion of Arctic permafrost coasts, which make up a third of Earth's shores. "He's the man," says colleague Paul Overduin, a geoscientist at AWI. "He puts us on the map in a lot of ways."

As early as graduate school, Lantuit says, he was "genuinely interested in bringing people together." As a master's student at McGill University in 2002, he founded the Geography Graduate Society and became a key assistant on an international permafrost-mapping project. The experience taught him lessons about networking in science that have subsequently shaped his career.

First, he says, what matters isn't how impressive the title on a business card is—it's the role you play in projects or initiatives. Second, while wearing a welcoming face never hurts, it's what you offer scientifically that turns conversations into scientific opportunities.

Lantuit got connected early on, but he found few resources to help other young Arctic scientists do the same. So he and Jenny Baeseman, a microbial biologist, created APECS, which runs workshops that bring together young



"He's just someone who's constantly connecting his peers."

and established scientists to explore publishing, fieldwork, funding, and career advancement. His reputation as a connector grew as he matched colleagues with opportunities—including helping Baeseman, who was focused on Antarctica, join a project in the Arctic. "He's just someone who's constantly connecting his peers," Baeseman says.

They connect him in return: Lantuit's CV lists the myriad partnerships, international research projects, journal special issues, panels, and conferences he's created or run. All that connecting takes time away from research, he acknowledges. "There are scientists who will publish 50 papers in *Nature* in their career. I won't. I'm fine with that." Yet, none of this would be possible if he hadn't published well-regarded papers on erosion on Arctic coasts. "I

tell my [Ph.D.] students, you need to deliver scientifically," he says. Several of them wanted to attend the Ottawa meeting, but Lantuit said no. "Their dissertations are late."

Lantuit's appetite for new projects and partnerships remains voracious. Managing his various ongoing efforts taxes his phone's scheduling app, which lists a relentless string of meetings, dinners, sessions, and cocktail hours for the 5-day meeting. "I have this inner drive to connect," he says as he gets up to walk to the conference's gala dinner. He has assembled a colorful table of heavy hitters: influential scientists, well-known administrators, and funders. These are useful people to know, but it's clear he genuinely likes each one. "It's fun," he says, and heads for the ballroom. ■

Eli Kintisch is a contributing correspondent for Science. For more on life and careers, visit www.sciencecareers.org. Send your story to SciCareerEditor@aaas.org.