

Reindeer herding and other traditional means of livelihood in modern context – planning a study in a Sami area in Finland

Lydia Heikkilä

University of Lapland, Dept. of Social Studies, P.O.Box 122, FIN-96101, Rovaniemi, Finland
(lydia.heikkila@kolumbus.fi).

Abstract: Reindeer herding and other traditional means of livelihoods are challenged in numerous ways by modernization and globalization processes today. In my sociological study, I am aiming at uncovering and analyzing the manifold socio-economic changes and their contextual social and historical links, that influence the present conditions of practicing reindeer herding as a traditional means of livelihood in Finnish Lapland. In addition to focus on land use, my study will give some new understanding of the local environmental management. This article puts the subject in the current socio-economic developments and social scientific discourses around globalization, environmentalism and traditional knowledge. Moreover I will reflect upon methodology and impact for research results.

Key words: environmentalism, globalization, land use conflicts, modernization, reindeer herding, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

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Contextual factors of current socioeconomic change and related social scientific perspectives

Accompanying the current interest in cultural minorities, traditional marginal means of living and local economies are receiving more public and scientific attention. A specific characteristic of the emerging research work is the *interdisciplinary* approach (e.g. Riseth, 2000). This trend is mainly influenced by: 1) feminist studies and 2) studies by members of ethnic groups themselves. The contribution of feminism is in recognizing also people's everyday spheres of life as research subjects (Lehtonen, 1995). On the other hand, the activity of indigenous peoples since the 1970s, e.g. as manifested by the Sami movement, has increased the self-respect of indigenous peoples with a need to reflect upon ethnic collective identity, selfhood and peoplehood (Eidheim, 1997). Accordingly, there has been a demand for new social scientific scopes and renewal interpretation of social facts leading to certain refocusing of research subjects, to new approaches, and to the emergence of

new theoretical perceptions and methodological practices in social sciences. The growing interest in minority cultures and marginal economies is one outcome of this tendency.

Globalization and the environmental concern

An important factor that relates to the mentioned trend in social sciences is globalization. Today *globalization* is a major source of change for the local conditions of living. With globalization I refer to the changes in the economic, political and cultural spheres towards world-wide markets, cross-national companies and multinational media. Globalization is a process towards a common, world-wide community (Albrow, 1997; Alasuutari & Ruuska, 1999).

In the wake of globalization we also witness the resurgence of local histories, ethnic identities and a growing interest in traditional knowledge. To some extent this interest can be seen as a prescribed consequence of the process of unification itself. National interests have notably lost their significance in formulating peoples' identities with the extending

cross-national and universal tendencies in economy and culture. Therefore locality has in recent years gained more importance in constituting people's identity (Hobsbawn, 1994; Lehtonen, 1995; Hall, 1996; Alasuutari & Ruuska, 1999).

Another contributive factor is the intensified universal concern for the *environment*. The urban populations share a joint interest in the protection of nature, be it animals in captivity used for producing luxury commodities or for scientific testing, concern for rain forests, protection of wilderness areas, or impact of climate changes. Sustainable ecological, economic and social development has become the key concern of our time (Haila & Levins, 1992; Haila & Jokinen, 2001).

Environment management and protection of areas are expressions of this concern. In the planning processes common *human interests* are receiving more consideration. A method called *participatory planning/approach* has emerged in this process. Through participatory methods, individual citizens and different interest groups are given a chance to collaborate with planners and join in problem solving (Loikkanen *et al.*, 1999). An interesting detail is the rising interest in *traditional ecological knowledge* (TEK). Serious efforts are being directed to collecting this information and to gaining acceptance for TEK in western science (e.g. Ferguson & Messier, 1997).

Changing social circumstances

Transformations in the lives of everyone living in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) owe much to the social democratic concept of *welfare-state*. The term usually refers to the national system of social security. The measures deriving from welfare-state politics have been principally those of social, health and labor policy. The "Nordic model" of the welfare-state consists of a large body of socio-political measures contributing to the even distribution of income and services. Such measures connected to employment, housing standards and means of livelihood in both urban and rural regions of the Nordic area have been in the key interests of the welfare-state (Laatu, 1997).

The social circumstances of the northern local societies, both Sami and that of the majority population, was thoroughly transformed when the welfare-state was introduced after the Second World War. The structure of local labor markets and networks of social security were altered as new services were established in administrative, educational, health service, social security and national defense sectors with state support. With welfare-state measures the modern state extended to previously remote north-

ern areas to secure national integrity. The Province of Lapland in Finland, for example was incorporated into the national scheme of post-war rebuilding and the process of industrialization (Massa, 1994).

As the introduction of the welfare-state into the remote areas changed the local living conditions dramatically, nearly as intensive and pervasive has been the change caused by the withdrawal of the welfare-state services in the 1990s. In the past decade, Finland – along with other western societies – went through a major social change due to an economic recession. As a result, rigorous balancing measures were executed with the aim to cut public expenditure. Social security was reduced at every level, subsidies for transportation were suspended, etc. The transition process of the national economy was accompanied with the new regulations associated with Finland's membership in the European Union in 1994 and the process of globalization in general.

