

KRUPNIK, Igor, Claudio APORTA, Shari GEARHEARD, Gita J. LAIDLER and Lene Kielsen HOLM (eds), 2010 *SIKU: Knowing Our Ice. Documenting Inuit Sea Ice Knowledge and Use*, Dordrecht, Springer, 501 pages.

Anja Nicole Stuckenberg

Volume 35, numéro 1-2, 2011

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1012853ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1012853ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)

1708-5268 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Stuckenberg, A. N. (2011). Compte rendu de [KRUPNIK, Igor, Claudio APORTA, Shari GEARHEARD, Gita J. LAIDLER and Lene Kielsen HOLM (eds), 2010 *SIKU: Knowing Our Ice. Documenting Inuit Sea Ice Knowledge and Use*, Dordrecht, Springer, 501 pages.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 35(1-2), 302-304.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1012853ar>

Beverley Diamond
Canada Research Chair in Ethnomusicology
Research Centre for Music, Media and Place
Memorial University
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador A1C 5S7, Canada
bdiamond@mun.ca

KRUPNIK, Igor, Claudio APORTA, Shari GEARHEARD, Gita J. LAIDLER and Lene Kielsen HOLM (eds)
2010 *SIKU: Knowing Our Ice. Documenting Inuit Sea Ice Knowledge and Use*,
Dordrecht, Springer, 501 pages.

For the wider public, images of the hockey stick graph, stranded polar bears, or an ice-free Northwest Passage in the Arctic have become emblematic of global warming. Yet emblems like these seem to fail to communicate the urgency, enormity, and immediacy of the climate situation to large parts of the wider public, if measured by actual political action and changes in lifestyle. One of the reasons may be that these kinds of images are simply too abstract and remote to challenge people to connect climate change to their own particular lives, livelihoods, and experiences.

While providing more concrete images of the impacts of climate change on everyday life may be a minor objective for the increasingly intensive collaboration between scientists and Arctic communities, it is an important one to keep in mind when reading *SIKU: Knowing Our Ice. Documenting Inuit Sea Ice Knowledge and Use*. This collection of case studies evolved from collaborative projects between researchers and Indigenous communities to gain new data, insights, and approaches to climate change observation, monitoring, and adaptation that would provide both scientific and local communities with new data, useful technologies, and experiences and models of collaboration. By nature, such a localising approach to science also communicates strong and accessible images of climate change concretely affecting the actual lives of people. For all of these reasons, this book is an important resource not only for researchers and anthropologists but also for educators, policy-makers, and people actively involved in climate change advocacy.

The history of *SIKU* is interconnected with the International Polar Year (IPY 2007-2008). The research programs and projects under the auspices of the IPY produced and made accessible large amounts of new descriptive data and new insights into the causes and processes of climate change. More than that, the pressing situation of anthropogenic climate change also provided an opportune moment to include the social sciences and humanities in the research vision of the IPY; their task was to deal with what is often termed the human dimensions of Arctic climate change. The IPY project "Sea Ice Knowledge and Use: Assessing Arctic Environmental and Social Change" International Polar Year project (2006-2009) was set up to follow the model of the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project (Freeman 1976) in its descriptive and mainly ecological system approach to Arctic socio-economic life. Organised as a "coordinated international study of local knowledge and use of sea ice in several indigenous

communities across the Arctic” (p. 7), the resulting summary publication covers a multitude of perspectives on the indelible relationship between humans and their natural environment spanning a region from Chukotka to Greenland.

The essays of this volume have been loosely organised into four subsections: 1) Recording the Knowledge: Inuit Observations of Ice, Climate and Change; 2) Using the Ice: Indigenous Knowledge and Modern Technologies; 3) Learning, Knowing, and Preserving the Knowledge; and 4) SIKU and *Siku*: Opening New Perspectives. The individual case studies explore how climate change reaches by way of the sea ice into the particular daily lives of people and communities. Most of the resulting findings already have been published elsewhere: logbooks of ice and weather conditions; remote sensing and other scientific data; an elaborate cybercartographic atlas; maps and navigational information and techniques on ice use and traveling; video and photo documentation; dictionaries of local sea ice terms and place names in indigenous languages; and narratives and oral histories that evolved from SIKU activities. Nonetheless, by publishing them again in this summary volume, the editors have created a space for both comparative and complementary reading that further unfolds the complexities of situations due to changes in the sea ice and provides perspectives for future research planning and joint efforts.

