6.4 Sami education and development, between tradition and modernity

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Introduction

Climate change and questions related to adaptation to climate change is for sure on the world-wide agenda and receives a lot of attention around the globe, but especially in the Arctic. It is well acknowledged as having an influence on the future of the communities in the Arctic. At the same time, simultaneously, communities in the Arctic experience other human initiated changes that are driven from outside. Mega-scale mineral projects, oil and gas development, including all the infrastructures that comes with such projects, most often outside any local or regional control, causes and forces changes regarding the human perspective or the social and cultural life of northern communities and for this case, for Indigenous communities in the Arctic.

This chapter outlines of some of the challenges connected to the use of education as a means of capacity building in a situation where Indigenous peoples of the Circumpolar North experience rapid changes in multiple ways. I will briefly present a theory, from the education sector, to understand the interplay between education and community that also takes the change or development issue into consideration. I will also provide comments based on a presentation I made some years back about the case of modernization and change. I then focus on some of the challenges of human development outlined in the Arctic Social Indicators report. At the end, I will present a few examples to discuss some of the education challenges.

The interplay between education and community

In one major study of education in the Far North, Darnell and Hoëm (1996) present a theory to understand change and development from the perspective of education by the interplay between societal domains and education. They propose to study the dimensions of culture,
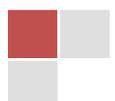
social organization, economy, and technology to understand change, and they propose to understand culture as the stored composite of knowledge that a group or people have at their disposal. Hoëm (2007) further elaborates that these dimensions represent areas of change, and that knowledge production takes place in different contexts within these dimensions. Whatever variables are used to characterize a society, as long as is refers to human activity it is a significant measure of knowledge capacity. The people use this as their base for conceptualizing; it is a base for their understanding and mastery at different levels. We could refer to the levels being the individual, a community, or a nation. This gives the people the potential to perform their work and to further nurture their culture. Changes in a given situation occur when there is tension between the societal dimensions as well as between elements of these dimensions. The cultural and social dimensions change relatively slowly, and slower than economy and technology. The degree of congruence between the dimensions can be used to measure the quality of change. High congruence, and control capacity that leads to such, can lead to changes in a planned fashion. High divergences on the other hand do not foster manageable situations. Much can be said and exemplified based on such an approach. However, in this chapter I will give just an example for the sake of illustration.

To exemplify tension between dimensions, we could refer to changes in technology – for example digital media that does not take into account Indigenous peoples language has a negative impact on the potential to further develop the language and forces a negative change. Digital media that uses the language promotes further enculturation through the language use and is positive. This gives the individual as well as the group a potential to adjust to and master new challenges; it is geared towards empowerment. The group needs a system for transmitting its values; hence education should be an arena for combining traditional values and innovative solutions. In accordance with this, one could postulate that sustainable change for Indigenous peoples both culturally, socially, economically, and technologically has to combine tradition with the newest technological innovations. This would include presenting a combination of the traditional and modernized system, including using community capacity to nurture retention and translate challenges/adaptations into an expanded development capacity. But it seems that the possibility to respond positively to changes with a sustained result is when you can master this on a relatively small scale and also keep a flexibility to use and adjust to human and social capital.
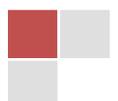
In a paper I presented some 15 (Keskitalo 1995) years ago, I distinguished between macro-driven implantation, micro-level modernization, and locally initiated and controlled innovation. Macro-driven implantations could be explained as large industrialization projects in some Sámi areas a hundred years ago that forced changes within all societal domains: cultural, social, economy, and technology. These huge industrialization projects did not take the culture, the social organization of the local community, in consideration. The macro-driven implantation devalued, made changes, and eventually extinguished the traditional knowledge system and replaced the value system, the priorities and focus of the existing traditional knowledge transmission. Also, other mining projects and later oil and gas exploitation projects, as well as agricultural projects, could be discussed as examples. The industrial colonization of Indigenous people's homelands had huge implications/changes for communities: including the replacement or total extinction of local knowledge.

Micro-level development as modernization of primary economies on the other hand occurred over the years first as smaller changes in a more balanced form. We could use examples from mechanical innovations like the early use of the out-board motor and snow machines, even some small scale fishing technology. These were first used because they added new possibilities that made life easier. People could master these tensions without a total change of knowledge. But it had to be balanced towards the resource base to secure and sustain both people and nature. It also needed to be balanced towards all forms of dependency towards an outside credit system and unforeseen financial capacity demands. As long as the resource base could be controlled locally, and be evenly distributed locally, the viable community survived. On the other hand, large scale modern expansions from outside and an increasing globalized economy have taken control and demanded/created structural dependencies outside the manageable social and economic system of the local communities.

