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Chapter 6. An Urban Future for Sápmi?

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The chapter at hand constitutes some conclusive words to the book as a whole, some summary observations about Sámi urbanization and urban Sámi life. We take the book's title as the point of departure for our discussion, or more precisely a few possible interpretations of the title which we have been made aware of by informants representatives of user groups at meetings organized by the research project.

What's in a Name?

An Urban Future for Sápmi? Indigenous Urbanization in the Nordic Countries and Russia. The first part of the title, the question *An urban future for Sápmi?*, might seem to imply that our book focuses on something hypothetical—in other words, that Sámi urbanity, or urbanity in Sápmi, is something that exists in the future, and only potentially. However, as we have shown, the presence of Sámi in urban areas, and the existence of urban areas in Sápmi, is well-established and far from new.

Various other ways of reading the title have also been called to our attention— readings that reflect differing worldviews, fears, and hopes among the readers. For example, there is what one may call a *rural-positioned pessimistic reading,* in which the title is understood as suggesting that the future of the Sámi is to be found in the urban areas, but not in the rural areas. Such a message was not our intention, but that interpretation describes a scenario that unfortunately may be not so far-fetched. We can also note the existence of an

urban-positioned pessimistic reading, where the question mark is taken to suggest that the Sámi—despite their very real urban past and present—do not necessarily have an urban future.

Sámi Urban-Rural Divides

This book has largely dealt with urban Sámi affairs, and not the predicament of rural Sámi today. The current demographic trend is towards urbanization—a deeply challenging turn of events for a nation that has its cultural strongholds in rural areas. The reading of the question in the title as implying that we might believe that there is no *rural* future for Sápmi, may reflect deep-seated fears within parts of the Sámi community.

The prospect of rural Indigenous collapse becomes even more frightening for those who suspect that there is no *urban* future for Sápmi either. As shown in Chapter 4, there is a strong association between Sámi culture and rurality that limits the ability to imagine an urban future for Sápmi, and that influences how Indigenous people living in cities define themselves in terms of where they "really" belong. These stereotypes are similar to what other Indigenous people experience (Andersen and Peters 2013:379–380, Denis 1997): studies have shown that individuals may experience major difficulties in reconciling their urban and Indigenous identities. This may be especially difficult for those who have lived in the city for generations and have a weakened connection to traditional lifestyles. However, as Dankertsen shows in Chapter 2, urban Sámi youth of today are actively challenging these stereotypes, seeking to create new ways of being Sámi that are integrated in their urban lifestyle, without losing their links to the past.

The association of Indigeneity with rurality can also prove challenging when it comes to urban Indigenous governance (Andersen and Peters 2013: 380). Legitimization of Indigenous rights often presupposes the existence of stereotypical traits in line with the

dominant group's expectations of what a given Indigenous people is like. An urban Indigenous population may not stand out as sufficiently recognizable for the dominant group to be aware that it has specific needs and rights.

Even if we assume that Sámi ethnicity will survive in urban environments, urban Sámi culture will not be the same as rural Sámi culture. Important elements of rural Sámi culture cannot be replicated in an urban environment. It should be possible to maintain many aspects of Indigenous culture, such as language usage, clothing traditions, and art. Even some aspects of traditional nature usage can be continued, if Indigenous urbanites have access to the types of landscape that their people utilize under rural conditions and are thus able to continue harvesting from nature in traditional ways, although now as a form of recreation rather than a fundamentally important economic activity. However, that is a very different kind of Indigenous nature usage than that which is practiced by Indigenous people who follow traditional lifestyles in the primary sector of the economy—such as reindeer herding, fishing, gathering, and hunting. This type of Indigenous lifestyle cannot be replicated within city limits.

It also seems unrealistic that the type of language usage found in certain rural parts of Sápmi could be established in majority-dominated cities. The survival of Sámi language in the city can only be as a minority language used by a smaller section of the urban population. Those who move to an urban area from rural parts of the country where Sámi simply *is* the local language, will often experience that they have lost something of fundamental value. Unless urban Sámi-speakers should desire, and manage, to cluster themselves demographically in certain geographical parts of their cities, the intensity of Sámi language usage that is still found in certain rural areas, cannot be replicated within the cities of the majority population.

