



**Reality of Sámi reindeer husbandry
– project assessing the
well-being and resources of Sámi reindeer
herders**

Ulla Timlin and Arja Rautio

7.5.2026

Photo: Anne Näkkäljärvi



Research group:

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Professor Roberta Woodgate
(University of Manitoba, Canada)



Project facts

The purpose of the project was to understand and thereby strengthen the well-being of Sámi reindeer herders based on their experiences and those of their family members.

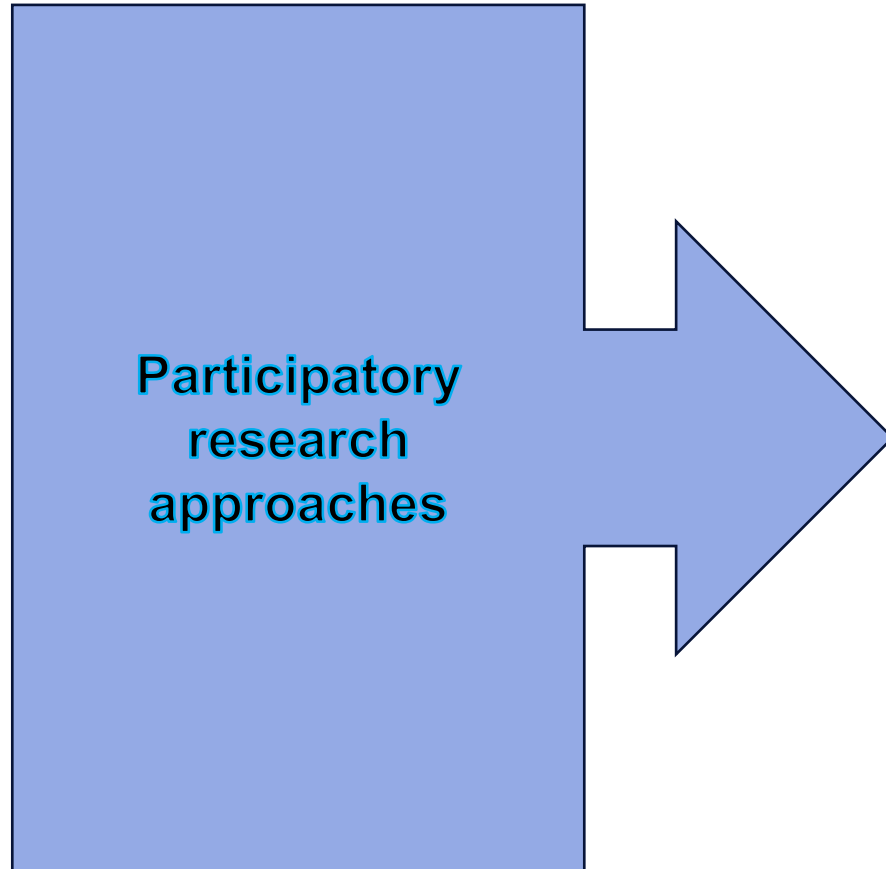
The goal was also to identify development needs and solutions that would enable the further development of both existing and new forms of support and services.

Duration: 2021-2026

Funding: Finnish Cultural Foundation



Methods



Participants:

- Sámi reindeer herders and family members
- Northern Lapland and Northwest Lapland: three municipalities
- Aged from 30 years to retirement age
- Both female and male

Data collection:

- Five workshops:
 - around 60 participants
- Theme interviews:
 - 12 participants
- Art-based methods:
 - Photos and videos describing herding

