

An Urban Future for Sápmi? Indigenous Urbanization in the Nordic States and Russia.

Mikkel Berg-Nordlie, Astri Dankertsen, and Marte Winsvold (eds.)

(New York: Berghahn Books, 2022, Studies in the Circumpolar North Series), xvi +281 pp. ISBN: 978-1800-732-643.

An Urban Future for Sápmi is a collection that seeks to fulfill two legacies. First, as the fourth volume in Berghahn Books' *Studies in the Circumpolar North* series, it must lend a unique perspective and theme of analysis to Olga Ulturgasheva and Alexander D. King's series, which encapsulates the impact of such far-reaching events as climate change, resource extraction, diplomatic tensions, and small communities' survival in a contemporary, interconnected world. Second, as the culminating product to come out of the international research project NUORGÁV (discussed in subsequent paragraphs) it must comprehensively tie together its preceding projects, which span publications on (but not limited to) topics of urban Sámi visibility, cultural rights of Indigenous youth across the Scandinavian borders, and Indigenous space governance. In both regards, *An Urban Future for Sápmi* upholds a trajectory of incisive, thoughtful academic work. Given its assumption of readers' familiarity with issues concerning Arctic Indigenous peoples and socio-political concepts, it functions as a resource and text for readers more established in urban, Arctic, or critical Indigeneity studies.

An Urban Future for Sápmi brings together five chapters from four authors, in addition to a preface, introduction, and conclusion (which brings in a fifth author). The edited volume also includes a standard glossary, two appendices on language and transliteration, references, and an index. The contributors effectively integrate tables and maps of Sápmi areas, administrative zones, and population to contextualize the social and geopolitical environments within which the chapters' themes exist. Additionally, public domain and author photos concentrated within the second, third, and fourth chapters provide visual references to Sámi art, dress, and urban settings.

Across its five chapters, the book does an excellent job of articulating the complicated, intrinsic connection between the political and cultural processes that simultaneously affect *and* are initiated by Arctic Indigenous peoples (specifically the Sámi of Northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia). Urbanization is understood both as a consequence of global modernization and as an internal trend among Sámi. As a

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result, the book examines how Sámi have retained their sense of history and culture in this new setting, rather than necessarily approaching the trend as an imposed external threat. The book presents data and analysis on subjects such as Indigenous urbanization history, urban Indigenous youth and questions about identity that emerge across generations, and the creation (and later governance) of spaces for Indigenous culture and community within urban centers that otherwise reflect dominant cultures.

While Chapter 1, “The Sámi and Sápmi, The People and The Land,” offers an overview of foundational concepts, including relevant definitions in Sámi and broader Indigenous studies, challenges facing the Sámi peoples (39), and defining features of the Sámi nation (33–37), subsequent chapters quickly dive deeper into urbanization theory and critical race and Indigeneity concepts, at a pace that is very reasonable for a book that is a resource for field practitioners and scholars, but may prove too rapid for early learners on these topics. This should not be seen as a weakness, rather a consequence of its tailoring for an intended, more advanced audience.

Chapter 2, “Cities in Sápmi, Sámi in the Cities: Indigenous Urbanization in the Nordic Countries and Russia,” acknowledges the data collection challenges that exist for both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, with particular attention paid to quantitative challenges (55–60). Gaps in quantitative data—whether in the form of inconsistent definitions and classifications resulting from differing state interests in establishing such categories (a phenomenon particularly notable in the case of Russia’s Indigenous peoples’ classifications), or because certain metrics have simply not been historically collected—are a long-standing, recognized challenge in the field. Chapter 3 in turn examines how urban Sámi identities—specifically, those of youth—are constructed and negotiated internally and inter-rationally, while Chapter 4 examines the development of Indigenous NGOs and Indigenous culture houses as illustrations of “spaces” created by Sámi activists to exist within urban environments. Finally, Chapter 5 takes a step back to consider the urbanization work of Sámi—and the impacts of urbanization as an external force upon Sámi peoples—within the context of global urbanization. The book’s conclusion reflects more philosophically upon what is meant when we as a field discuss urbanization: are we discussing realities or hypotheticals? It is certainly the belief of the authors that urbanization is not some future possibility, but a future being realized in real time. Here, the authors emphasize that urbanization and cultural adaptations from it do not inherently dilute

or negate Indigenous identity or practices. Instead, it is another form of cultural evolution that Indigenous peoples are often implicitly excluded from, and an embodied part of existing as a society.