"Urban Sámi life" is necessarily a type of Indigenous life where the language is a minority language and incomes are not derived from directly utilizing natural resources. That said, this is already the situation in much of today's rural Sápmi: most rural Sámi do not make their living mainly from traditional economic activities, and Sámi is a minority language in most of rural Sápmi also. Rural Sámi who live in areas where the language has become a minority language, and who are not personally connected to the primary sector of the economy, will find that continuing with their way of living the Sámi life will not necessarily be more difficult under urban conditions—it will be experienced as easier by many. But nevertheless: the "Sámi Primary-Sector Life" is available only for people based in rural areas, and it is likewise only in certain rural areas that the "Sámi Majority-Language Life" is available. The survival of these important types of Sámi lifestyle require a *rural* future for Sápmi.

Sámi urbanization does not, in itself, work to the detriment of these two rural Sámi lifestyles. The urban and rural Indigenous communities may even strengthen one another— the existence of both rural and urban communities within an Indigenous nation enables the existence of a larger range of products, competences, and connections that can be advantageous for all. But if it is possible to imagine a rural–urban Indigenous equilibrium, we can also imagine a "tipping point" where that equilibrium is lost.

At one point, population decline in a rural area can become so pronounced that what we may call "the pulse" of the place begins to ebb out. The place becomes less interesting to live in for many of today's people, who have lifestyle ideals that are characterized by a certain degree of cultural urbanity even if they are born in and live in rural areas. More fundamentally, with a shrinking population, the economy slows down, and the number of persons available to provide services dwindles, making it difficult to remain for those who want to. Some of the factors causing out-migration are made more pronounced by the very

same out-migration, causing a downward spiral. At some point, urbanization may become a direct demographic threat to the survival of rural Sámi cultures.

As pointed out in this book, Sámi urbanization is not just about migration, but also about local urban Sámi revitalization. However, there is also an unmistakable element of rural–urban redistribution in the ongoing urbanization process, and the consequences are already becoming evident. The extent to which Sámi youth organizations are active in urban areas could be one indicator, although this may also reflect the fact that youth in rural areas where Sámi culture is still strong likely feel less of a need to create organized Indigenous spaces. The redistribution of the Sámi civil-society sector in Norwegian South Sápmi, described in Chapter 4, is also worth noting: since the turn of this millennium, Trondheim city has fostered an increasing number of local Sámi organizations, and indeed one of the major regional organizations in Southern Sápmi eventually reorganized itself into one more rural and one urban-centred NGO. Similarly, further north, in Tromsø, the rural activist *milieu* appears to have weakened whereas Sámi organizational activity in the municipality's urban center has continued to grow. On the Russian side of Sápmi, the organizational center of the youth organization has gravitated towards Murmansk City, the largest city north of the Arctic Circle. Another indicator of the urban reorientation is pointed out by Pettersen and Saglie (2019): since 2013, Sámediggi parties in Norway have increasingly included urban Sámi issues in their election programs, and "urban Sámi issues" have by now become an established topic in the Sámi political debate, one that all parties must relate to.

In terms of short-sighted self-interest, it could be argued that the urban Sámi may have less interest in politics aimed at facilitating the survival of rural, traditional economic activities—and instead give priority to urban language- and culture-oriented politics. Whether urban–rural Sámi solidarity is strong or weak depends, among other things, on the answer to a question posed in the introduction of our book: Do urbanized Indigenous individuals retain

their connections to rural areas? Or are their connections to rural cultural strongholds severed? As detailed in Chapter 3, the continued and strong link to the "traditional" Sámi cultural areas, and the way that many urban Sámi define themselves in terms of their connection to these areas, even after generations of living in the city, make urban Sámi identities somewhat multi-local. Although many of the Sámi youth interviewed for this project feel that urban life is important to them, they all describe their Sámi identity in relation to one or more rural places of origin. Those who have recently moved to the city often maintain their direct ties to their place of origin through visits back home, perhaps moving back and forth throughout their lives. Even after generations of urban life, members of the youngest generation may retain a connection to the rural place(s) where their Sámi family has its origin. We can see in our empirical material how some informants express their multilocal identities through hypermobility, moving between the urban and the rural. The social media also provide ample opportunities for young people to retain active connections to their rural place of belonging while living a fully urbanized life. Multilocal identities become a way out of the "out-of-placeness" some experience as urban Sámi, as they may stay connected to rural areas while spending their everyday life in the city. As Nyseth and Pedersen (2014:147) write, "urban Sámi identities are being "stretched out" across particular places and territories. In that sense we could say that they are carriers of dual identities."

