

Project information

Project title

Kinship vs. the 'cooperative context': an evolutionary perspective on cooperation among Saami reindeer herders in Norway

Year

2020

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

Bård-Jørgen Bårdsen, bjb@nina.no, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA), Tromsø, Norway. Guro
Loise Fisktjønmo Hole, Guro.Fisktjonmo@niku.no, NIKU.

Flagship

Terrestrial

Funding Source

Fram Centre and Nordforsk.

Summary of Results

Kin relations have a strong theoretical and empirical basis for explaining cooperative behaviour. Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition that context—the cooperative environment of an individual—also shapes the willingness for individuals to cooperate. For nomadic pastoralists in Norway, cooperation among both kin and non-kin is an essential predictor for success. Norway represents a good area for investigating contextual aspects of cooperation. The northern parts are characterized by a history of intra-group competition exacerbating between-herder conflict, lack of trust and subsequent coordination problems. Due to a history of herder-farmer competition, the southern parts are characterized by high between-herder coordination and trust. This comparative study investigates the relative importance of context and kinship in structuring cooperative behaviour in both regions using an experimental gift game. The main findings from this study were that in the South, the level of cooperation around an individual pushes gifts to be distributed evenly among other herders. Nevertheless, kinship matters since close kin give and receive larger gifts than others. In the North, neither giving nor receiving gifts seems to be influenced by kinship or what neighbouring herders are doing. Herders in the South live in an environment where they can trust unrelated members and at the same time, reward close kin. In the North, the cooperative aspect of herding might differ between winter and summer; a difference not captured in this study. A seasonal reshuffling of group membership and its possible effect on cooperation is something that needs to be considered in future studies.

Master and PhD-students involved in the project

None

Published Results/Planned Publications

- Fisktjønmo, G. L. H., Næss, M. W., and Bårdsen, B.-J. (in revision). The relative importance of “cooperative context” and kinship in structuring cooperative behaviour: a comparative study of Saami reindeer herders. *Human Nature*.
- Næss, M. W., Fisktjønmo, G. L. H., and Bårdsen, B.-J. (in review). The Saami cooperative herding group: the siida system from past to present. *Acta Borealia*. Preprint: SocArXiv, 19 June 2020. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/d6hm5>.

Interdisciplinary Cooperation

Project team consists of one anthropologist and two ecologists.

Budget in accordance to results

Budget is spent in accordance with proposal for 2020; Without the Fram Centre funding project would not have been possible.

Could results from the project be subject for any commercial utilization

No

Conclusions

The aims of the project were fulfilled and the funding obtained from the Fram Centre's terrestrial flagship was key for the project.