



## Career reflections in Sámi Reindeer Herding in the field of Tension Between Tradition and Innovation

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### Abstract

This article shines a spotlight on how reindeer herders reflect on their career within reindeer herding. In the context of the Sámi, reindeer herding is a traditional industry that for many represents a culture, way of life, identity and sense of belonging. Challenging and tension-filled career reflections are made in the interplay with wider society and its requirement for modern and sustainable industries. This article highlights the reflections that are made in the field of tension between tradition and innovation, and discusses the reflections in the perspective of career competence and identity. The findings indicate that context-specific and historical reindeer herding competence is essential if career guidance is to be relevant in the reindeer herding industry.

**Keywords:** career, reindeer herding, tradition and industry

### Introduction

The first Official Norwegian Report on career guidance, entitled *Norge i omstilling – karriereveiledning for individ og samfunn* (Norway in Change – Career Guidance for Individuals and Society) (NOU 2016:7, p. 13) – states that ‘An important element will be to facilitate access to public career guidance services for everyone (regardless of age and life situation)’. The aim is therefore for the entire population of Norway to have access to career guidance. This has motivated us to focus on a group

in the Norwegian population that has received little attention (Kjærgård et al. 2022).

In this article, we will focus on the Sámi population, and specifically those who work in the reindeer herding industry. According to the ILO, the Sámi in Norway have the status of indigenous peoples. In ILO Convention no. 169 (ILO, 1989), the main principle is that indigenous peoples and tribal peoples in independent states have the right to maintain and further develop their culture and that the authorities have a duty to facilitate this.

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Norway ratified the convention in 1990 and it was decided that the convention applies to the Sámi in Norway (Regjeringen, 1990).

‘The ILO Convention sets out the right of indigenous peoples to determine their own cultural development, to learn to use their own language and to establish their own institutions which provide the opportunity for effective representation. Furthermore, the convention recognises the aspirations of indigenous peoples to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development and to maintain and develop their identities, languages and religions, within the framework of the States in which they live. The Convention also includes provisions on land rights, recruitment and conditions of employment, vocational training, social security and health.’ (FN, 2020)

According to the Sámi Parliament, the focus on the Sámi population’s affiliation with reindeer herding – one of the few culture-specific Sámi industries – is a core component of their culture. This delimitation is made in the knowledge that the contemporary Sámi identity and culture are diverse in terms of language, lifestyle and geographic location. We have therefore found it necessary to limit the focus of this article to the culture-specific industry of *reindeer herding* in Finnmark. The Sámi Parliamentary Report on Reindeer Husbandry 2016 (Sametinget, 2016, p. 14) states that:

‘Reindeer herding is an important pillar of Sámi culture and society. It is a way of life and industry that is based on strong cultural elements, where familial and other relationships are important. Reindeer herding helps preserve the Sámi language, values and traditions and ensure that traditional knowledge is maintained, developed and continued. It also entails traditional herding patterns and

organisation, as well as protecting the cultural landscape and heritage. These elements are directly linked to reindeer herding, and are fundamental to reindeer herding being a viable form of adaptation’.

In addition to the Sámi Parliamentary Report (2016) on the importance of reindeer herding as a bearer of culture, both the Sámi Pathfinders (2021) and the Norwegian government (2019) emphasise that reindeer herding is closely linked to Sámi culture, and an important arena for identity and language.

With modern career guidance as a backdrop, where the focus is on adjustment, developing new skills and a focus on rapid changes in industry (NOU 2016:7), we aim to explore the career reflections that take place within this line of work. We will also highlight how career guidance can be relevant for people that are concerned with preserving traditions, identity and language, and for a family-based herding system. We are therefore curious about the following: *How do today’s reindeer herders reflect on their career within reindeer herding?*

### Earlier Research

The article entitled *Sámi reindeer herd managers: why do they stay in low-profit business* by Riseth (2006) is based on two major hypotheses:

- ‘the life form hypothesis: reindeer management has a particular value for the performers, being the condition for an active choice of staying within the industry;
- the capital hypothesis: lacking recognition of the resources of the reindeer-managing Sámi is/has been limiting their establishment in capital requiring undertakings’.

