

Hemmersam Peter. **Making the Arctic city: the history and future of urbanism in the circumpolar North**. BLOOMSBURY VISUAL ARTS. London, New York, Dublin, 2021. 254 pp.

The last approximately 10–15 years have been marked in the Arctic science by a new surge of interest in the problems of Arctic cities and Arctic urbanisation in general. However, the phenomenon of the Arctic city itself is by no means new. The Arctic has already experienced several urban development booms. The first can be considered a boom in urban development associated with the pursuit of resources for the early industrialisation of the northern countries (Klondike Gold Rush on the border of Alaska and Canada, the development of ores on the Arctic margins of Nordic countries, the development of the Kola Peninsula in Russia, etc.). Bold modernist projects followed in the 1950s and 60s; the 1970s and 1980s were also marked by creative activity associated with the rethinking of Arctic cities in a more environmentally friendly way. Peter Hemmersam carefully sorts out and systematises the different stages of development of Arctic cities in different countries, trying to “catch” the Arctic city as a special phenomenon and trace its evolution.

The main paradox of the Arctic cities is that they are extremely alien to the Arctic, and this alienation surprisingly unites the Arctic cities of different countries and eras. It is hard to resist the temptation to quote the opening lines of the author sharing his personal impressions: “Visiting Arctic cities has always involved a slight sense of displacement for me – even in the northern regions of my residential country, Norway. I am happy to note that the feeling has become less pronounced as I have become more familiar with the urban settings and urban life of the communities in question after numerous visits over the years” (p. xv). This confession perfectly illustrates the main idea of the book.

For almost the last century, Arctic cities were conceived as a special phenomenon, the development of which had to solve certain goals, which were very specific in relation to the goals of the development of “ordinary” cities in more southern regions. The Arctic cities are, as it were, both “under-cities” and “hyper-cities” at the same time. There are “undercities” because they are too small to support the functioning of “normal” urban development mechanisms, “local buzz” as an environment for innovations. They are excluded from urban exchange networks, and they are too far from each other to get an agglomeration effect. But at the same time, they are “hypercities.” Compared to the sparsely populated tundra, these “kids-cities” perform all the functions that comfortable megapolices perform under more favourable conditions. These are both decision-making centres and centres of social contacts (often in a small town in the Arctic, the routes of residents or workers of territories stretching hundreds and thousands of kilometres around intersect, as if it were a “Global city” in the centre of the world macro-region). The industrial functions of the Arctic cities are very limited, but the administrative, communication, social functions in their absence of alternatives in a vast region turn out to be more significant than the similar functions of a city of the same population in the surroundings of Copenhagen or Moscow. The author quite rightly notes that in the Arctic a city should be defined by way of life, and not by size.

As the author writes, “there is still a tendency to view Arctic cities as underdeveloped, inefficient or inferior in terms of urban planning. They depend on external resources, air transport and seasonal supplies of food and other essentials. At the same time, Arctic cities and towns are concentrated hubs of urban life in inhospitable landscapes. These are self-sufficient ‘islands’ that are not included in the regional city networks” (p. 28).

And the paradoxical nature of the Arctic cities is only strengthened by the ambiguous definitions of the Arctic and the North themselves, especially if we take into account the widespread construct of the North as the territory of Other, an analogue of “Orient,” following here the reference of sociologist Rob Shields to Edward Said’s postcolonial theory of “orientalism” (p. 11). The idea of “othering the North” seems to be very important for understanding the policy towards the region, but so far it has been very little developed, especially in relation to the highly urbanised Russian Arctic, where comparison with “Orient” can be shocking at first, but nevertheless productive. The author very conscientiously examines related aspects of understanding the North and the Arctic, including the idea of “Arctic exceptionalism” by Philip Steinberg et al. (Steinberg et al., 2015), the dialectic of the colony and the frontier, the ideas of

“internal colonialism” by political scientists Oran Young and John Dryzek (Dryzek & Young, 1985), the North as a periphery (King, 2015; Grydehøj, 2014), etc.

Thus, the excursion into the conceptualisation of the Arctic and the North conducted by the author is much broader than just an analysis of the idea of an Arctic city and may be of interest in itself to all researchers involved in the political, economic and human development of this circumpolar region.

The author carefully traces the evolution of the very idea of the Arctic city and development of the certain cities in the northern regions of the USSR/Russia, Canada and Greenland. The analysis itself is already of factual interest and contains many details (for example, observations on the history of the exchange of experience between these countries in the field of architecture of Arctic cities are noteworthy). However, for a detailed analysis, the author dwells on individual cities, especially Murmansk in Russia and Fairmont in Canada. If the choice for a detailed analysis of Fermont looks really justified as the unique “climate wall” was built here and the city itself was a special project of “Northern” architecture, then the choice of Murmansk for such a big attention looks like a stretch. Of course, the field observations made by the author together with his students, and included in the text, greatly decorate the book. Nevertheless, Murmansk is large, but due to the relatively mild local climate (in comparison with other cities of Russian Arctic), it is not the most specific Arctic city of this country. Norilsk, which is an absolutely unprecedented example of the development of a large city in very harsh natural conditions, has been given much less space, with the main focus being on the unrealised (although very bright) projects of the Soviet architect Alexander Shipkov. On the contrary, the dramatic history of the urbanisation of Greenland, largely inspired from outside, is very instructive.