How, in particular, have these above mentioned factors influenced the local living conditions of the people living by traditional means of livelihood in Finnish Lapland? How has the context of practicing the traditional means of livelihood changed? How do these factors reflect into land use conflicts in the local society? How is the land use conflict articulated by different interest groups with the particular focus on Sami reindeer herders?

These are the questions I am intending to pursue in my research work "*Life is Different Beyond the Mountains – Sami Reindeer Herding in the Middle of Modern Land Use Discourses*". The study is part of a Canadian project "Sustainable Development of the Arctic – Conditions for Food Security" coordinated by the Université Laval (Québec) and McGill University (Montreal). The research is also involved in and are partly overlapping with the Natural Resource Planning project of the Finnish Forest and Park Service in the northernmost area of the country where most of the Sami in Finland are living (Heikkilä, 2000, Sandström *et al.*, 2000).

Methodological considerations

The immediate context in which I observe matters is a local reindeer herding Sami society in Enontekiö, in the northwestern part of Finland bordering Norway. I use the understanding that I have acquired after been living in the local indigenous society for over 14 years. I will use anthropological methods; the research material consists of written and oral first hand sources as well as literature. I use participatory observation as one of the main methods. I listen to conversations in various contexts and keep records in the form of a research diary.

Additionally I have at my disposal the archives of the Finnish Forest and Park Service concerning wilderness planning, natural resource planning, and public responses to the planning. Past and current literature is also available in this subject area.

In interviewing it is my preference to utilize structurally designed methods as little as possible. Structured and controlled interviews are incongruous with the lifestyles of indigenous people. There are certain good results of collecting the TEK of Inuit people by using a structured, but a very flexible, interviewing protocol (Ferguson & Messier, 1997; Thorpe & Eyegetok, 1999). However, Ferguson & Messier themselves reflect seriously upon the interviewing methods. They conclude that the insight of some Inuit advisors proved critical to the collection and interpretation of Inuit ecological knowledge. The Inuit have a particular manner of relaying information through factual stories that are told, instead of generalizations from several observations. The content and connections of these stories plus the significance of details needed to be interpreted to the researchers by some Inuit advisors. Ferguson & Messier stress that a thorough experience and cooperation is required from the researchers to gain trust and insights between the researchers and the indigenous people. Above all the researchers need a sound understanding of the cultural basis of indigenous knowledge. For Ferguson & Messier it took 12 years to develop the interviewing method suitable for that particular region and community.

By observing my living surroundings and reading Paine (1994), Beach (1981) and Ingold (1980) I have got the understanding that the herding and husbandry knowledge, as well as the traditional environmental knowledge in general, are intrinsically linked with the practice. It is essential to be present and participate in the working processes in the field. Beach (op.cit) recognizes this as the only way to gain knowledge.

Besides the pragmatic and particular nature of TEK one has to understand the significance of the detailed stories, called *muitalusat* and *máinnasat* in the Sami language. These, often fictitious stories, frequently supplement the pragmatic knowledge obtained in the fields. The content and connection of these stories may not, however, be obvious for non-members of the community. Another significant consideration is the role of *tacit knowledge*, which plays a very important part in the cognition processes and expressing patterns of indigenous people. There seems to be a considerable conceptual discrepancy when trying to incorporate indigenous knowledge into western scientific conceptual systems. How do we interpret the silence, the absence of cer-

tain discourses? Ferguson & Messier (1997) also underline the *research ethics* of studying indigenous knowledge. Indigenous reindeer herding knowledge is being studied today successfully, in subtle methods, by members of native societies themselves (Eira, 1994; Oskal, 1995; Sara, 1996; Kalstad, 1999). We should be conscious of the risk of assimilation or reproduction of colonial relations if indigenous knowledge is made to serve western environmental management.

We must consider several factors when using traditional knowledge. First, on whose conditions indigenous knowledge or TEK is collected and how it is utilized. Second, TEK seems to be more a way of thinking or a way of living including cultural values, rather than a certain set of information about nature as an isolated topic. It seems to include particular type of observing and decision making processes different from those regularly included in western thinking (Ferguson & Messier, 1997). TEK should be considered in light of this complex context and not only as separate disconnected pieces of information. Finally, in connection with the studies on indigenous people and ethnic minorities, it seems that the issue of researcher's positioning of oneself and its bearings to the research work must be evaluated anew. We as researchers are part of the de-/recolonizing processes in the world.

The intersecting land use discourses: theory and practice

I intend to apply current social scientific theories and approaches that are used in cultural studies. Accordingly, the social reality and social conducts are regarded as *social constructions*. In brief terms the content is: we can only acquire information, attain comprehension and convey our ideas of the material world through concepts that are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1988). I share the approaches of Fornäs (1995), Grossberg (1995), Lehtonen (1995) and Hall (1997) placing the emphasis on *cultural practices*. Culture is about "shared meanings", where language is the privileged medium in which we "make sense" of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged (Hall, 1997). Social conducts have to be examined in the complex network of their effects, relations and material contexts (Grossberg, 1995).