Riseth’s findings suggest that there are indications that the reindeer-managing Sámi practices are in a Weberian sense a substantial rationality. Analyses indicate close connections between landscape,

management type, and type of rationality in reindeer management.

In the article entitled *Sámi identity and preferred futures: experiences among youth in Finnmark and Trøndelag*, Mathisen et al. (2017) conclude that life modes that signify or enable salient Sámi values influence how Sámi youth reflect on their Sámi identity and envision opportunities. Furthermore, their findings show that different life modes influence Sámi youth identity development through providing opportunities for new expressions of a Sámi identity.

In their research on cultural sustainability in a lifestyle perspective with a focus on Sámi reindeer herding, Kjærgård et al. (2022) suggest that career counsellors could help *raise awareness* (Freire, 1970) among the Sámi herders of the causes of the problems they face. These can be perceived as personal problems, but they are essentially structural. In this context, career counsellors are urged not only to raise awareness, but to encourage social mobilisation and exert pressure. In their anthology on the Norwegian myths of Sámi reindeer herding, Benjaminsen et al. (2016) discuss the conceptualisations and realities in Sámi reindeer herding. They claim that in contrast to the image created by the media, politicians and the administration, traditional reindeer herding is an ecologically sustainable activity. They further claim that the industry is threatened by land encroachment from mining etc., and incorrect assessments by the government's herding administration, and call for a shift in this administration whereby the tradition-based knowledge of herd managers is taken seriously.

This article focuses on drawing attention to the herd managers' perspective in the field of tension between traditional reindeer herding and the government's administration of reindeer herding.

## Theoretical Perspective

Reindeer herding is an industry that represents and preserves Sámi culture, language, values, traditions and, not least, identity (Sametinget, 2016). In this article, we will delimit our perspective and discuss the reindeer herders' career considerations in light of the Norwegian National Quality Framework for Career Guidance (Haug et al., 2019), as well as identity theory that focuses on the social and cultural impact of how we see ourselves (Leary & Tangney, 2011).

There are many genetic, social and cultural factors that shape how people see themselves. In this context, we relate this to social identity theory as well as place-identity theory (Hauge, 2007). In terms of the reindeer herding industry, place is crucial as the grazing pastures are regulated in restricted regions and where the reindeer herders follow the reindeer herd during their summer and winter grazing. The understanding of the interaction between people and place has implications for the explanation of the impact of places on identity (Bell, 2001). In this article we will use the term 'place' based on a transactional view of settings, which Speller (2000) defines as 'a geographical space which has acquired meaning through a person's interaction with the space'. In addition, we draw on Tuan (1977), who distinguishes between 'sense of place' and 'rootedness', where 'sense of place' is described as an awareness of the positive feelings one can have for a place, and 'rootedness' as a feeling of being home.

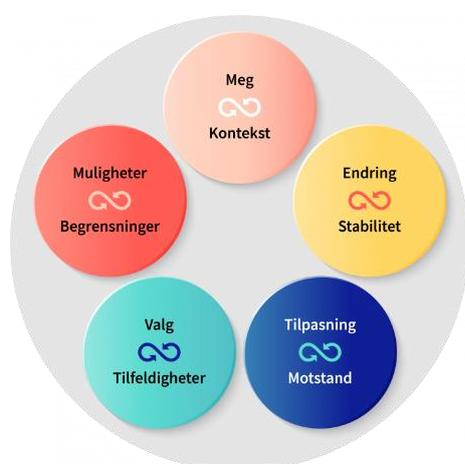
The first Official Norwegian Report on career guidance (NOU 2016:7, p. 13) recommended that a national quality framework for career guidance be developed. This national framework consists of four parts: 1. Competence standards (professional career guidance), 2. Career competence (learning outcome from career guidance), 3. Ethics (principles and a code for good practice), and 4. Quality assurance (quality criteria, indicators, evaluation, statistics and

research). The National Quality Framework for Career Guidance serves as a cross-sectoral framework for use in different contexts vis-à-vis various target groups and in a lifelong perspective (Haug et al., 2019).