Moving from identities to politics, urban Sámi voters do not seem to favor policies detrimental to rural Sámi lifestyles (Mörkenstam et al. 2017, 214–16). However, even if Indigenous urbanites retain a partly rural identity, and support rural issues, there is still the risk that they may give priority to urban issues if they have to choose where to focus their political attention, or what to prioritize when budgets are to be set. Further, even if the urban Sámi population retain their solidarity with the rural Sámi population, and are willing to sacrifice their own interests to the benefit of the rural population, the redistribution of the

population still leads to a certain geographical redistribution of power. In 2019, the Sámediggi Electoral Registry (SER) of Norway was shown not just to be stagnant but *dropping* in the rural Ávjovárri constituency in Finnmark, where the two kinds of rural Sámi lifestyles described above have a stronghold. As a consequence of this redistribution within SER, Ávjovárri lost one Sámediggi representative—and Gáisi, the mixed urban-rural constituency where Tromsø is located, gained one representative. This provoked debate, and indeed alarm, among some Ávjovárri residents—as well as some urbanized but loyal former residents. The mayor of Kautokeino (Guovdageaidnu), one of the three Ávjovárri municipalities, expressed fears that the Sámediggi would in the future become a "city parliament" and that the interests of the rural areas would be forgotten (nrk.no 2019). The tendency towards rural depopulation directly impacts the urban–rural balance among Sámediggi voters, and this fact alone will have political effects, spurring continued debate about the final implications of the current rate of Sámi urbanization in Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

Urban Sámi Ethnic Survival

As for the second of the pessimistic readings of our title, it is possible to envision that attempts at maintaining Indigenous culture in urban areas will ultimately fail. We are currently in an epoch of Sámi history where, after a long period of Indigenous invisibility and assimilation, urban areas are experiencing a pronounced growth in people with Sámi identity-connections, some born and raised locally; others who have migrated in from rural areas. We can also note the growth of Sámi institutions and organizations in urban areas. But might this still go wrong?

One aspect of the survival of the Sámi culture in the cities is the fear that there may not be enough space there for Sámi culture to blossom and develop on its own terms. Many traditional Sámi communities have a repertoire of social relations and interactions defined as

Sámi, and the use of Sámi language and practices may be an integral element of interaction in many situations. Can an urban, majority-dominated context cannot offer the adequate possibilities for the survival of Sámi identity, community, culture and language? As Olsen (2007) points out, there are only a limited number of public spheres that are reserved for the expression of Sáminess: expressions of Sámi identity are often seen as being a private matter. These (informal) restrictions may prove challenging for the preservation of the Sámi languages in urban areas, as the opportunities to use it in everyday life are more limited.

Racist sentiments of the past have become less widespread, and the cities have become more tolerant regarding Sámi expressions in the public sphere; and there furthermore appears to be a growing interest for Sámi culture among the majority population and politicians in the cities—but anti-Sámi racism still remains a problem also in urban areas, and to varying extents the accepted norms for how Sámi should behave in public still remains. These norms entail a restriction in expressions of identities that "stand out" as Sámi, for example wearing traditional Sámi clothing. The "neutrality" that the public sphere is supposed to be characterized by is in reality not neutral at all: the majority ethnos' language and culture is never challenged—while expressing open Sáminess is constructed as non-neutral, "ethnic", noisy, as performing a statement.

