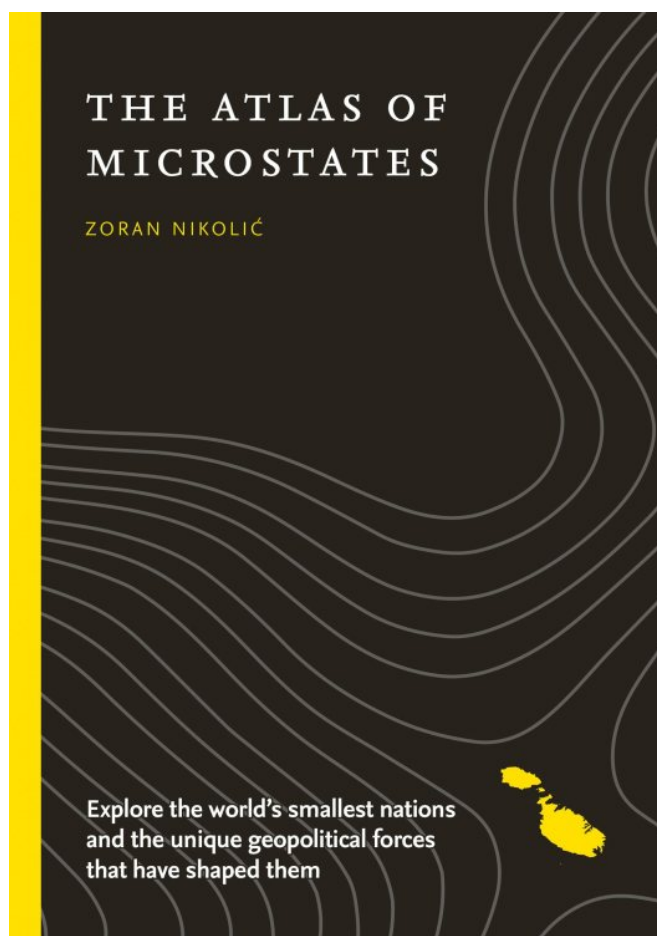




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Book review: Atlas of Microstates

reviewed by Stephen Appel



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Nikolić, Zoran. *Atlas of Microstates*. First Edition. Dublin: HarperCollins Publishers, 2024. 240 p. £16.99 / \$29.99 CAD. ISBN: 978-0-00-870349-3.

Author Zoran Nikolić, an IT engineer by training but a lover of maps and Geography, describes this book as a response to what he sees as an injustice: the frequent marginalization or omission of small-sized sovereign states in maps and atlases. *Atlas of Microstates* follows his earlier popular works, *Atlas of Unusual Borders* (2019) and *The Atlas of Unusual Languages* (2022) and continues his thematic focus



on geographic exceptions and edge cases. The result is an engaging reference that aims to celebrate the world's smallest nations.

The book is attractive and modern in design, with artistic flourishes including an index map printed on the inside covers—though one that reverses a core cartographic convention by depicting land in blue and water in gray. The tone is light and accessible, but the content is organized with obvious care. Historical microstates are presented alongside those that exist today, giving the work a broader scope than might be expected.

The atlas is organized regionally, with sections on Europe, Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania, followed by a final segment titled *Other "Small Countries"*. Within each regional section, entries are arranged alphabetically. Each microstate is presented in a two-page spread: the left page features a map, basic data, and a tagline—ranging from somber, as in São Tomé and Príncipe's "Equatorial centre of the slave trade," to playful, as with the Free State of Schwenten's "Free beer for 220 days." The right page contains an approximately 500-word narrative summarizing the microstate's history, geography, and political context. The key data includes the state's location, period, population, and area. Most entries also feature flags or coats of arms, and each map is accompanied by a small locator inset showing the microstate's position within its regional context.

The cartography is simple but effective. Each microstate is shown in red (an unconventional but readable choice), with surrounding land in green and water in blue. The maps label major cities, capitals, summits, and notable physical features, as well as present-day and historical boundaries. Some include ceasefire lines and other contested borders. While the maps are largely stylistic, they are all north oriented and include a graphic scale (though not a north arrow). Hill shading or bathymetric detail is absent, which may limit their physical depth, but the overall effect is consistent with the clean, contemporary aesthetic of the book. Simplicity also ensures that even the relatively small map panels remain legible. A graphic key to the map symbology is provided in the front matter.

The accompanying texts are readable and informative, with a tone that feels akin to Wikipedia. Each entry provides a combination of geographic context, demographic or ethnolinguistic notes, and a brief political and economic history. Several entries include small clarifications or side notes—such as an acknowledgment that "Berber" is considered a pejorative term in the entry for Beni Abbas (in present-day Algeria). Fun facts are interspersed throughout, such as Italy's unique status as the only



country with two enclaved sovereign states (San Marino and Vatican City). The final section includes entries on the world's least populous and least densely populated territories, as well as an introduction to micronations like the Principality of Sealand. These are explicitly differentiated from microstates in the introduction, which notes: "...micronations are more informal, where without legal basis someone can declare a piece of land, or even someone's apartment, to be an independent state. No micronation has ever been recognized by any official state." (p. 9)

A yellow border surrounds each page and the text is black on a light-grey background. There are a few quirks in the design and formatting. For example, some place names in the descriptive text are bolded, but not consistently (sometimes countries, sometimes regions) without a clear pattern or explanation.

The Atlas of Microstates lacks citations or references. The back matter consists of a single page including image credits, map data attribution, and a short acknowledgment. No sources are listed for the information provided in the entries. While the material seems accurate and was presumably fact-checked, the absence of any bibliographic apparatus limits its usefulness for scholarly research.

The atlas measures approximately 6" by 8.5". It's lightweight and easy to hold, making it a good candidate for casual browsing. Fortunately, the map layouts are clean enough to remain legible at this scale. *The Atlas of Microstates* avoids cramming in too much detail, instead opting for clarity and thematic focus.

The book would sit well on the shelf alongside other popular geographic references. Nikolić distinguishes his work by contextualizing each state historically and culturally, and by including both contemporary and historical microstates within a single framework. That scope, along with the consistent design and inviting tone, makes it particularly appealing for general readers and Geography enthusiasts. The complete set of the author's three atlases would make a wonderful gift that any Geography lover could display. It's unlikely to serve as a primary research source due to the lack of citations, but it offers an enjoyable and informative introduction to a group of places that are often ignored in mainstream geographic works. It's the kind of book that invites readers to flip through, get curious, and follow a rabbit hole; exactly what a good atlas should do!

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