In our article, we will concentrate on career competence. However, there is no

consensus in the research on what career competence is needed to deal with career-related challenges (Neary et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the National Quality Framework has developed a model that identifies areas of competence and can be applied to specific contexts. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1. Model for career exploration**



The different areas of competence for exploration are presented as pairs of words with opposite meanings, inspired by the theories of planned happenstance (Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz, 1999; Krumboltz, 2009) and positive uncertainty (Gelatt, 1989). The word pairs in the model can be used for exploration and learning, and for creating reflection on new opportunities and how to deal with dilemmas and tensions. The career buttons are: *Me and Context*, *Opportunity and Limitations*, *Choice and Chance*, *Change and Stability*, *Adaptation and Resistance*.

We have chosen to use the competence areas *Me and Context*, *Adaptation and Resistance*, and *Opportunity and Limitations* in our discussions and analysis of the reindeer herders' career reflections.

### Method and Analysis

Through their affiliation with the Sámi population, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV) offices in Kautokeino and Karasjok provided useful input on current topics for this research article and helped put us in touch with reindeer herders. In the spring of 2021, the University of South-Eastern Norway and the Troms and Finnmark career centre conducted 12 interviews of adolescents and adults involved in Sámi reindeer herding in Finnmark. Some of the respondents were reindeer herders and others had a looser connection to daily

reindeer herding as they worked part-time in herding whilst also working in other industries. All the interviews were conducted remotely (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Separate interview guides were prepared for the adolescents and the adults. These were structured in the same way in that the questions covered the 'past' (How are reindeer herding and the Sámi identity expressed?), 'present' (How does modern business activity affect the reindeer herding industry?), and 'future' (What career considerations take place in reindeer herding?). The results were transcribed and analysed in line with the four-step model by Braun and Clarke (2006) consisting of 1) text, 2) codes, 3) categorisation, and 4) themes. The following analysis table was used:

Figure 2: Extract from the thematic analysis

Text	Codes	Category	Themes
I am very interested in traditions and traditional knowledge and all the values of our culture.	Tradition, culture, values, transfer of knowledge	Cultural belonging and continuance	Tradition, culture and identity
Land encroachment is a battle, you almost need to have legal training to keep up.	Land regulation	Wider society's regulation of an industry	Tension-filled areas of conflict
It is also knowledge that you need to balance between two worlds.	New orientation	Combining occupations	Career considerations between tradition and innovation

## Analysis and Discussion

### *Tradition, culture and identity*

The Sámi Parliament (2016), the Norwegian government (NOU 2016:18) and our respondents all confirm the strong cultural connection between Sámi culture and reindeer herding. The reindeer herding industry has a centuries-long history and consists of a family-based organisation, called *Siida*, which is a self-governing unit where reindeer owners collaborate on the herding and monitoring of the herd. It is made up of individuals, the family-based household, the collective working community which also includes *Siida*'s land, resources and infrastructure (Sara, 2015). All our respondents were reindeer owners, but not necessarily full-time reindeer herders. When someone is born into a reindeer herding family, they are given their own reindeer. It can be considered a kind of endowment for newborn babies. If they don't end up as a full-time reindeer herder, others in the family will take care of the daily reindeer herding. According to our respondents, this tradition helped create both a sense of identity and a sense of belonging to reindeer herding. Other identity markers were also expressed, which strengthened *social identity* (Hauge, 2007), and which according to our respondents were important for the development of self-

perception. The *place identity* 'sense of place' came to light specifically within the daily reindeer herding, both in the way that reindeer herding as an industry takes place within delimited areas and that the herding of the reindeer takes place in known natural areas. 'Rootedness' was predominantly associated with the different identity markers, such as reindeer ownership, language, reindeer marking and *Siida* affiliation. Several respondents reported that being able to practise the Sámi language was like 'coming home'.