While it is positive that urban authorities are increasingly showing an interest in Sámi culture, we also need to be critical to the ways in which Sámi culture is expressed in public, and the extent to which Indigenous people are involved when the dominant group and its institutions produce "Indigenous" cultural content. We may take the northern town of Bodø's role as European Capital of Culture 2024 as an example. Sámi culture is an important part of the Capital of Culture-project, and in connection with this there are debates about the tourism industry and its use of Sámi culture, with references to much-criticized usage of Sámi culture by the tourist industry of Rovaniemi in northern Finland. There have also been debates about

Indigenous involvement in relation to the project for a Sámi House in Tromsø, which was at one point criticized for having fallen out of touch with the local Sámi and their interests (Chapter 4). We need to consider the ways in which Sámi culture is performed, and how Sámi communities and society in general are involved when dominant-group people and their institutions perform Sámi culture, so that the cultural expressions in urban areas do not fall into the trap of presenting Sámi people in stereotypical and potentially racist ways.

Stereotypes about what it is to be a "real" Sámi also have an effect on how young urban Sámi feel that they can express their Sámi identities, as seen in Chapter 3. These stereotypes may in turn lead to a sense of alienation within the local urban Sámi population, who may not feel at home in the dominant notions of Sáminess as these resonate poorly with their own Sámi lifestyles. As Kuokkanen (2000, 218) points out, change is something that happens in all living cultures: indeed, it is a prerequisite for the survival of any and every culture. The linkage between the concepts "Indigenous" and "traditional" may in some cases involve racist ideas of Indigenous cultures as frozen in time and space, as something that once existed in the past, but has been irreparably damaged by colonization. Despite the growing awareness of the present-day conditions of Sámi culture, we can still find portrayals, especially online and in newspapers, with stereotypical images of what "real" and "authentic" Sámi culture is and should be. These stereotypes—drawing on rurality and (often ill-informed notions about) the Sámi culture of the past—are further used to delegitimize urban Sámi rights and the need for Sámi policymaking in the cities. The chances for urban Sámi identity and culture to thrive will improve if more widespread acceptance can take root in society— both Indigenous and dominant-group society—that urban Sámi lifestyles are no less Sámi than the rural Sámi lifestyles.

The current millennium has also seen some prominent conflicts centered on the identity of the urban areas themselves, most notably the 2011 conflicts in Tromsø (Chapter 4)

but also debates in Umeå surrounding the Sámi profile of the city when it was the European Capital of Culture (see Hudson et al. 2019). Such conflicts are a product of the long-lasting suppression of local Sámi history, identity and culture. The Sámi aspects of places were suppressed during the era of assimilation, but the post-war Sámi movement began a process that set about righting some of the wrongs. In many rural areas this process has been going on for a long time, and in some places the Sámi re-emergence process has moved to a phase of general normalization of Sáminess as an integral element in local culture and history. Some urban areas are going through their own variant of this process now, with different dynamics appearing in different cities. In-migration of Sámi from rural areas and increasing normalization of Sámi heritage as part of one's identity are driving factors behind the increased visibility of Sáminess in urban areas. Potentially, the re-emergence of Sáminess in urban areas could re-construct the identity of the city itself: no longer just a place to be Norwegian, and possibly even something more than a Norwegian place where Sámi can live, but a place which is in itself both Sámi and Norwegian.

This re-emergence process is not without counter-reactions. As Hudson et al. (2019) have discussed, and as has been observed also in this book (Chapter 4), portions of the dominant group may at some point feel that the new visibility of the Sámi aspect threatens to weaken the status of the city as the place of their own dominant group. Such sentiments derive from the view that the Indigenous and dominant-group identities are fundamentally at odds, that a locality cannot be a Norwegian place and a Sámi place at the same time. This attitude represents a direct threat to Sámi ethnic survival in the cities, as it paints the re-emergence of Indigenous culture, identity and history as a threat to the majority population. For Sámi ethnic survival to succeed, such enemy-imaging must be successfully defused, and space be made for cities to be places that both the Sámi and the dominant group may identify as their own.

In the introductory chapter, we posed the question of what happens to Indigenous individuals who take part in the demographic shift. Do they suffer identity loss, loss of language and culture, and lose social ties with their ethnic community? If not, how do they to maintain identity, language and culture under urban circumstances? The answer varies depending on what type of Sámi urbanite we are talking about.