According to Hall (1999) the events, their relationship and structures are conditioned by the material world, but they are construed meaningfully (signified) within *discourses*. The term discourse is referred to here as a set of statements, which provide a language for speaking of a certain subjects.

Discourse equals a mode of speaking or thinking, a way of representing an object. A discourse produces significant contextual knowledge and this knowledge has implications to social conducts and has substantial consequences. An important aspect of discourses is their function in relation to power. Power is understood here in a cultural and symbolic sense. More important than whether a certain statement is true or false, is its practical influences. Some discourses are stronger than others. One discourse may prevail in a society to the extent that it suppresses other discourses.

The discourse approach is frequently accompanied with *the theory of articulation*, in cultural studies. The concept of articulation – in the sense of clutching something into something – offers a useful point of departure for understanding the compelling relations of social conducts and their effects, including investigations on different, often unpredictable effects of certain conduct. Articulation provides a theory related to the contexts. "Articulation is used to engage this conduct to that effect, this text to that signification, this signification to that reality, this experience to that politics. These connections again are articulated to parts of larger structures etc." (Grossberg, 1995). To analyze a certain event implies the reconstruction of the network of relations part of which is being articulated, as well as options for other types of articulation (Grossberg, 1995).

The discourse approach and the practice of articulation have certain advantages, compared to the somewhat more static approaches of structural theories and system-theories (e.g. Ingold, 1980). This approach allows one to deal better with the various dimensions and multiplex relations of the phenomena and their contexts. Derived from this idea, I shall approach my research problem in terms of various interrelated discourses on local land use patterns. I have sketched five discourses along which land use conflicts are argued. The intersecting discourses articulating land use interests are: 1) environmentalism 2) recreation as a part of modern urban lifestyle 3) the changing role of the Finnish Forest and Park Service as the biggest land manager in the region 4) local (non-Sami) people living on traditional means of livelihood and 5) Sami reindeer herders. I am investigating how these discourses are articulated in different contexts of globalization, transformation of the welfare-state, and the rise of the market economy. As a result, a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic transition process and its influences will be outlined.

Land use and ownership issues are articulated probably most seriously in the confrontations between the traditional means of livelihood and the

modern society today. There are certain historical features to be discovered behind these issues, for instance customary Sami rights in what is now Finnish area (Korpijaakko, 1989; Korpijaakko-Labba, 1999). Land has become a scarce resource after Finnish immigration to Sapmi (the land of the Sami) was encouraged by the government from the late 1600s onwards. Since nature in the northern subarctic areas is relatively barren and the climatic conditions are severe, agriculture is successfully practiced only with great difficulty in this area. With the northward expansion of peasant farmer's culture, more people became dependent on similar means of livelihood. Competition over scarce natural resources ensued. Along with modernization, people have adopted higher living standards, meaning modern accommodations and motor vehicles. This has resulted in a steadily growing demand for economical profit from natural resources. However, the reproductive capacity of nature is restricted. There is a clear limit to growth.

Land use conflict has assumed a multidimensional character nowadays. There are local, national and global factors acting simultaneously. Local conflicts appear in divergent interests of reindeer herding and other traditional means of livelihood. This conflict is made more pronounced since the underlying ethnic dispute between Finns and Sami has been reactivated lately. A key issue articulated in land use conflicts, according to my first hand observations, is the right to move in the landscape, particularly on motorized vehicles. Any extra disturbance in the landscape is regarded as harmful by the reindeer herders, in the sense that herds disperse easily. Off-road traffic seems to be the main source of conflict between reindeer herding and other traditional means of livelihood, as well as between reindeer herding and tourism. A second key issue is the land encroachments upon reindeer herding areas with conflicts e.g. to forestry, mining industry and an expanding network of roads. To sum up the many-sided argument: for reindeer herding it is a question of pastures getting scarce and the reindeer' habitats being disturbed. Reindeer herding cannot be carried out under these circumstances using the Sami traditional methods.

There are also the new perspectives to the land use confrontation raised by the expanding national and global demands for nature protection (environmentalism) and recreational needs. Both have claims on local land use and environmental conditions. In accordance with national and international agreements, and the practice of participatory approach, these arguments have to be considered in local environment planning.

Conclusions

The socio-economic transition process of the local society relying on traditional means of livelihood in a modern society is discernibly reflected in local land use conflicts today. Modern ways of life challenge the local land use patterns and place the earlier conflicts into new contexts. Modern environment management, as well as the local society, are forced to adapt to newly emerging global and national claims on local land use. Also the local inter-ethnic relations are rearranged in this process. There are simultaneously several ongoing discourses, within a framework where these interests are articulated. The arguments used in these discourses intersect in an interesting way. Behind the arguments are often quite substantial moral dilemmas which imply principal cultural values. I intend to bring forth certain new angles of the Sami reindeer herders' position today at the center of these discourses.

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