If we relate the various identity markers to the competence area *Me and Context* in the National Quality Framework for Career Guidance, it becomes clear that reindeer herding is a context-specific industry whose content and operating structure imply a culture and a knowledge tradition that it has always been important to transfer to new generations. Identity affiliation is developed and maintained through long traditions of mentoring, where knowledge and skills in reindeer herding are transferred from generation to generation through practical reindeer herding, and not at the 'kitchen table' as one of our respondents put it.

The Reindeer Husbandry Act (2007) states that all reindeer within the Sámi reindeer grazing area must be marked with an incision to the ear according to the owner's registered *mark* by 31 October of

the year of the reindeer's birth. Reindeer markings show who owns the reindeer, and they require approval from the marking committee of the county governor in Troms and Finnmark. According to Moutka (2019), the reindeer mark is the first thing a child receives from its parents, and it connects the person to the reindeer. 'The reindeer mark is personal, in the same way as personal names and *joik* songs, and the shape of the cut in the ear indicates the family and affiliation.' However, in a press release, Moutka (Moutka, 2019) talks of his fear that the government's proposal to introduce ear clips will undermine the tradition of reindeer marking.

According to nordligefolk.no, *joik* is the Sámi's traditional form of singing, and is considered one of the oldest vocal traditions in Europe. There are different types of *joik*, and today a distinction is made between *personal, animal and nature joiks*. A personal *joik* is made for a specific person and is thought of as an extra name for the person being *joiked*. Personal *joiks* mainly describe positive features of the person, and it is considered a compliment for someone to hear their own *joik*.

In an animal *joik*, the melody can help describe the characteristics of an animal, and these *joiks* can be used to encourage an animal in some way, such as a shepherd dog or a reindeer pulling a sledge that might move faster when it hears its own *joik*. A nature *joik*, or landscape *joik*, can describe a mountain, a reindeer grazing pasture, or a season.

Our respondents mentioned the personal *joik*. 'Yes, I have both a registered ear marking and a *joik*. It's like a 'calling card', and my wife also makes *joiks*. Our son has been given a *joik*, and so has our daughter, but she's not entirely happy with it, so it will probably be changed. Then there are families who have their family *joiks* or familial *joiks*. In the past, they were extremely good at distinguishing between the different *joiks*. They were able to work out where it came from, even which family it came from.'

According to the Norwegian Digital Learning Arena (Jernsletten, 2020; NDLA), the Sámi's national costume tells us the area they come from or belong to, but it is also a strong symbol of identity. This has not always been the case; it was previously a marker of ethnicity with negative connotations but has become a positive symbol and an important component of the Sámi identity. In an essay, Jernsletten (2020) described the role that the Sámi's national costume has played as an identity marker in Sámi culture, by examining its history over the last 100 years in light of 'Norwegianisation' and revitalisation. She concludes her essay with the following statement: 'You do not become more Sámi by wearing the national costume, but you show more clearly where you are from', which makes it a clear identity marker.

#### *Tension-filled areas of conflict*

According to Kjærgård et al. (2022), the *independent way of life* is the most prominent among full-time reindeer herders. However, it is not uncommon in the Sámi reindeer herding community to herd reindeer in the winter and work as a machine operator, joiner or in some other occupation in the summer. It is also common in many families for one member of the family to work full-time in reindeer herding and others to work full-time in public administration or in the private business sector. This set-up is not necessarily satisfactory for everyone, as described by one of the respondents: 'I think about it every morning... I look out the window every day and want to go to the mountains..., when I'm in the office, since we need an income on top of that from herding...'