As noted above, migrants from heavily assimilated parts of Sápmi may experience *more* opportunities to express their Sáminess in the cities than in rural areas, and less discrimination from parts of the majority population—while migrants who come from "Rural Primary Sector Life" or "Majority-Language Life" are likely to experience urbanization as far more challenging. A third category are the Sámi who have grown up in urban conditions. To some extent, their skills and familiarity with Sámi culture and language will reflect the competences of their parents, but also the Sámi infrastructure of the city where they grow up: the kindergarten services, schools, Sámi culture houses, organizational life etc. Here we find large differences between different urban areas, as well as between states.

Parts of this book have discussed the growing phenomenon of organized urban Indigenous spaces: arenas where Indigenous urbanites can live out their culture, learn more about their culture, and maintain an Indigenous community. We consider such spaces as essential to Sámi ethnic survival in urban areas. The presence of different types of Sámi in the same urban Indigenous spaces can make the "space" more robust in terms of numbers and finances, and the possibilities of mutual learning of each other's competences—a process in which people that come from strongly Sámi-cultural rural areas have much to offer. However, joint spaces for these two poles on the cultural-linguistic spectrum may also create challenging situations regarding language usage: conflicts may arise from discontent among some that the majority language is heavily represented or even dominates within the Indigenous space, or discontent among non-Sámi speakers who experience pressure to avoid

the Indigenous space because they lack language competence. This problem represents a challenge to constructing robust organized spaces for Indigenous ethnic survival in urban areas. This is detrimental to the maintenance of a Sámi social community in the city, and it can also negatively affect Sámi cultural survival.

The urban Sámi language issue is also complicated by the fact that different Sámi languages and dialects co-exist in the cities. While some of the urban areas studied in this book are in areas traditionally inhabited by Sámi people, the original Sámi dialects in these areas have largely disappeared. Those Sámi who have the deepest local family ties to the city and its immediate hinterland are unlikely to speak a Sámi language—with the important exception of reindeer-herding Sámi who have traditionally spent parts of the year in the local area. The latter are likely to speak dialects that are different from those of the old non-nomadic Sámi populations. Those who have migrated to the cities from rural places where the Sámi language is still in a strong position bring in new dialects, even new Sámi languages. This local Sámi multilingual situation poses a challenge to the survival of Sámi language in the urban Sámi spaces: not just the coexistence of non-Sámi speakers and Sámi speakers, but also the co-existence of multiple Sámi languages, which may ultimately result in the language of the ethnic majority becoming an urban Sámi *lingua franca*.

Opinion varies as to how essential it is for language survival in cities to have urban spaces where one language is spoken by all, and regarding which spaces should be more open and more closed. This is a difficult issue: in some settings, it may be essential for everyone present to understand Sámi at some level—but it is also impossible to delimit a social space for Sámi-speakers without exacerbating the feelings of exclusion and discrimination that are already deep-seated in many Sámi who do not understand the language. To maintain social cohesion among urban Sámi, some degree of mutual understanding must be established about which social spaces must be entirely open and which need not be; perhaps even more

importantly, there must be a culture of acceptance that in the open spaces not everyone will not always understand each other, and that speaking a language that not everyone present understands is both socially permissible and indeed necessary for language survival.

Another issue discussed in this book is the specialization and politicization, and even partisanization, of Sámi civil society life—and how this might be a challenge to the creation of urban Indigenous spaces. However, this phenomenon is not necessarily fundamentally negative; the emergence of new organizations that cater to different Sámi subgroups may also lead to a more varied and rich Sámi cultural life where the specific interests of different Sámi subgroups are more adequately taken care of. The emergence of organizations that express internal political differences can be healthy from a democratic perspective. Also, differently politicized Indigenous organizations may cultivate networks with different organizations of the dominant ethnos, and the existence of majority-Indigenous networks on all sides of the political spectrum is likely to benefit Sámi ethnic survival. It is, however, essential that various Indigenous NGOs manage to cooperate, or at least coordinate, with one another; that neutral spaces exist for Indigenous people of different organizations, and that there is some form of umbrella organization to act as a common Indigenous voice. Otherwise, social cohesion society will be weakened, and may ultimately affect the possibilities for the survival of language and culture.

