

SCIENCE, GEOPOLITICS AND CULTURE IN THE POLAR REGION: NORDEN BEYOND BORDERS. Sverker Sörlin (editor). 2013. Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate. xiv + 443 pages, hardcover, illustrated. ISBN 978-1-4724-0969-0. £70.00.

Science, geopolitics and culture in the polar region is the second of five volumes in the series *The Nordic experience* – the outcome of an interdisciplinary, multi-year research project at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Stockholm's Södertörn University. The primary goal of every volume is to dig into the notion of Nordic exceptionalism. What is it that makes us speak of a unique Nordicness and in which areas does it reveal itself? The other volumes deconstruct, how Norden has been stereotyped in heritage practices, transnational media structures, expressions of cultural identity and in the distribution of democratic ideals during the last 200 years. This volume focuses on polar science as a distinctive Nordic pattern. If the entire volume were to be summarised in a single sentence, according to editor Sverker Sörlin the shortest candidate would be this: 'The Nordic nations are part of the Arctic, and the Arctic is part of the Nordic region' (page 16). His claim is that it is just as impossible to imagine a Nordic region without the Arctic as it is impossible to imagine the Arctic independent of the involvement of the Nordic states: the 'modern history of the Arctic [...] is a key feature in understanding not just the Arctic itself but also the Nordic countries' (page 5).

The fourteen articles in this volume try to do this claim justice. They are divided into five main parts. Chapters 2–4 investigate the geopolitics of the Nordic presence in the Arctic and Antarctica, chapters 5–8 deal with Nordic polar relations with Russia, chapters 9–10 focus on Greenland and chapters 11–14 extend the research to ideas and institutions, heritage practices and collective memory. The volume thus covers a very broad range of topics from many different angles. If one can speak of any focus at all, most of the articles are situated in the twentieth century, in particular in its middle decades. However, some contributions draw the narrative until the present, while others go back until early modern history.

The main point of departure is to break the chains of the Westphalian logic of states as prime actors. The polar regions simply do not work that way. The Nordic states possessed a far greater 'symbolic' than 'sovereign' territory in the polar regions (page 4). Moreover, as largely unpopulated areas, far away 'from the hustle and bustle of everyday life' (page 15), politics, science, culture and the military intermingled much more with each other than elsewhere, which allowed the small Nordic countries to punch considerably above their weight. The broad range of topics in this volume is an image of how the 'Arctic Norden' reflected itself in a considerable number of ways within the composite of science, diplomacy and policy.

Chapters 2–4 are set at the height of Nordic polar science between 1930 and 1960. Sörlin in chapter 2 deals with the Danish-Norwegian geographer and glacier researcher Hans Ahlmann who tried relentlessly to bring the Nordic countries closer in their efforts to understand the Arctic. Peder Roberts (chapter 3) describes, how polar cooperation between the Nordic countries suffered major setbacks following the advent of the cold war. One of the consequences of this setback was the transfer of Norway's polar station in the Antarctic to the

white minority regime in South Africa. Peder Roberts, Klaus Dodds and Lize-Marié van der Watt (chapter 4) describe this interesting example of Norwegian *realpolitik* at a time, when the country was championing liberation movements in sub-Saharan Africa.

Chapters 5–8 are more or less situated within the same period, but shift the focus from Nordic polar science to polar relations with Russia. Julia Lajus (chapter 5) explores the establishment of two different kinds of polar stations and of marine biological stations in the Russian (sub-)Arctic from around 1880 until the 1930s. Stian Bones (chapter 6) examines cooperation in polar research between Norway and the Soviet Union during the cold war. Julia Lajus (chapter 7) again describes Norwegian-Russian cooperation with regard to the fish resources in the Barents Sea between 1900 and 1970 as the beginning of polar cooperation and exemplary for the transboundary nature of polar matters. Urban Wråkberg (chapter 8) shows, how Russia provoked the Nordic states to modify and develop their polar agendas into geopolitical and geoeconomic instruments after the First World War.