According to the Reindeer Husbandry Act (2007), the purpose of the Act is 'to facilitate ecologically, economically and culturally sustainable reindeer herding based on Sámi culture, traditions and customs for the benefit of the reindeer herding population itself and society in general'. The provisions of the Reindeer Husbandry Act cover themes such as reindeer herding areas, resource

base, organisation, reindeer marking, herd size, grazing pastures, fences, vehicles, hunting, trapping and fishing. This is perceived as wider society intervening in the Sámi's everyday life: *'We try to maintain our herd size so that everyone can have a job in reindeer herding... All the land issues are pretty exhausting... It feels a bit threatening.'*

The tension between government regulation and the traditional reindeer herding industry is evident. Many people are involved in lawsuits over land that are dividing families, and they fear that their livelihood will disappear. It is also clear that 'modern' thinking in terms of sustainable, ecological knowledge is at odds with traditional knowledge and practice. Here, modern ecological sustainable thinking – where the emphasis is on waste management – meets traditional ecological, sustainable thinking – where the emphasis is on the interplay between reindeer and nature.

*'When we do the slaughtering in the spring and there's a pregnant reindeer. I've learned that when you slaughter a reindeer and there's a calf inside, you take it to a tree so that it goes back to the earth. I think this comes from the old Sámi belief that all living things should be returned to nature. You should then ask nature to take it back. Thank you for the loan, thank you for giving it to me. There are many things I have learned from my childhood. I try to pass them on.'*

Benjaminsen et al. (2016) express in their book on Norwegian myths in Sámi reindeer herding that the differing knowledge regimes of the herding communities and the Norwegian administration make them worlds apart. They believe that this dichotomy highlights the differences in language, attitudes, objectives, knowledge and, not least, power. They also believe that the government ignores the practical, traditional knowledge of the Sámi herders,

and largely depends on indicators and figures from scientific research.

Thus, the relationship between the majority culture (in the form of the Norwegian state) and the minority culture (represented by the indigenous Sámi people) is clearly filled with tension. This is not something recent, but in light of the ILO Convention (1989) and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2021), we should perhaps ask the question: What can traditional Sámi reindeer herding teach us about economic, ecological and cultural sustainability? It may well be that the minority culture can also teach the majority culture something.

Sámi tradition, culture and language have at various times been under immense pressure, and the Kautokeino Rebellion (Arkivverket, 2018) and the policy of 'Norwegianisation' (Minde, 2005) are examples of how *Adaptation and Resistance* are not unknown phenomena in general Sámi culture and in the reindeer herding industry in particular. Here, it is wider society, represented by the Norwegian state, that imposes regulations on an industry and then intervenes in the traditional herding system, which forces the reindeer herders to work in other sectors. The competence areas *Adaptation and Resistance* are highly relevant in this context. Viewed in conjunction with the historically close relationship between social development and career guidance (Savickas (2008), Plant (2021) and Kjærgård (2021)), we can say that the field of career guidance has largely been inspired by a Western majority culture (Plant, 2014). Now that it is explicitly stated through the ILO Convention (1989) and the SDGs (2021) that indigenous peoples have specific rights that need to be protected, it is appropriate to make the field of career guidance and its practice relevant, but not necessarily through an adaptation discourse (Højdal & Poulsen, 2007) in which the minority culture must adapt to the majority culture. Instead, there should be a greater focus on what the minority culture can teach the majority culture. The minority culture, in the form of Sámi reindeer

herding, is based on historical traditions and knowledge that the majority culture can learn from. It is positive to note how the National Quality Framework for Career Guidance illuminates the link between *Adaptation* and *Resistance*. Hopefully this will motivate both reindeer herders and career counsellors to focus more on *Resistance*.