The publication reveals, not surprisingly, that the issue of the “human dimension” is rather multifaceted. Any endeavour to fit a project like SIKU into a more concisely defined programmatic framework of human/environment relationships must not only fail but also lead us inevitably onto thin ice. “It is not as simple,” as Joëlie Sanguya said in response to an endeavour by visiting researchers to boil down the impacts of a shorter sea ice season on Arctic communities (p. 264). Yet, while *SIKU* provided a wealth of data and perspectives, two important aspects of the “human dimension” were missing. First, women’s experiences and perspectives on sea-ice changes are basically not represented. Not only are women critically involved in giving shape to the Indigenous communities of the future, but they also participate in sea-ice activities, such as travel, deal with the fact that many men of the community work out on the sea ice, are involved in training children in Indigenous knowledge, and use products of the hunt.

Second, though *SIKU* was pragmatically set up to provide local sea-ice observations of a mainly empirical kind, I would argue that both social and economic life are difficult to isolate from the broader religious beliefs and practices of Indigenous communities. Various authors, such as Wisniewski (pp. 275-294) and Laidler et al. (p. 69ff), actually address the importance of such religious interpretations. And Aporta argues that:

projects like the ones conducted in the context of [...] SIKU may sometimes reflect the constraints of academic research, where [...] comprehensive experiences of the environment can be overlooked [...] it is, perhaps, in the narratives that we document that such wholeness can still be detected, preserved, and transmitted and, hence the importance of making this documentation available to the communities beyond the limits of academic publications or scientific reports (p. 178).

Yet such data and insights have no further bearing on the interpretative and practical results of the *SIKU* projects and future research plans. However, the ways in which we conceive of and give meaning to our relationships with the environment contribute to how we observe, understand, and deal with change.

The increasing openness to the “other” science, be it natural or social sciences, and the increasing openness between the “other” ecological knowledge of local people and scientific knowledge constitute a promising and important step forward to an integrated public, political, ethical, and scientific climate change discourse. *SIKU* with its excellent and detailed case studies clearly shows this integration. It also leads us to take the next step and invite to the roundtable other conversation partners such as women, religious leaders, artists, and the voice of the knowledge that resides in the hearts of people. This idea certainly does not originate with me; agrarian writers, such as Wendell Berry in particular, have long advocated such a holistic approach. In the light of climate change and the new insights and joint efforts presented in *SIKU*, such an approach has become even more pressing and, hopefully, within closer reach. After all, as Sanguya and Gearheard write, there are people for whom

there is a special time of the year, just before freeze up, when our community is buzzing with anticipation. We are waiting for ice. This is “waiting season” and it goes back to traditional times. [...]. The ice reconnected us to people and places. [...] Not only people wait for ice. The animals and even the land itself seem wishful for the sea ice in fall time [...]. The ice transforms not only the physical landscape around us but also the emotional landscape within us [...]. To know and use sea ice and experience it the way we do, through music, stories, journeys, emotions, and memories, takes years and lifetimes. As the sea ice changes across the Arctic, these are the things that people who live with ice face losing, not only the physical aspects and environmental functions of sea ice, but the intangible soul-filling stuff that we collect through our life with it (p. ix).

To them *SIKU* “starts the journey toward linking science with soul” (*ibid.*: x). Being thus led into the worlds of changing Arctic sea ice, we may also become increasingly aware of our own connection to the places that we live in, live with, live as part of, and live off and our ways of studying them, talking about them, and dealing with them.

References

FREEMAN, Milton M.R. (ed.)
1976 *Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project*, Ottawa, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

Anja Nicole Stuckenberg
Institute of Arctic Studies
John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding
Dartmouth College
Hanover, NH 03755, USA
astuckenberg@lstc.edu