While all of the chapters contain excellent content and flow well into and from one another, Chapter 3, “Young City Sámi in Norway and Sweden: Making Space for Urban Indigenous Identities,” stands out as a particularly thoughtful and well-articulated portrayal of the practical and philosophical challenges Sámi face in an urbanizing north. In this chapter (one of the longest in the book), Astri Dankertsen provides a deep dive into a central concept in Indigenous studies: identity. Complicating this conversation is the recognition that *identity* can itself be a complex, problematic term, lending itself to notions of cultural “authenticity” and gatekeeping (108). Nonetheless, Dankertsen does an excellent job of navigating the complexity of identity and applying it to specific communities as case studies.

An Urban Future for Sápmi is a professional and impressive collection of work by a cohort of Indigenous studies scholars whose names are recognizable to researchers, scholars, and practitioners studying or working among Sámi and Sakhi communities and interests. The book particularly stands out as a continuation of Mikkel Berg-Nordlie’s research trajectory—notably, he plays a contributory role in all sections of the book, *sans* the Introduction, Chapter 3, and Chapter 5. All authors previously played roles in the NUORGÁV project (2015–2022), an international research project that gathers and analyzes data from the four countries with Sámi populations: Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Thematically, the project seeks to understand, contextualize, and visualize the evolution of the Sámi nation as a border-transcending people. The project rests upon cooperation between NIBR (Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, an OsloMet and Akershus University College social science research institute), Nord University, and the Arctic Circle under the University of Lapland, and upon contributions from the Norwegian Research Council’s Program for Sámi Studies; in sum, it represents a tangible contribution to the shift among Scandinavian institutions to promoting Indigenous studies, particularly as Indigenous peoples—including Sámi—are moving from historically marginalized rural peripheries to physical, political, and cultural centers.

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Earth, Ice, Bone, Blood: Permafrost and Extinction in the Russian Arctic.
Charlotte Wrigley

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023), 236 pp. ISBN: 978-1517911829.

In her stunning first book, the geographer Charlotte Wrigley gives an evocative account of the Northeast Science Station near Cherskii in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), as well as its better-known public experiment “Pleistocene Park.” The book, which I understand closely follows her doctoral fieldwork, centers around one season of fieldwork at this remote scientific station, seemingly in 2019. The book is creatively organized around themes and events. The chapter on “Earth” weaves a story of permafrost—and the mystery of its fragility—around the author’s summer spent testing the density of the permafrost in the company of the charismatic Zimov family. Thereafter, each chapter captures a moment of the fieldwork together with a major theme in the applied science of de-extinction. The book is well referenced, with a citation to nearly every major work, article, and public science contribution on Anthropocene and post-Anthropocene science. The central theme of the book is the paradox of an environment being eternal and yet subject to change. Wrigley situates the discussion in the history of permafrost science, and in particular, the early work of Soviet scientists defining this liminal state. This is then abruptly contrasted to the unexpected warming of the active layer, troublesome flooding, and the eruption to the surface of frozen ancient animal carcasses. Her reading of recent philosophies and histories of science meditates upon the discontinuous nature of this state and on how easy it is to be open to various scientific-technical projects, such as retro-breeding a woolly mammoth or recreating a lost biome.