#### *Career considerations between tradition and innovation*

ILO Convention No. 169 (ILO, 1989) states that indigenous peoples and tribal peoples in independent countries have the right to maintain and further develop their culture and that the authorities have a duty to facilitate this. In addition, the Sámi Parliament (2016) points out the importance of reindeer herding as a bearer of culture. Both the Samiske veivisere (2021) and Regjeringen (2019) emphasise that reindeer herding is closely linked to Sámi culture, and an important arena for identity and language. Thus, there is clear recognition in the official discourse that Sámi culture and reindeer herding have strong historical and cultural ties. Nevertheless, our respondents report tensions and challenges in relation to the efforts to ensure that reindeer herding remains a viable livelihood for current and future generations. One area of tension is the preserving of the herding culture and identity whilst also making way for fresh thinking and innovation. Key identity markers such as 'reindeer as a christening gift', reindeer marking and Siida (as the collective herding operation) are presented as creators of identity and bearers of tradition. Likewise, the allocation of grazing areas by district and the geographical areas where the Sámi languages are majority languages reflect a clear *place identity* (Hauge, 2007).

Among our respondents, individual career considerations were placed in a collective context through the following questions: '*What competence do we need in Siida? How can my competence be applied to reindeer herding?*' Here, Siida's needs were an important component in the

choice of occupation, and the respondents chose both vocational and academic pathways as these were perceived to be important and sought-after competencies within Siida's operations.

As a consequence of reductions in reindeer grazing land, many of the reindeer owners have had to give up their full-time work in the reindeer herding industry. In a *lifestyle perspective*, the *independent way of life* is the most prominent among full-time reindeer herders (Kjærgård et.al 2022). However, as mentioned earlier, it is not uncommon in the Sámi herding community to herd reindeer in the winter and work in some other occupation in the summer. It is also common in many families for one member of the family to work full-time in reindeer herding while others work full-time in public administration or in the private business sector. This set-up is not necessarily satisfactory for everyone, but it is an economic necessity. We found a certain creativity among our respondents in relation to the career competencies *Opportunity* and *Limitations*. The horizon of opportunities is explored in terms of how to ensure that reindeer herding can remain a viable livelihood despite the land and operational restrictions. This is underpinned by a strong identity affiliation with an industry that has deep traditional roots.

Some families adjust their reindeer herding activities to also include meat production, and some add tourist activities. New technology has also been introduced. Several reindeer herders expressed that reindeer herding is physically hard work that requires them to keep the herd in their sights most of the time, particularly to guard them from predators. It was also reported that drones and GPS had been used to help them in their work and to prevent motorised vehicles from entering the grazing pastures.

We have found an innovative approach to reindeer herding as a viable livelihood among today's reindeer herders, both through the introduction of new technology and by combining their herding

with other forms of work. At the same time, there is a clear awareness of the centuries-old tradition of reindeer herding and its value and knowledge in the face of government regulation.

This tension-filled situation is reminiscent of Habermas (1971) concepts of *lifeworld* and *system* in which he argues that the system has a tendency to colonise the lifeworld, which in this context is understood as the Sámi reindeer herding industry. This may in turn require the field of career guidance to take an emancipatory approach to career guidance by also focusing on how the regulatory framework and general external factors can affect opportunities for an industry's development. Sultana (2018) stresses that this approach implies sharp criticism of societal regulations. The goal for career counsellors must therefore be to *raise awareness* (Freire, 1970) among the Sámi herders of the causes of the challenges they face. These can be perceived as personal problems, but they are essentially structural.

### Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study has sought to highlight a selection of reindeer herders' experiences

of a centuries-old industry, which is associated with tradition, culture and identity. The 'backdrop' to this industry is a majority culture that has sought to 'Norwegianize' Sámi culture (Minde, 2005). In terms of Sámi reindeer herding's encounter with wider society, the examples in this article can be considered in a tension-filled relationship between tradition and innovation. This study has only provided limited insight into some of the tensions faced by reindeer herders within a defined geographical area. Other perspectives on the reindeer herding industry and approaches to careers could provide different answers. Likewise, a different sample of reindeer herders could provide different perspectives.

Tradition and innovation do not necessarily have to be at odds with each other, but if we are to understand whether career guidance may be relevant in the reindeer herding industry, more historical knowledge is needed about Sámi reindeer herding. The context-specific approach to career guidance, which the National Quality Framework encourages, can help make career guidance accessible and relevant to new groups in the Norwegian population. This is certainly a topic worthy of further exploration.

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