

Summer life – memories, dreams and materiality

Kerstin Gunnemark (ed.) 2016. *Sommarliv. Minnen, drömmar och materialitet*. Göteborg: Makadam förlag. 335 pp. Ill. ISBN: 978-91-7061-218-3.

The anthology *Sommarliv – minnen, drömmar och materialitet* (Summer life – memories, dreams and materiality) invites the reader on an ethnological journey through time and space in Nordic summer landscapes from the 1950s until today. This book presents a wide variety of summer housing

and summer lifestyles in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Nordic-style summer cottages and summer houses, camping and caravanning, boating as well as summer gardening are presented. The focus lies on recurrent aspects of Nordic summer life and finding answers to why it is so important for millions of people in the Nordic countries to spend their summers and summer holidays in the same, predefined ways, year after year. Nordic summer life is also viewed and presented through the lens of outsiders; two of the articles in the anthology give an interesting insight into the views and experiences of Germans spending

their summers in Sweden. The key focus here is to unravel their fascination and idealised images of summers in the northern parts of Europe.

The articles in the book put a strong effort in explaining and analysing narratives of summer living, not only experienced during the three short summer months of June, July and August, but also in contrast to everyday life during the remaining months of the year. Key themes in the analyses are cultural heritage, traditions, family, roots, hobbies, creativity, materiality, aesthetics and idealised images. During the recent decades, summer living and summer housing has been given much space in both traditional and digital media. There are plenty of magazines, TV shows, blogs and websites aiming to inspire and encourage readers and audience to furnish, decorate, renovate and rebuild different types of summer houses, preferably as do-it-yourself projects (DIY) following the current trends of recycling and sustainability.

Sixteen researchers with roots in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Germany have contributed to the book, which has its background in an international collaboration project between universities, archives and museums. The researchers represent vast disciplinary backgrounds. Most of the authors are ethnologists, but also disciplines such as art history, visual studies and cultural geography are represented. I applaud the author presentations at the very back of the book, which give a personal insight and background to every author's own experiences, family traditions and views on summer life and summer living. The articles are beautifully illustrated with photographs from field works, museums and archival collections and different forms of media. Photographs by professional photographers are to some extent also included. The reading experience is enriched thanks to the pictorial material; the photos evoked in me personally strong feelings of curiosity, reconnaissance, nostalgia, memories and longing for summer, sun and holidays.

Due to the extensive source material, an impressive number of informants from various backgrounds are presented. The empirical data has been collected through field work, observations, interviews and through analyses of both

visual material and digital media. The source material is analysed and presented in various ways, and both the thematic and geographical width of the data is noteworthy. I would argue that by presenting such a wide range of contemporary ethnographic data on this theme, together with an adequate theoretical framework, this anthology fills a large gap in current ethnological research.

The book is divided into five large themes. The first chapter "Berättelser om sommarlivets aktiviteter" (Stories of the activities of summer life) describes summers spent in Finland, Denmark and Visby, Sweden. The article from Finland gives an insight into Finnish summer cottage life from the 1950s onwards as narrated by Finnish Swedish-speaking women. Visby on the island of Gotland in Sweden is considered a true summer paradise. The second article depicts how permanent residents in Visby choose to spend their summer holidays while the island is invaded by thousands of summer visitors and tourists. The Danish contribution follows a similar theme and presents the roles of summer visitors in a small community in Denmark and the societal changes these outsiders have contributed to. The second chapter "Drömmar och förverkligande" (Dreams and realizations) presents two articles in which German informants have been interviewed on their fascination of Nordic summer life and cottage interior style and aesthetics. This chapter includes one article documenting caravanning and camping in the northern parts of Sweden, as well as an article on Swedish garden and allotment enthusiasts' views on space, heritage and creativity in an online discussion forum.

In "Generation och kulturarv" (Generation and cultural heritage), two articles deal with family relations, heritage, history and feelings of belonging, manifested in summer houses and the objects within. The articles in the chapter "Estetiska uttryck" (Aesthetical expressions) describe style and materiality analysed through staged pictures of summer houses presented in media and blogs, and the summer life style sold and marketed in summer concept stores. The articles in the last chapter "Från sjösidan" (View from the seaside) deal with boat owners' views and narra-

tives on boat heritage and memories of seaside summer life.

The editor, professor Kerstin Gunnemark from the University of Gothenburg has done a remarkably good job in putting the anthology together. Thanks to the cross-referencing between the different articles, a well-thought-out and well-structured book has been created. While reading the different articles, I could, however, spot small imbalances. Some articles have a very strong theoretical approach, while others focus on presenting the source material without a deeper problematization or theorization of the theme. Some articles are heavily compressed with a confused heap of themes, source material and theories. These articles should indeed have focused more on one or two themes instead of trying to include everything. The introduction and the epilogue written by the editor, however, create a very good framework for the anthology. The anthology is also thematically held together through the articles' references to theory and literature. Several articles refer to Bruno Latour and his actor-network theory or Michel Foucault and the theory on heterotopia. This does not mean that the articles repeat

each other, though, but rather they complement one another effectively.

Personally, I would also have wished for more focus also on the negative parts of summer life with a more nuanced discussion on for instance class differences. Is summer life as it is presented in the book valid for everyone in the northern parts of Europe? What about the summers of newcomers, such as immigrants? With this critique in mind, there is a risk that the book strengthens a perhaps utopian picture of a "perfect" Nordic summer life and cultural heritage. As an equal representative for Nordic summer life, the anthology would also have needed a contribution from for example Norway. Nevertheless, this book can surely attract and inspire a wide range of readers, not only researchers or ethnologists. I experience the quotes from the informants as recognizable, and the analyses of these gave me many aha-experiences. The book forms a welcoming presentation and escape to stories, views and experiences on how summers can be spent in the northern parts of Europe.

Sarah Hagström