In the Nordic states, the Sámediggi representative organs constitute such an organization-transcending common voice, but this organ exists at the state level rather than the local, urban level. The Sámediggi in Norway is increasingly active in relation to Sámi urban life. Nevertheless, there is obviously a limit to the capacity that a state-level institution has for involving itself in purely local affairs, so there is a need for organization-transcending representation of local or regional Sámi communities. Chapter 4 shows us various attempts, with varying degrees of success, to create Sámi organizational structures that are "big-tent",

i.e. that unite local or regional NGOs and create opportunities for the Sámi to have a common voice at the local/regional level.

We have observed significant local variations regarding the structure of local urban Sámi life. These differences arise from elements such as differing local Sámi civil society dynamics, different degrees of local conflict intensity connected to Sáminess, different degrees of Sámi visibility in local political affairs, and the different budgetary constraints of urban administrations. The variance is such that we might expand the central question of this book: An urban future for Sápmi— *in which urban areas?* It is perhaps particularly important that the cities and towns here identified as "top-tier" and "second-tier" urban areas (Chapter 2) take special responsibilities for creating robust Sámi spaces, and that many different types of actors manage to work jointly on this. Civil society, municipality, county, Sámediggi, central state apparatus, and the private sector all have a role to play in this regard.

Networking and the Future of Sápmi

A recurring theme in this book is *conflict.* Not just conflicts between the state or the majority-dominated social structures and the Sámi, but also internally, between different parts of the Sámi community. The most contentious of these conflicts are those that touch upon what it means to be Sámi, or who should be excluded from or included in various organized Sámi social spaces. Internal conflicts are present to different degrees within the Indigenous communities of different states and cities, and it is not given us to know what the outcome of these conflict dynamics will eventually be in different places. While conflict is a natural element in any society, the Sámi people are perhaps particularly vulnerable to the negative aspects of internal conflict, due to their position as an Indigenous minority nation divided by several nation-states.

If there is anything history has to teach us, it is that nothing lasts forever. The fluctuations in the Sámi policies of different states illustrate this quite well. The Sámi people today face several serious challenges to ethnic survival—not just from the culture-destroying social processes that keep on moving even after active assimilation policies have been formally abolished, but also from specific policies that these states implement despite being formally committed to Sámi ethnic survival: while one hand of the state works to assist Indigenous cultural revitalization, the other works *de facto* against it. This problematic situation exists even now—in a time when all the four states exhibit more positive attitudes towards the Sámi than earlier in history; and in a time when some of the states that have divided up Sápmi are in possession of capital and resources that make it economically entirely within reach for them to contribute in the rebuilding of what they have destroyed. We must ask: what will happen to the Sámi policies of these states in times of severe economic downturn, increased ethno-nationalist turns in the public mood, and democratic decline? These three negative tendencies are global trends, and they have to varying extents already reached Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The imminent future may well bring an even harder struggle for the Sámi to survive as an ethnic group.

Negative developments in the economy, tolerance level, and democracy of the dominant groups' states are potential scenarios for the future that all Indigenous peoples must prepare for. An important part of this preparation work is to build both strong internal social cohesion, and strong networks with different parts of the majority society. The current work done to establish various types of Indigenous spaces in urban areas, the range of organizations and networks forming and growing in the cities, and the emergence in urban Indigenous communities of ways of dealing with internal cultural and organizational plurality so as to foster social cohesion and maintain Indigenous culture—may prove vital for the resilience of the Sámi in the future.

While the reflections of this final chapter have focused on challenges, we also wish to point out that the changes in urban Sámi policy and organizing observed since the turn of the millennium must be recognized as *growth*. Despite the conflicts and setbacks, the current period may be categorized as one of continuing renaissance for Sámi culture, identity and language in the cities and towns of Northern Europe. The necessity of urban Sámi policy has largely been accepted, and urban Sámi needs have become an important part of Sámi political debate. Networks, organizations, and institutions have been created that may prove strong enough to survive the upcoming challenges. In the cities of Northern Europe, foundations are being constructed that can enable the Sámi to have a future also in the urban areas.

The Authors

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