The book “Protecting Indigenous Sacred Sites in the Arctic and Circumpolar North”, published with Springer Polar Science, offers a compelling exploration of the profound relationship between Indigenous communities and their Sacred Natural Sites (SNSs) in the Arctic. The editors Leena Heinämäki, University of Lapland, and Thora Martina Herrmann, Université de Montréal, bring together multidisciplinary perspectives to define the cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance of these sites while addressing the pressing challenges Indigenous peoples face in protecting them. Through an engaging combination of legal analysis, case studies, and policy recommendations, these eleven chapters position SNSs as vital touchstones for understanding the intersection of environmental conservation, cultural heritage, and Indigenous rights.

The narrative is divided in two parts: while the first focuses on Recognition of Sacred Sites of Arctic Indigenous Peoples under legal discourse, the second connects the Intangible Cultural Heritage to Sacred Sites offering several examples and recommendations.

The book centers on the importance of SNSs, which are deeply embedded in Indigenous worldviews as sacred spaces tied to spiritual beliefs, rituals, and cultural practices. These sites, often governed by customary laws, also serve as instruments of biodiversity and environmental stewardship. In fact, these sites often function as reservoirs of traditional knowledge, embodying intergenerational wisdom about ecological resilience. Starting with these premises, the book’s primary purpose is to showcase how protecting these sacred spaces according to different legal frameworks as international Human Rights, European law and domestic legislations in the Arctic. SNSs are also portrayed as *holistic and natural entities* where ecological conservation and cultural heritage coexist. For instance, the Sámi People’s sacred sites, such as *sieidis*, are highlighted as examples of spaces where spiritual reciprocity with nature is central to cultural and environmental practices.

One of the book’s strengths lies in its analysis of the challenges faced by Indigenous communities in safeguarding SNSs. These challenges include industrial development, urban expansion, vandalism, destruction of prehistorical sites and the commodification of sacred spaces through tourism. The secrecy often maintained by Indigenous groups about these sites to protect their sanctity further complicates their legal recognition and protection. It also highlights the historical marginalization of SNSs in conservation agendas, noting that they were often overlooked in favour of Western conservation models that prioritized

ecological over cultural considerations. For these reasons, the editors' chapters call for a paradigm shift toward "*biocultural*" conservation that respects and incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems. In their vision, recognizing SNSs as *biocultural landscapes* can provide more effective and respectful conservation outcomes.

As previously mentioned, the book provides also a thorough analysis of international legal instruments in protecting SNSs. It explores the contributions of treaties such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Notably, the CBD's Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines are presented as a significant step toward incorporating Indigenous perspectives into impact assessments for development projects. However, the authors condemn the inadequacy of existing legal frameworks in fully addressing the unique needs of SNSs. Also, it analyses broadly the global context of Indigenous movements by highlighting how platforms like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) have elevated the visibility of Indigenous issues and provided a foundation for advocating SNS protection.

The book also includes a detailed list of case studies, providing concrete examples of both successes and shortcomings in the protection of SNSs. For instance, the *Saramaka People v. Suriname* case underscores the importance of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in safeguarding Indigenous land rights and sacred spaces. Similarly, *the Kichwa People of Sarayaku v. Ecuador* case highlights the detrimental effects of government actions that disregard FPIC and Indigenous autonomy. The African Commission's ruling in *Endorois Welfare Council v. Kenya* is another powerful example. It demonstrates how displacement for tourism development violated the cultural and developmental rights of the Endorois people, emphasizing the role of intergenerational equity in upholding Indigenous rights. These case studies not only illustrate the challenges but also highlight the potential of legal and policy mechanisms to support Indigenous claims. They also serve as valuable learning tools for the readers to understand how long and complicated has been the fight of Indigenous Peoples to get their cultural and land rights recognised in judicial *fora*.

The second part of book adopts an overall *legal pluralistic* approach that harmonizes state laws with Indigenous customary laws. The pluralistic approach integrates Indigenous cultural values and ecological knowledge, bridging the gap between traditional conservation practices and modern environmental management. In fact, the most interesting point of

analysis in this second part is how the intangible aspects of SNSs, such as oral traditions, rituals, and spiritual beliefs, rock paintings are integral to Indigenous identity. The authors address the threats posed by several Arctic States critiquing assimilation policies, unsustainable tourism, and wide urbanization, which have disrupted traditional practices, changed traditional topography and led to the degradation of sacred sites. The discussion on intangible heritage is enriched by examples, mainly from the Sámi Peoples in Finnish Lapland.

For all these reasons, “Protecting Indigenous Sacred Sites in the Arctic and Circumpolar North” is an original contribution to the discourse on Indigenous rights, cultural heritage, and environmental conservation. Its multidisciplinary approach combines legal analysis, case studies, and policy recommendations. It also highlights the role of international legal frameworks, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on Biological Diversity, in strengthening the recognition and protection of sacred sites.

The book includes several collaborative solutions from diverse Arctic states and it offers practical guidance for addressing complex challenges. All chapters insightfully provide a comprehensive roadmap for exploring sustainable and equitable practices. It is not only a call to action but also a valuable reference for ongoing research and policy development in that region. As climate change and globalization continue to impact the Arctic and its communities, this work stands as a tool to review and assess the effectiveness of legislations aiming to protect the world’s most vulnerable social communities. This edition is an important source of studies for BA and MA students, academics, policymakers, and advocates interested in Arctic issues.