From chapter 9 onward, the style of the contributions changes from overall historical descriptions to cultural analysis and interpretation. In one of the most enlightening contributions to the volume, Kirsten Thisted (chapter 9) shows, how Greenlanders have continued to be branded in a 'paternalistic and colonial' way as 'passive victims of climate change' – 'witnesses who may be interviewed about how they perceive and notice the disappearance of their world' (page 230) – but not as active people who can shape their own fate, something to which they have at least been formally empowered through the Act of Self-Government of 2009. Thisted demands that Greenlanders should be met as equal negotiation partners and not as indigenous peoples. But she also points out that the latter self-image still comes rather convenient for Greenland at times, since it legitimises certain exceptions from whaling or pollution regulations. Jessica M. Shadian (chapter 10) analyses how the Nordic nations have actively started to create a Nordic Arctic after the end of the cold war in order to fill the increasingly outdated Nordic model with a new narrative. The conclusions from her chapter are intriguing, not least with regard to the volume's overall objectives. In the end, also this volume contributes to the construction of a new social reality, which emphasises the Nordicness of the Arctic and the Arcticness of Norden, which is a deliberate choice and certainly not self-evident.

In chapters 11–14, the perspective changes. While the majority of the chapters in the book focus on how Norden shaped the Arctic, these chapters investigate how polar ambitions shaped identity in Norden and elsewhere. Anders Houltz (chapter 11) analyses the collective memory of Nordic polar expeditions in the Norwegian *Fram* Museum in Oslo and the Swedish *Andrée* Museum in Gränna (named after the Swedish explorer S.A. Andrée). He reveals how the two museums are entrapped in two very different narratives of what it means to be a polar nation. While Norway's polar efforts became part of the struggle for its national independence, Sweden's polar efforts fitted badly in the Swedish self-image of rationality and progress in polar science. Dag Avango (chapter 12) shows how the remnants of Norwegian whaling stations in South Georgia Islands in the South Atlantic were incorporated into different arguments for claims to political influence and extraction rights of the United Kingdom and Argentina. Aant Elzinga

(chapter 13) gives an overview how the polar expeditions of the Nordic nations and their participation in international polar years left their mark in Nordic culture, politics and science. The last chapter in this volume by Lisbeth Lewander (chapter 14) consists of loose fragments about security-related issues in Arctic science collaboration between the Nordic states, the US and Canada. Lewander died before being able to finish work on her chapter, but Sörlin decided to include it nevertheless because of her central role to the Arctic Nordic project.

The different contributions confirm Sörlin's initial claim in general: neither can Norden be conceived independently of the Arctic nor can the Arctic be conceived independently from Norden and this is an impression which does not exclusively relate to the Nordic polar scientists Hans Ahlmann or Fridtjof Nansen and their famous polar expeditions, but also to the remnants of long-forgotten Norwegian whaling stations in Antarctica. Nordic involvement in the polar region was broad and diverse and it is therefore no surprise that the polar regions also left their mark on Nordic identity.

It is the great achievement of this volume to show the broad range of this Nordic-Arctic interconnectedness. However, not all authors equally live up to this premise. Some of the chapters are entirely or to a large extent descriptive. They should have been better placed within the overall theme of the volume. This applies in particular to the chapters by Julia Lajus (chapter 5) and Aant Elzinga (chapter 13). The volume is then at its strongest when it goes beyond mere historical descriptions of Nordic-Arctic interconnectedness and moves into the sphere of interpretation. Chapters 9–12 of Kirsten Thisted, Jessica M.

Shadian, Anders Houltz and Dag Avango stand out in that regard and make a fascinating lecture.

Those who expected a more focused and round-up analysis of the 'Arctic Norden' might be disappointed. Too broad are the topics dealt with, too different the methodological approaches chosen by the contributors. The title of the volume clearly reflects its wide range somewhere between science, geopolitics and culture. There are no limits to other themes that could have been included as well. It seems incidental that the volume eventually consisted of exactly these 14 articles. This must have also made it hard to divide the volume into different parts. Although Greenland plays some role in her analysis, Jessica M. Shadian's chapter for example does not really fit under the heading 'Greenland and the ambiguities of sovereignty'. One could also wonder, whether the volume would have benefitted from focusing exclusively on the 'Arctic Norden' instead of trying to construct a 'polar Norden' at the same time by including Norden's interesting, but negligible, engagement in Antarctica.

However, these are only minor points. The volume should be judged by its overall objective to reveal that Norden and the Arctic are connected with each other in so many ways that one can not think of one without thinking of the other. And here it succeeds. *Science, geopolitics and culture in the polar region* is an excellent reflection of the wide range of Nordic-Arctic interconnectedness and an enriching point of access for its many facets (Christian Rebhan, Humboldt University of Berlin, Department for Northern European Studies, Unter den Linden 6, 10099 Berlin, Germany (christian.rebhan@hu-berlin.de)).