

Design and the Built Environment of the Arctic: Leena Cho and Matthew Jull (2024), New York, NY: Routledge. 246 p. paperback. ISBN 978-1-032-66770-6

The Arctic represents a crucial nexus for global change, yet research on its urbanism and architecture remains underexplored. *Design and the Built Environment of the Arctic*, edited by Leena Cho and Matthew Jull, fills this gap with a compelling and timely collection of work from leading and emerging scholars on how the built environment – encompassing architecture, landscape architecture, infrastructure, urban design, and planning – engages with the region’s distinct environmental, social, cultural, and geopolitical dynamics. The book opens with a concise introduction by Cho and Jull, situating Arctic urbanism as an interdisciplinary field in essence, which necessitates and demands a variety of perspectives for a holistic environmentally- and culturally-relevant understanding of its many places. The editors guide readers through the book’s three-part structure covering theoretical reflections, case studies, and community-based, future-oriented narratives.

The first section interrogates the contours of a wider Arctic urban discourse. Torill Nyseth and Julie Christensen deftly examine the heterogeneity of Arctic cities, calling for new frameworks to conceptualise urbanism at various scales. Traditional population-centric urban definitions are challenged, with reflections offered that include local and regional particularities regarding nature, Indigeneity and multiculturalism, administration and politics, and regional or international connectivity. Ali Fard’s chapter aptly responds to their call with a thorough and alternative conceptualisation of “infrastructural urbanization” as an extensive urban mode. He surveys entangled and dynamic networks, such as fibre-optic cables, water and energy connections, and transportation links, and teases out their complexity, including contradictions such as their influence empowering locals or reinforcing colonial implications. Completing this section, Peter Hemmersam critiques the replication of southern design typologies in Arctic contexts, extrapolating on a dichotomy of comfort and discomfort in the urban form. He neatly argues for designs rooted in local social and cultural realities, aligning with broader decolonisation debates in architecture and planning.

The book’s second section comprises six focused case studies, each located in a different Arctic nation, which provide a more granular look at the built environment. Benjamin DiNapoli’s analysis of Kiruna, Sweden, explores the city’s relocation due to mining subsidence. His proposed multi-stakeholder development frameworks prioritise residents’ agency in planning and design, showcasing how urbanism can address tensions between industrial development and social equity. Bert De Jonghe’s chapter examines Greenland’s airport network, or “aeroscape,” as a nation-building enterprise. He highlights how infrastructure reflects geopolitical strategy while addressing local or regional needs. The chapter by Vera Kuklina and colleagues is a fascinating and insightful look into Russian landscape planning ideology from the late nineteenth century onwards. Their analysis of urban green infrastructure in the Siberian cities of Tyumen and Nadym illustrates how green spaces reflect colonial histories, ecological strategies, and human-assisted adaptations. Aaron Cooke and Tom Marsik’s work in Alaska highlights the engineering and logistical challenges of designing housing for small, rural Arctic communities, often with only air or sea connections. Their principles of cold-climate construction, developed through the Cold Climate Housing Research Center, offer a pragmatic perspective on how architecture can address extreme environmental conditions while remaining culturally and socially responsive.

The last two case studies perform double duty and are co-clustered with the final chapter for the third section that foregrounds local collective agency in contributing to future narratives. Miriam Blais’ team examines interplay between local knowledge and participatory design practices in Nunavik and Nitassinan through a series of architectural design studios, emphasising the active role of Inuit and Innu communities in crafting their built environments. Janike Kampevold Larsen’s study on Vardø is equally compelling, vividly capturing the architectural material culture of the city through its extensive history and its recent decline and dilapidation countered by community-based efforts at reinvention. She sets a theoretical examination that connects love of place to practices of care and demonstrates how design can transcend its conventional boundaries and temporal restrictions to become a tool for

empowerment and storytelling. These cases are not only methodologically innovative but also deeply humane, grounding the book's theoretical aspirations in tangible, lived experiences.

Julie Decker's closing chapter functions as both a synthesis and a reflection, integrating narratives of the Arctic drawn from literature, media, art, and architecture. With a rapid succession of references, Decker problematises and critiques the dominance of fragmented, outsider perspectives and frameworks, urging instead for a deeper understanding of the region. She advocates for enriched territorial knowledge rooted in active engagement with local communities and landscapes, positioning them as vital components of our collective urban future.

The book avoids romanticising or oversimplifying the Arctic. Instead, it offers a complex variety of perspectives that balance the region's vulnerabilities with its potential. The chapters swiftly guide readers from one part of the Arctic to another, revealing new landscapes of investigation at every turn. This journey emphasises the enormity of the region, its multitude of built environments, and the ways they can be localised and understood through diverse lenses, both in the present and looking toward the future. The contributors challenge readers to move beyond conventional paradigms, advocating for inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to urbanism.

While the content is rich and varied, a few aspects could be improved. Certain chapters could benefit from addressing pressing questions raised by their content. For instance, Cooke and Marsik's work, while already thorough, features synthetic polymer-based materials as a common design solution for stable, warm, and airtight homes. I have seen plastic sheets blown from construction sites in the tundra, and am curious to know more about material containment, waste management, and building practices on construction sites. Kuklina and her team could have elaborated on specific references, such as what *subbotniki* are and how their role in the Soviet organisation of everyday life influenced or continues to influence the creation and care of landscapes. Additionally, the inclusion of more Indigenous-led or co-led

scholarship would greatly enhance this compilation. The questions I raise, however, reflect the interesting material covered. The chapters are primarily succinct and poignant case studies, providing a robust understanding of the type and quality of recent and ongoing research in the Arctic.

Further, while the compendium is not short on impressive illustrations, they are all sadly in black and white. The lack of colour fails to capture the vibrancy of the Arctic-built environment and detracts from many of the chapters' communicative power. The deficiency is particularly conspicuous in the maps and student projects, where colour would have enhanced legibility and engagement. Similarly, some charts and maps require more space on their pages to allow the reader to better grasp the information conveyed. Some chapters suffer from minor typographical errors and uneven editing, and there is one instance of a mislabelled building in a photograph, which may frustrate meticulous readers. Yet these issues do little to detract from the overall quality and coherence of the work. The book's strengths far outweigh its limitations.

Design and the Built Environment of the Arctic is a landmark publication that situates Arctic urbanism as a vital field of inquiry. By treating the Arctic as a dynamic and integral part of global urbanism rather than a peripheral or exotic region, the book encourages new ways of thinking about urbanisation, climate and environmental change, and cultural resilience. As the Arctic continues to evolve, so too must our understanding of its built environments – and this collection provides a critical foundation and catalyst for that ongoing exploration.

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