Results



THEMES

MAIN THEME

UNIFYING THEME

Environmental challenges
Continuous adaptation
Changes needed

**Multi-layered nature
of herding**

Mental load
Own language and culture
Life on reindeer husbandry terms

**Herding as a part
of life**

Family and community support
Power of reindeer herders

**Sámi
reindeer
husbandry
under pressure**

**Essence of
Sámi
Reindeer
husbandry**

**Power of
reindeer
herding**

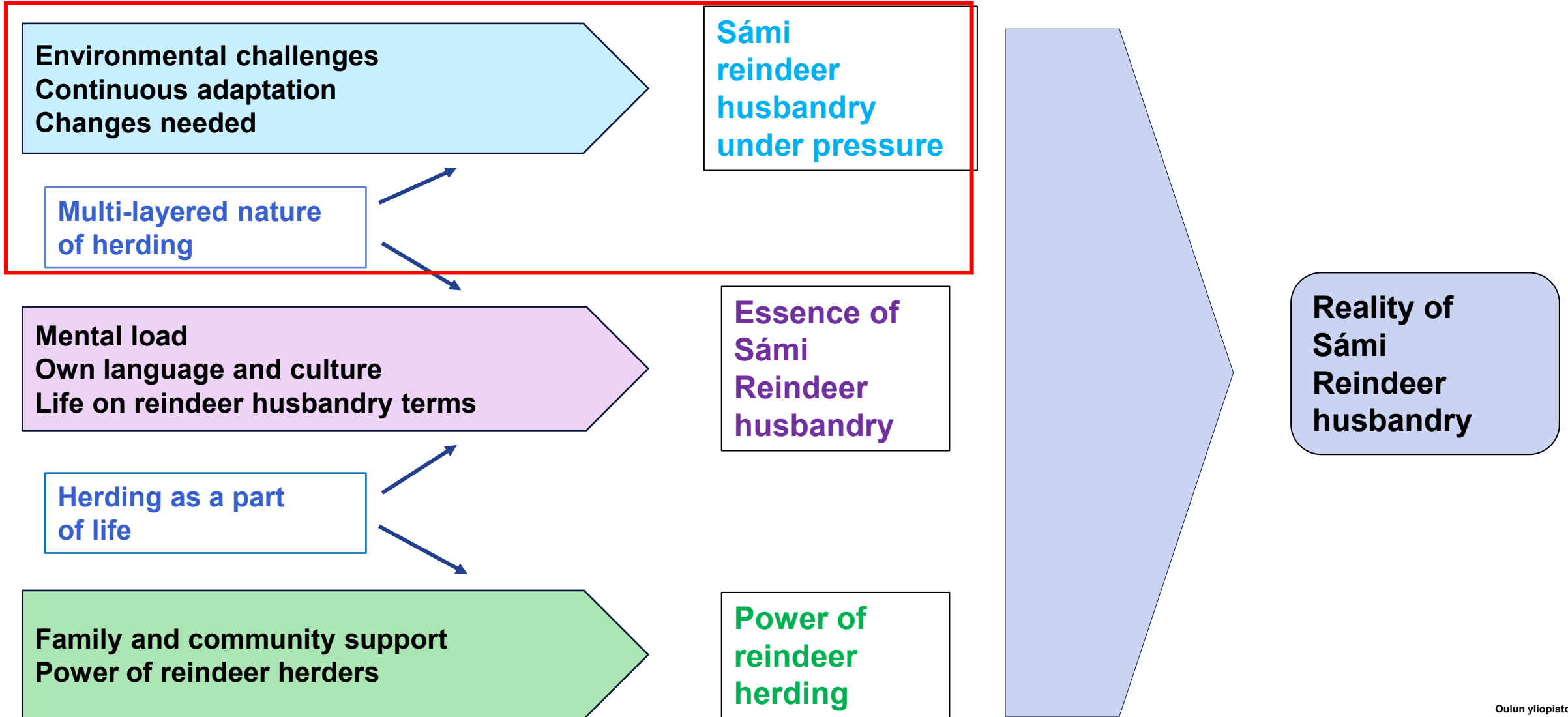
**Reality of
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THEMES

MAIN THEME

UNIFYING THEME





Theme: Sámi reindeer husbandry under pressure

Environmental challenges

- Uncertainty and insecurity due to climate change
- Lack of food for reindeers
- Problems caused by beasts
- Compatitative land use

Continuous adaptation

- Demands of the variety of governance systems
- Dictated by the systems
- Constant defend of own livelihood

Changes needed

- Needs of system change
- Support needs for the reindeer herders and their families



