Histories of reindeer husbandry resilience: Land use and social networks of reindeer husbandry in Swedish Sápmi 1740-1920

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Against a background of ongoing and predicted climatic and environmental change facing humans on a global level, this thesis combines historical perspectives with theories of social resilience in a study of reindeer husbandry in Swedish Sápmi, from the late 18th century to the early 20th century. The thesis includes four individual studies that examine the topic from different angles, connected together by reoccurring elements of social resilience. The first paper analyses the adaptive capacity of reindeer husbandry communities in the northernmost part of Swedish Sápmi during the 19th to early 20th century, using materials from the Sami bailiffs’ archives, governors’ reports and documentation from official committees. The second paper is based on similar materials and explores livelihood diversity of reindeer husbandry in southern and northern regions of Swedish Sápmi from 1860 to 1920. The third paper examines the social networks of reindeer husbandry and includes an analysis on how these are represented in demographic sources at the turn of the 20th century. The fourth and final paper examines taxation lands as objects of place-attachment in a south Sami reindeer husbandry context from 1740 to 1870.

The thesis demonstrates that communities and families practiced highly flexible herding in terms of what pasture area they used, when and how they used it and with whom. In order to maintain this flexibility, communities needed authority to manage their own livelihoods and a diverse and interconnected landscape. The results further show that reindeer husbandry was a dynamic and diverse livelihood, well into the 20th century. Fishing, hunting, trapping or farming was part of many reindeer herding families’ livelihoods. By tethering aspects of diversity to norms and ideals within the communities included in the study, I argue that farming can be understood as both an enforced adaptation and as an adaptive capacity depending on the ideals within the community in question.

The thesis supports the notions that reindeer husbandry since long has faced many challenges, including: border closings; competing land uses; disturbance from settlers; enforced regulations and laws concerning reindeer husbandry; and restrictions of livelihood diversity. Furthermore, these challenges were not only sources of disturbances in their own right, but they also restricted the adaptive capacity of reindeer herding communities.