I enjoyed reading the book as a lively and sympathetic description of the Zimov family and of Cherskii itself. Sergei Zimov and his son Nikita are one of the better-known “audacious” scientific families who have built a small empire around hosting American and European permafrost scientists at their station. They are controversial for their early proposals not only to study biome regime change, but to aim pragmatically to convert a small expanse of tundra and tree-line forest into a grassland by mimicking the mechanical pressure of grazing. Their early published articles in Russian and English in the mid-1990s, with their dense ecological equations and prosaic calls for the return of a “productive grassland,” inspired and puzzled scholars such as myself. Even in those early days they employed a neocolonial vision, seemingly

hermetically sealed off from the life projects of local Chukchis, Evens, Iukaghirs, and Russian Pokhochany. As with reading a science fiction series, I was keen to catch up here on their most recent shenanigans. I was surprised to learn from Wrigley's book that their geomorphological project had now adapted as an emergency permafrost preservation project instead of a tundra-extirpation project. It seems that the new vision is that the mechanical pressure of hooves will not only remove mosses but also compact the earth to better protect it from thawing. Wrigley is very cautious not to offer a firm opinion on the controversies surrounding ecological restoration and retro-breeding, but instead to offer up a variety of opinions backed up with citations. In one of the seasons, we observe over her shoulder as the Zimovs try to craft a funding application to an American foundation. With scenes such as these, the author expertly brings together the everyday pragmatics of big science with the sometimes-controversial visions of these larger-than-life scientists.

Readers should be warned that this is an idea book, but not a very cautious one. Ethnographers, such as myself, will I suppose be worried by the casual way that Indigeneity is used as an exotic backdrop to the science. "Sakhans" are more often than not represented as Indigenous—although strictly, that would not be the way that they would identify. Instead of being given motorbikes, cattle, and horses, they are usually given reindeer. There are plentiful references in the book to Iamal Nenetses—sometimes written as "Nenet"—as if they lived over in the next valley and not half a continent away. Evenkis crop up here and there (sometimes as Evenk) but usually not where they should be. The most startling anomaly were the "Inuit" informants that the author associates with Julie Cruikshank's classic work on glaciers in the Southern Yukon Territory. The reason for these anomalies is likely that the author picks up, splices, and exports Indigenous themes to Cherskii much in the way that frozen mammoths' genetic material is recombined with Asian elephants in order to engineer a sense of wonder. In that sense, Wrigley shares something in common with the genetic entrepreneurs whom she sympathetically portrays. Some of the details are just exaggerated for exotic effect—such as the photograph of a light all-terrain vehicle (*vezdekhod*), which is represented as a tank. Or the interesting citation of the recent research on the biochemistry of reindeer blood, where naturally produced ethanol is said to be metabolized at a slower rate in the winter—although the author chooses to link this to reindeer becoming tipsy in winter or (likely Nenetses) drinking blood.

There is also not very much specific information about her own fieldwork in the area. I was able to deduce that the research must have happened in 2019 by cross-referencing it to media reports of an aircraft accident that is cited in the book. I was not really able to find a short paragraph situating her own work—or even her PhD thesis—as one might expect from a social anthropologist. Likewise, with the ideas there is some lack of caution and consistency. Generally, the book weaves together a significant ethnographic event with a citation from a key anthropologist or historian of science. Thus, displays of mammoths in museums are described as “boundary objects” (with a reference to Sarah Franklin) that connect viewers to a sort of timeless community. Susan Star’s original usage was to show how objects pretty much performed the opposite by dividing collectors from professional curators. The names Stengers, Ingold, Blaser, or de la Cadena appear here and there next to the word ontology without really reflecting on how any of those authors use the term. Or, indeed, how Taimyr Dolgan or Jamal Nenets accounts might generate an alternate cosmopolitical vision. I did find myself looking up citations—but then being frustrated by the citation system, which usually does not give a page reference.

Although I was shocked, a bit, by some of the errors, this is a thoughtful and well-researched book. It is also a brave book that takes on some of the biggest themes of this century (extinction, retro-breeding, and environmental restoration) and delivers an even-handed account. Due to the errors and exaggerations, I would hesitate to offer it as a model to students, but it certainly opens the door to a fascinating project and the rich literature that describes it.

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