Local innovation has its base in the local livelihoods, cultural values, and local priorities. This is a conscious change based on small scale operations united with the traditional knowledge adapted to the societal dimensions aimed at building and securing development under local control based on, and giving breath to, viable communities. This does not really distinguish between what is modern and what is traditional; it creates a locally negotiated tradition during its own journey, it supports identity formation under local control. But, it depends on access to
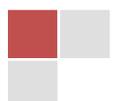
local resources under a local management regime. Examples of such could be found in small scale home industries based on local resources.

When we then discuss education towards these changes for Indigenous peoples we easily see challenges in the case of what future do we educate for. There must be a solid cultural core in the basic education to match challenges further up in the education system. And even the most traditional must be integrated with the modern. This is about creating new innovative solutions.

The Human dimension

The Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) (2004) identified a number of key issues as determinants for people's well-being in the Arctic. The report brought into discussion control of one's control, cultural integrity, and contact with nature as critical issues regarding the human dimension of change. The issue of the quality of life for people of the Arctic is closely connected to the possibility to control factors that gives access and capacity to foster well-being. The AHDR addresses three critical concerns when it comes to education. A first issue is the control dimension, the balance between local control and national directives. A second issue addresses the challenges regarding education for Indigenous peoples. The Arctic Social Indicators Project (ASI) (2010), a follow up study responded to ADHR in aiming at developing indicators to track changes in human development in the Arctic. The ASI has added three more domains, based on the UN Human Development Index (life expectancy, literacy, and standards of living). The ASI translated these into issues of health/population, education, and material well-being. These social indicators can be further developed to collect data that could give a possibility to measure the challenges of change.

Coping with change is a challenge for the human dimension that needs to be taken into consideration. The economic adaptations and the living conditions in the Arctic are not homogenous, but they face many of the common challenges. However, closeness to nature is quite common. To find indicators that could be used as a base for understanding is a demanding task given the internal structures throughout the Arctic. While full coverage of the indicators is in the report mentioned above, the education domain focuses on the need to have a good and adequate basic education system that provides good quality basic skills.

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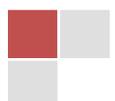
As a comment I should stress that an adequate and quality education system for Indigenous peoples means providing the foundation for both a sound cultural well-being as well as background to a further academic career. For cultural well-being, this means to foster the potential for the individual to identify itself with its cultural group, and for the group to be given the possibility to foster and sustain the group level capacity. Among other factors, the vernacular language plays a core role. But to have access to study and learn the common history of the group, and of course to have the possibility to learn both the material and immaterial culture, is also of importance. To develop such a case for the sense of belonging it requires cultural autonomy to elaborate such a system because the traditional majority-minority relation does not offer such quality situations within the mainstream system.

But in addition, there are other factors to consider within the education sector. A sound and adequate basic education has to be extended into an adequate system for supporting a professional or an academic career. The rate of Indigenous students pursuing higher education in the Arctic is not promising. On the other hand, one must recognize that this also connects to the high drop-out levels from high-school. So both the low rate of Indigenous students fulfilling the upper secondary level, and the rate of them pursuing higher education, indicates system failures. Since much of the workforce in a modern community is based on formal training for the services and professions, we see a potential for a lack of recruitment with people from the communities mastering the language and the culture. Modernity, therefore, often in terms of these services means importing a workforce that may stay only for the short term. It may serve a function to cover an urgent need, but is not sustainable or stable. It also loads pressure on supporting factors as language retention, cultural autonomy, and the sense of belonging.

Sámi economy and Sámi labour

Magga (1992) states that there is a close relationship between the cultural process and traditional economies. Changes in the economy, he states, often force people to change their cultural identity. The result is an accelerated societal change, leading away from their life as Sámi. As explained by a reindeer-herding administrator, 'the change away from herding is a change of identity' (Bergland 1998). In his doctoral thesis, Bergland (1998) states that identity is not based exclusively on contemporary social relations and labour. Identity is also based on
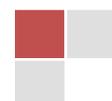
the continuation of these relations and labour roles into the next generation. An individual also feels his own loss of identity into his own future and the future of the coming generations.

