

Long has cultural research involved scholars heading out into the ‘unknown’, writing gripping (and often inaccurate) tales about the peoples and societies they have met along the way. Understandably, this has caused much frustration for these ‘unknown’ people who know themselves very well, and who have had few opportunities to correct inaccurate representations, or to self-represent their worlds in academic literature. Published in 2022, *The Sámi World* is an invaluable contribution towards countering this trend.

Edited by Sanna Valkonen, Áile Aikio, Saara Alakorva and Sigga-Marja Magga, this scholarly work takes the reader through the past, present and potential future worlds of the Sámi, the Indigenous peoples of northern Europe and western Russia. Each chapter in the book acts as a stand-alone research paper, with overarching themes threaded throughout. A significant number of the chapter authors are Sámi themselves, or have long been embedded in Sámi communities, so rather than author and reader being two outsiders peering in and trying to make sense of this world, it often feels like the reader is a guest being invited in to learn from someone about their own reality. This can be seen in the prominent use of the various Sámi languages, with Sámi terminology for concepts reminding us that this world does not need to rely on Western theories to explain it, instead having its own body of knowledge and understandings. The inclusion of many quotes in Sámi languages first, followed by English translations, further highlights that the Sámi world is a complete, rich world within itself, rather than just a curiosity on the fringes of dominant society.

The first section, entitled *Guođohit* - Living with/in Nature, is made up of twelve chapters that explore Sámi relationships with their environment. Alongside more popular discussions of Indigenous land rights and the environmental knowledge of reindeer herders, the often forgotten subsistence activities of egg and berry gathering are included, further noting the roles of coffee, birch sap, and vitamin D deficiencies in Northern diets. When exploring how information about the environment is communicated, the role of oral histories and symbolisms within clothing such as the *gákti* are included, alongside lesser-known forms of knowledge transmission such as the musical storytelling of Skolt Saami *leu'dd*.

These highly informative chapters do not shy away from being critical. When discussing some of the ways the Sámi world has been communicated to wider audiences, authors outline how museums and the tourism industry have repeatedly provided inaccurate, staged

depictions of Sámi cultures which homogenise and primitivise, ironically often under the guise of wanting to provide audiences with 'authenticity'. Another chapter discusses how sacred *sieidi* sites, which hold a deep spiritual significance that has been expressed through changing practices over time, are simplified and stripped of meaning within archaeological narratives, just labelled as sites of animal sacrifice. Further, some authors highlight the constantly evolving nature of what it means to be Sámi, such as the roles of the Laestadian and Lutheran faiths within this identity. Even seemingly positive narratives of 'strong Sámi women' in 'historically egalitarian societies' are questioned in a chapter on feminist understandings of the impacts of colonisation on matriarchal and patriarchal Sámi societal structures.

The second section entitled *Gierdat* - Living through/in Societal Ruptures, which also contains twelve chapters, explores shifts in Sámi identity and representation. Beginning with recent history, authors tell the painful tales of residential schools, language suppression and harsh assimilation policies, with valuable nuance that acknowledges how experiences differed both through time and across the nation states that intersect the Sámi homeland. This gives context to later chapters exploring new formats of identity and representation today, from the development of the symbolically unifying Sámi flag, to novel administrative structures in Stockholm that cater for Sámi living in urban settings outside the traditional northern homelands. Once again, the authors do not avoid the complexities of these subjects. For example, they question the markers of identity that allow one to be part of new administrative and political structures, and highlight how inclusion in these structures can lead to both cultural revitalisation and abuse of power for external political ends. Following on from topics of communication in the previous section, authors explore the ways in which various Sámi groups have sought to self-represent, from protests to the formation of Sámi media in newspapers, literature, radio and TV.

The final section of eleven chapters, *Duostat* - Envisioning Sámi Futures, looks at how Sámi today are enacting, constructing and relearning their world. Authors discuss how skills and knowledge that have been temporarily lost, whether language or the construction of the *ládjogahpir* hat, are being regained. To safeguard this future, chapters lay out practical information such as ethical research guidelines created for researchers wishing to work with Sámi communities, and governance structures that could be (or be better) applied in today's legal landscape. This section engages with key contemporary discourses, like the

overlap between feminist approaches and queer world making with the Sámi world. It also proposes new approaches that have yet to be widely adopted in scholarly research, such as researching the activism of having fun.

The *Sámi World* gently unsettles common narratives about Sámi life by simply including. This is not involvement of more Sámi authors, but inclusion of diverse knowledge about and from Skolt Sámi, Queer Sámi, Urban Sámi, egg collecting Sámi, and many other parts of the Sámi world we hear less about. Whilst not one, unified storyline, it feels like a key go-to reference book for academics, which is deeply and often delightfully informative about a wide range of Sámi topics. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, in the epilogue of *The Sámi World*, sums it up quite nicely:

*“It has been an unmitigated pleasure and an adventure to delve into this treasure of a book. Although it is an academic publication with all the appropriate trappings in place, and even if the topic is sometimes grim, it is as if the authors cannot quite conceal their passion for the Sámi world, generously spiking their chapters with anecdotes and stories, details from domestic life and vivid descriptions of nature imagery from Sápmi. A good read it is, and an enlightening one.”*