But still, the most interesting thing in this book is not the history or architecture of individual cities, but the history of ideas.

Here the author continues his work on exploring ways of thinking about the Arctic and, in particular, his article in the Arctic Record, published in 2016, mapping the professional and academic discourse on the architecture of the Arctic through a systematic review of academic and professional literature (p. 28). The book presents a narrower, but no less exciting topic – this is the mapping of ideas in relation to the Arctic city.

Perhaps the most attractive and new thing in the book is that the author was able to see the general trends and stages in the development of the idea of an Arctic city in a circumpolar field, as if “above” the differences in such different territories as the Soviet Union, Canada and Greenland. Perhaps, such a powerful generalised vision is what creates the exclusivity of Peter Hemmersam’s monograph.

Based on the stages of development of Canadian Arctic cities, identified by the architect of the legendary Fermont Norbert Schoenauer, the author gives his own, more universal system. It is advisable to bring it:

1. *“Paradise” in the North*. The development of Arctic cities at this stage was inspired by the aesthetically oriented City Beautiful movement in the early decades of the twentieth century and continued well into the 1950s in North America, and “celebrating socialism’s conquest of the adversarial North” (p. 158) in the Soviet Union – with strikingly similar urban results.
2. *Technocratic urbanism*: “Governments established research institutes to develop technology as well as sociological knowledge about new urban communities in the North. Powerful


technocratic state organizations in the Soviet Union, Greenland, Canada and Norway implemented large-scale programmes that included urban development and industrialization” (p. 158).

3. *Softening the North* (1970—80th) with “focus on the liveability of northern cities to attract a volunteer industrial workforce. It was during this period that the idea of a particular Arctic urbanism was formulated and tested in places like Resolute Bay, Vermont and Udachny” (p. 159).
4. *Climatic cities* (1980—90th), including Winter Cities movement, “with the international ‘critical regionalism’ movement, northern communities outside the modern metropolitan regions of the West functioned as experimental spaces for renegotiation and differentiating Modernist urban planning and design” (p. 159).
5. *Place-specific urbanism*.

The last stage is the most paradoxical here, as “today, Arctic cities are more and more like cities elsewhere, and politicians and urban planners subscribe to the mainstream international discourse on urban branding, liveability and the mobility of businesses and people. At the same time, Arctic settlements are affected by rapid globalization and a changing global climate. < . . . > the arrival of new low-wage immigrants to northern communities upends established social hierarchies. < . . . > At the same time, designers working closely with, or from within the region, have identified and mobilized Indigenous knowledge and regional cultures in new architectural expressions. This Arctic vernacular is not necessarily a ‘hard’ architecture or urbanism that specifies technical standards or solutions, but rather a materialization of the hybrid cultures of modern societies in the North” (p. 159).

As the stages were layered in the Arctic, several types of cities were formed, such as the utopian city, postcolonial city, provisional city, experimental city, ecological city, existing both ideologically and materialised in practice. The diversity of ideas has created an absolutely stunning landscape of Arctic cities – stunning in its diversity despite the generally small size of the Arctic cities themselves and their global population.

The book will certainly be useful for the widest audience. First of all, those who are directly involved in the architecture and design of Arctic cities will find interesting material in it, there is a lot of interesting comparative material for them here. However, the book is also important for those who are connected with the planning of any economic activity in the Arctic, with the solution to the issues of “shift migration or the city” in the development of natural resources. The book provides a lot of material for thinking about the role of the Arctic in the economy of the Arctic countries, in state policy towards the northern and other “peripheral” regions. Of course, the book is also useful for those who are interested in the Arctic from a cultural and political point of view. But the most amazing thing is that the book – as well as the problem of Arctic cities in general – is useful for everyone who is engaged in urban studies anywhere and has never even had anything to do with the Arctic. The existential problems of Arctic cities, which the book makes you think about, allow you to think more deeply about the patterns of urban development in general. This is a book about the city as a phenomenon, and the extreme conditions of the Arctic sometimes give more food for thought here than a “normal” megalopolis. I warmly recommend this book for everyone who is connected with the development of the Arctic as a whole, who lives in the Arctic and thinks about its future, but also for urbanists who have never been to the Arctic, for a deeper understanding of the

city as such. (Nadezhda Zamyatina<sup>1,2</sup>  <sup>1</sup>Faculty of Geography, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Leninskie Gory, Moscow, GSP-1, 119991, Russian Federation ([zamyatina@geogr.msu.ru](mailto:zamyatina@geogr.msu.ru)) and <sup>2</sup>Vysokovsky Graduate School of Urbanism (GSU), Faculty of Urban and Regional Development of the National Research University Higher School of Economics, 13, bld 4 Myasnitskaya str., Moscow, 101000, Russia ([nzamyatina@hse.ru](mailto:nzamyatina@hse.ru)))

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DOI: [10.1017/S0032247422000109](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247422000109)