Høgmo (1985) explains challenges and problems with identifying Sámi labour. One has to distinguish between different aspects of this. Sámi cultural articulation could be understood as constituting a particular articulation contrasting Norwegian, Finnish, or Swedish. It could also be understood as the articulation at a given time consisting both as Sámi by origin and as complementary to another cultural articulation by which it will be influenced and vice-versa. The traditional economy has changed. To define Sámi labour by the original tradition alone makes it difficult to consider economies other than the reindeer herding Sámi economy. On the other hand, understanding Sámi labour as ethnicity at work does not exclude tradition, but the focus shifts towards what kind of challenge the traditional economy faces intersecting with other economic articulations, and what does the Sámi sense of belonging mean in new economic adaptations. Different economies and economic activities, as well as cultural and academic activities, give different possibilities to manage ethnicity. Thereby, relations become important, not the operational aspects.

Such a position could be understood as containing negotiations that have importance for identity formation. In his examples of the result of change in herding, Bergland (1998) argued that a conversion process into other labour or into unemployment has different results for different age groups, as well as for gender.

As we see, even if change results in change in cultural identity, it is not necessarily a question of inter-ethnic change. It is probably as much an intra-cultural change. Do people and society generally distinguish between these two types of changes? How can and does the school adjust to these types of concerns?

The additional curriculum

I will now turn to an example that illustrates how traditional knowledge is an "added on" curriculum. The Sámi newspaper "Áššu" (number 31/2000 of Tuesday March 18) reported on the Sámi reindeer herding- and high school organizing theme based Sámi curriculum. One of the goals for such way of organizing the curriculum is partly for the teachers to learn traditional
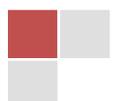
craft, with the school using community people as mentors and teachers. According to the newspaper, the theme curriculum covered a mix of traditional and contemporary subjects, like the traditional craft, traditional as well as new techniques of decorating silk shawls, use of modern communication technology, and experiments with new recipes from reindeer meat.

A couple of questions quite naturally rise from such an example. If this is additional and optional, what then is the standard curriculum of this particular Sámi school? Since this is organized as a special theme, it can be translated that it is organized in another way than what they do in the daily scheme. What is it that the basic questions of the schools function becomes reduced to matters about "optional", "additional", "theme", "special projects", to mention just some of the popular and frequent ways of solving the challenges.

Conclusion: The value of these examples

At this initial stage one conclusion seems important to state: that the change from self-supportive economy and self-invented knowledge transition, to specialized knowledge and dependency of external institutions in the globalized world, has been an ongoing struggle for Indigenous peoples. In these particular Sámi examples, we see changes take place – mega-changes implemented by forces out of local control, micro-changes as modernization, but also smaller changes with free-floating innovations invented and adjusted to locally. There are multiple examples of occasions or incidents similar to those reported here.

The tendency to change from a homogenous primary economy to a highly specialized tertiary economy with high demands for professional schooling is not uncommon in many Sámi areas.
In many Sámi villages it is not unusual to find institutions of primary economy side by side with modern Norwegian or modern Sámi institutions belonging to the tertiary and even the quaternary sector. Production work in the secondary sector, however, often seems to be lacking, which probably causes high unemployment in some areas. In Indigenous societies, there seems to exist an unabridged gap in building adapted traditions of knowledge transition in a systematic way into modern sectors. The gap consists of, on the one hand, the traditional transition of knowledge, family, or village based primary economy. And, on the other hand, this is challenged by the highly professionalized work in modern tertiary and quaternary sectors based on long term schooling concepts of knowledge transition. This gap needs to be filled with
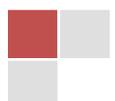
innovative solutions where tradition and modern concepts meet in secondary production work based on local utilization of sustainable resources.

A development including such economy could probably and partly provide local control of the development if it is introduced in a small scale way and involves local resources. Many individuals, families, villages, and regions in Sápmi experience changes in lifestyle from primary economy to specialized tertiary economy within one generation or at least within two generations. The economy itself, and the cultural and social web surrounding the traditional economy, is hereby challenged by unbalanced and quite unpredictable demands in terms of knowledge requirements, knowledge maintenance, and knowledge transition.

The change from Sámi identity based on local cultures with regional interconnections towards new all-Sámi cultural institutions and processes demands new knowledge, some genuinely developed in the new situation, others adapted from tradition for the new situation. A threatening force, however, could be if outside trends are uncritically implanted. The examples from my viewpoint indicate the field is loaded with challenges and contradictions that are of paramount interest when discussing the role of formal schooling for Sámi as individuals and as a wider Sámi community.

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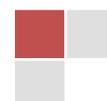
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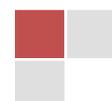
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