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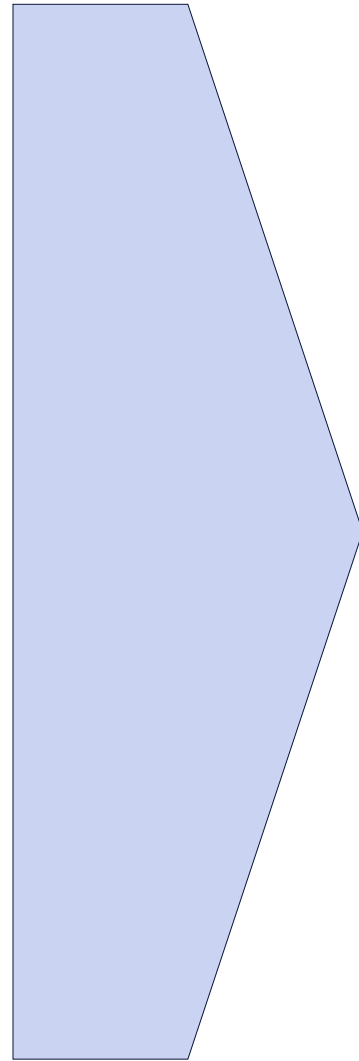
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Reality of
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Theme: Essence of Sámi Reindeer husbandry

Mental load

- Pushing oneself into the extremes,
- Worry and concern about the others
- Economical pressure

Own language and culture

- Being Sámi in Finland
- Sámi reindeer herding is an essential part of the Sámi culture
- The two faces of the second job

Life on husbandry terms

- Well-being of the reindeers is the main priority
- Everyday life of the reindeer herding
- A bad day for the reindeer herder



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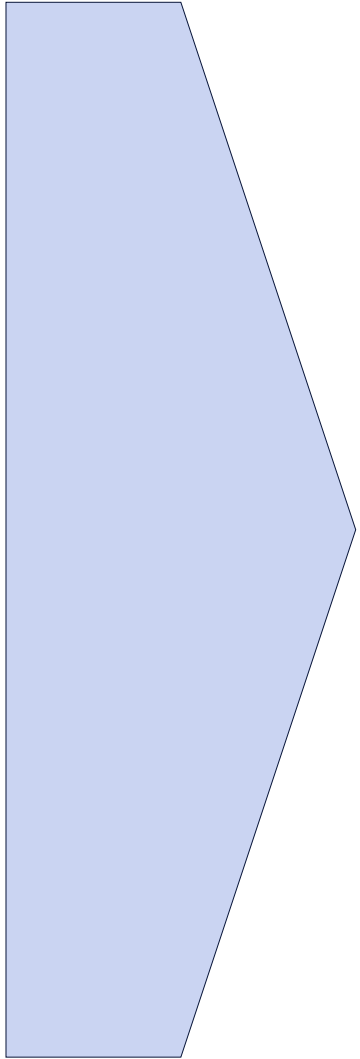
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Theme: Power of reindeer herding

Family and community support

- Protection of own community
- Strengths of the reindeer herding family
- Meaning of the family is wide
- Natural element in herding

Power of reindeer herders

- Being out in nature, with reindeers
- Main work gives a lot
- Constant learning
- Sámi culture and identity is highlighted
- Power and trust

Summary of the results

Challenges

- Climate change
- Predators
- Competing industries
- Continuous adaptation
- Society and continuous defence
- Systems
- Economic challenges

Supporting factors

- Own culture, identity and traditions
- Core / basic work
- Reindeer welfare
- Nature
- Family and community
- Power rising from within

Changes needed

- Changes to systems and legislation
- Subsidies offered to reindeer herders
- Supporting the family
- Increasing public understanding

Key conclusions



Photo: Ulla Timlin

- **Sámi reindeer husbandry needs a stronger foothold in Finland**, and its special characteristics must be taken into account. This must also be reflected in the consistent development of decision-making and support systems.
- **Sámi reindeer herders need forms of support that specifically strengthen their well-being.** These include occupational health services that support the herders' own culture but also forms of support that take the reindeer herder's family into consideration.
- **Sámi reindeer husbandry is a crucial part of the Sámi culture and way of life.** The reindeer herders and their families clearly view this as a positive aspect, and a strong position also creates confidence and strength for the future.
- **The welfare of reindeer is important, and living in interaction with nature is meaningful.** Sámi reindeer herders possess a lot of knowledge that can be utilised in decision-making.



Special thank to all participants!



Finnish
Cultural Foundation

Saamelaisen poronhoidon todellisuus – Saamelaisten poronhoitajien hyvinvointia ja voimavaroja kartoittavan hankkeen loppuraportti

Timlin, Ulla; Magga, Ristenrauna; Eriksen, Heidi;
Woodgate, Roberta L.; Rautio, Arja (2026-04-29)



Avaa tiedosto

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(1.470Mt)

Lataukset: 5

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