Project information

Project title

Cooperative solutions to common problems—the siida system in Saami reindeer husbandry

Year

2019

Project leader

Marius Warg Næss

Geographical localization of the research project in decimal degrees (max 5 per project, ex. 70,662°N and 23,707°E)

Finnmark (Kautokeino): 69.0181° N, 23.0470° E and Røros (South-Trøndelag/Hedmark): 62.5748° N, 11.3841° E.

Participants

Project participants/institutions: Bård-Jørgen Bårdsen, bjb@nina.no, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA), Tromsø, Norway.

Flagship

Terrestrial

Funding Source

Fram Centre and Research Council of Norway (FRIHUMSAM).

Summary of Results

Næss, M. W., Hole, G. L. F. and Bårdsen, Bård-Jørgen (manuscript). The Saami co-operative herding group: the Siida system from past to present. (to be submitted in spring of 2020)

Historically, the Saami siida system has been described as: 1) relatively small, consisting of 2-8 households; (2) based on kinship, formed around a core sibling group; (3) characterized by a norm of equality - herding partners were equals regardless of social status; and (4) informally led by a wealthy and skillful person whose authority was primarily related to herding. One of the key aspects of the siida was that it was flexible: composition and size changed according to season and members were free to join and leave the groups as they saw fit. Preliminary results indicate that the main difference between the historically representation of the siida system and today is with respect to flexibility: only two herders reported a change in summer siida and three reported a change in winter siida, and this only occurred in Finnmark. Furthermore, 92% of herders in South-Trøndelag/Hedmark and 95% in Finnmark reported that their father also belonged to the same siida. Considering that the oldest father was born in the early 1900s this indicate that the siida is, and have been for decades, more stable than previously argued in the literature (i.e. 5).

Næss, M. W. (2019). Cultural group selection and the evolution of reindeer herding in Norway. SocArXiv, 11. Nov. 2019. Doi: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/ta4ju. Preprint in review in 'World Development'.

Reindeer herding in Norway can be viewed as an assurance game with two possible equilibria: increasing livestock quantity or quality. Instead of viewing increased abundance as an example of a 'Tragedy of the commons' or as a natural outcome of a non-equlibrium system, we need to view them as an outcome of historical perturbations affecting the evolution of prevalent social norms facilitating coordinated behaviour. Between-group competition has been argued to shape normative content and the selection of herd accumulation in the North (Finnmark) and livestock body mass in the South (South-Trøndelag/Hedmark) could thus be viewed as a response to competition. Pertinently, herders in the North have mainly competed against each other while herders in the South have a history of competition against farmers. It could thus be argued that a history of inter-group competition in the South has coordinated herders around the strategy of increasing livestock quality. Increasing livestock body mass decreases herd expansion and thus limits the potential for encroaching on surrounding faming land, i.e. it also reduces the potential for inter-group conflicts. In contrast, a history intra-group competition in the North has resulted in herd accumulation as the preferred strategy. While this strategy translates into territorial expansion and thus increases intra-group conflicts, herd size is to a large degree the measure of power as herd size determines access to pastures. Both strategies are, however, best viewed as a solution to the ultimate goal of long-term survival, they are just a response to different historical and social environments.

Master and PhD-students involved in the project

None.

For the Management

Main point: Current management policies with respect to reindeer herding in Norway rest on the understanding it can be characterised as a 'Tragedy of the Commons' and a concurrent problem of overstocking. The main management objective is thus to achieve ecological, economic and cultural sustainability. While sustainability is loosely conceptualised, policies are—for all practical purpose—concerned with one thing only: namely that of reducing the number of reindeer. Instead of viewing increased abundance as an example of a 'Tragedy

of the commons', we need to view them as an outcome of historical perturbations affecting the evolution of prevalent social norms facilitating coordinated behaviour with respect to risk management.

Published Results/Planned Publications

- Næss, M. W. (2019). Cultural group selection and the evolution of reindeer herding in Norway. SocArXiv, 11. Nov. 2019. Doi: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/ta4ju. [PREPRINT], In review World Development.
- Næss, M. W., Hole, G. L. F. and Bårdsen, Bård-Jørgen (manuscript). The Saami co-operative herding group: the Siida system from past to present. (to be submitted in spring of 2020).

Interdisciplinary Cooperation

Project team consists of one anthropologist and two ecologists.

Budget in accordance to results

Budget is spent in accordance with proposal in 2019

Could results from the project be subject for any commercial utilization

No

Conclusions

Current management policies with respect to reindeer herding in Norway rest on the understanding it can be characterised as a 'Tragedy of the Commons' and a concurrent problem of overstocking. The main management objective is thus to achieve ecological, economic and cultural sustainability. While sustainability is loosely conceptualised, policies are—for all practical purpose—concerned with one thing only: namely that of reducing the number of reindeer. Instead of viewing increased abundance as an example of a 'Tragedy of the commons', we need to view them as an outcome of historical perturbations affecting the evolution of prevalent social norms facilitating coordinated behaviour with respect to risk management.