

Heritage and change in the Arctic: resources for the present, and the future. Robert C. Thomsen and Lill Rastad Bjørst (eds). 2017. Aalborg: Aalborg University Press. 242 p, paperback. ISBN 978-87-7112-624-2. GBP 34.

Change in the Arctic is a theme so ubiquitous in the public mind, if not also in scholarly discourse, as to be somehow lacking in surprise. The dramatic has become the routine; climate-driven transformations no longer have the power to shock, even as they become more shocking by the year. The narrative of Arctic change features well-worn tropes, most having to do with the readily observable changes to the physical environment. The authors whose work is collected in *Heritage and Change in the Arctic* contest this discourse, shifting the focus away from, say, melting ice and towards similarly variable culture and identity. Noting that such quantities, in broad terms, are both formed and continually renegotiated through the telling of stories, the editors observe that heritage “places itself at the crucial space between history and identity, and offers itself as a means by which a community can meaningfully define itself” (p. 7). In this view, cultural transformations must be foregrounded in the discourse of change itself, not drawn as secondary or corollary effects of environmental change.

The eight articles in this book, collected from a 2013 conference at Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) in Nuuk, examine heritage as a resource, which, the editors argue, is substantially akin to the oft-studied physical resources that garner wide public attention. In the interconnected nature of the Arctic’s physical and human environments, changes ripple through culture, tradition, identity construction, and community life in ways distinct from, but no less tangible than, those observed in ice, seas, lands, and flora and fauna. The notion of heritage as a resource in and of itself represents an intriguing analytical and narrative device, and while the contributing authors all at least dutifully nod to the paradigm in their respective papers, some interrogate it more fully than others. A trio of articles on mining and mineral resources of Greenland, for example, while informative, thought-provoking, and analytically rigorous in their own right, feature mostly conventional analyses of public policy and stakeholder participation in resource development, making only passing, tentative connections to the theme of heritage.

The most elucidative essays are those in which the dynamic nature of heritage is framed in concrete terms as part of political, social and economic formulations. In Karina M. Smed’s article on tourism in Ilulissat, for example, she notes that while heritage itself represents both process and product, in practical terms the global marketplace appears to favour static representations of culture that do not reflect the vibrancy of the place and its people. Essays on Greenlandic and Inuit music, literature and arts by Daniel Chartier and Karen Langgård similarly reveal heritage to be a quantifiable, everchanging resource whose impact on identity construction is both real and part of a contested terrain over which views will be legitimised in the discourse of Arctic change. Langgård’s paper on discourses on nature in Greenlandic literature, from my view the most insightful of the book’s chapters, traces how concepts of ethnicity and nationalism came to evolve and be integrated into West Greenlandic oral traditions as cultural encounters with Denmark occurred over time. A focus on heritage is less present in Suna Christensen’s article on frontier ideologies in education and Jes Lynning Harfeld’s contribution on hunting, animal rights, and Inuit culture, but both authors advance thoughtful critiques of identity and conflict in the Arctic.

Collected research papers rarely cohere around a common argument, notwithstanding the conference theme that brought together and ostensibly unifies the contributions, and this volume is no different. The theses, methodological approaches, and quality of writing vary from chapter to chapter, as one might expect, and the heritage-as-resource paradigm alternately emerges and fades from view, sometimes within the same chapter. The scholarship is outstanding overall, however, and the articles should be assessed for what they accomplish, not for the measure they deviate from the conference theme. If there is a common thread that connects the essays, it might be that each, in its own way, challenges the normative perspectives—what the editors call “elite” points of view (p. 10)—that have come to dominate popular views of the far North. Like any discourse, the one about Arctic change privileges certain perspectives over others, and the volume under review ably critiques how rights, values, traditions and identity become legitimised within discursive structures that are themselves subjectively constructed. The volume will appeal to social scientists, in particular those whose research places culture, in all its forms, as a key linkage between humans and both their natural and built environments.

Despite the book's title, its eight chapters focus not on the Arctic as a whole but exclusively on Greenland, a shortcoming acknowledged by the editors and a fact hardly surprising given the conference location. A broader, comparative approach featuring other Arctic regions would have strengthened the scholarship, but this quibble aside, *Heritage and Change in the Arctic* makes

valuable contributions to the social and human sciences. (Ross Coen, Department of History, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Gruening 604-B, Box 756460, Fairbanks AK, 99775, USA (racoen@alaska.edu))

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