

# Fear of Livelihood Disruption: Sapmi Indigenous People Respon to Arctic Infrastructure in Finland

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**Abstract.** This study focuses on the encounter between the indigenous Sápmi movement and the Northern Sea Route development project in the Arctic region of Finland. In 2018, the governments of Finland and Norway proposed an Arctic railway to connect the two countries with European and Asian markets via the northern sea shipping line. With strong global support from governments and multinational companies, the plan will practically become a challenge for Sápmi's struggle to win over natural resources in Finland, especially those related to their livelihoods. This research aims to see how local communities respond to this narrative and its praxis based on experiences in dealing with large-scale infrastructure development.

**Keywords:** Fear, Indigenous, Infrastructure, Livelihood Disruption, Resistance

## 1 Introduction

This study wants to analyze how the production of fear arises from the actors involved and will be affected by the Arctic Railway infrastructure design that will be built from Finland to Norway. The dream of a faster and more effective industrial logistics chain through the Northern Sea Route connecting Asia and Europe can be realized with this rail line. On the other hand, the design of this infrastructure is concerned with threats and uncertainties to the future of the Sapmi Indigenous People livelihood in Lapland, which relies heavily on nature, such as reindeer migration routes. Imagining livelihood disruption in the future, makes the Sapmi community take action supported by elements of civil society to reject the design of the arctic railway.

From an anthropological perspective, fear is a form of social experience which can be shared in society. As a social experience, collective fear of uncertainty can be traced by understanding "the situations that generate fear at a given time in a given place" [1]. In this case, fear arises because there is a specific context of time, place, and social phenomena. Furthermore, fear can arise through discourse that refers to a "certain name of otherness" capable of providing threats. This category can be attached to a particular person, institution, or practice [2]. For example, through "talk of crime" or, in the context of this research, "talk of bad effect of (past or other) infrastructures or intervention", fear can emerge collectively. I think we can use Jansen's [3] and Boscoboinik and Horakova [1] insights to study this future and uncertainty phenomenon in term of the "political economy of collective fear".

## **2 Research Method**

Researchers use library research methods that focus on the use of text as the main basis for data retrieval. Literature research or literature study is a series of library data collection processes that are processed into research materials [4]. The search and data collection method used in this research uses book texts, scientific journals, policy documents, and online news related to the theme of infrastructure in the Arctic region.

The data collection method that will be carried out in this study uses book texts, scientific journals, policy documents, and online news related to the theme of infrastructure in the Arctic region:

- a) The search for books and scientific journals will focus on the study of infrastructure anthropology which discusses the relationship between infrastructure development and society. Related to data tracking, the study of the arctic region will focus on the development of the arctic railway and the northern sea route.
- b) Tracing policy documents is based on written documents issued or issued by state authorities or the private sector. The Arctic Railroad Development Document compiled by the cooperation of Norway and Finland became the basis for the initial narrative of this study. A private sector collaboration called the Arctic Corridor resulted in an offer document on the benefits of investing in a document that is also important in data retrieval.
- c) Searching for local and international news from online mass media. One online news story that focuses on the Arctic region is the Barent Observer. This media has several news stories that describe the journey of how the local community, the Sapmi ethnic, has responded to the Arctic Railway.

## **3 Finding and Discussion**

### **3.1 Melting Ice in the Arctic Sea**

Several expeditions were conducted to test the potential travel routes that could be accessed through the Arctic region in the 20th century. The sailors had a dream to cross the poles even though they knew that the dangerous conditions had to force them to abandon the dream. Some sailors have to end up in despair and also with no success. In 1893-1896, a sailor named Fridtjof Nansen tried to make his voyage to the North Pole but found a dead end. In addition, Robert Peary, an American naval officer who had knowledge, experience and skills from the Inuit culture, also made voyages to the North Pole in 1908-1909. However, American naval did not make it to the North Pole [5].

Climate change makes the ice sheet in the Arctic sea thinner and provides potential opportunities for shipping in the northern seas. From the data obtained, there is a tendency for ice thickness in the Arctic to decrease quite rapidly. Explained that in 1958-1976 and 2011-2018, the sea ice thickness (SIT) at the end of the year at the time of melting, the ice decreased by about 2 m (66%). What could happen is that the Arctic region will become ice-free in September before 2050. The opportunity to navigate the Arctic region due to thinning or disappearance of summer ice will connect several existing shipping lanes. The loss of sea ice made it possible to open Transpolar Sea Route (TSR). The path will later connect the Atlantic

and Pacific Oceans through the North Pole. The TSR is a new addition, complementing 2 Arctic shipping lanes known as the Northeast Passage (NEP), which covers the northern coast of Russia known as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the Northwest Passage (NWP). In recent times, the NEP and NWP have been traversed by some or all of the natives, marines, naval explorers, and military, and these routes are shipping and freight routes [5].

Technological developments, especially shipping, are enough to provide a breath of fresh air to keep hope in exploring and developing transportation routes in the Arctic Sea. The line became fully operational sometime in the second half of the 20th century when there were technological advances in icebreakers and submarines for scientific, military purposes. In 1977 the dream of reaching the North Pole was realized when the Soviet Union's icebreaker, *Artika*, made it through the frozen waters of the Arctic. The technology of icebreaker in 1994 was modified and developed to be able to navigate areas that have ice thickness up to 8 m [5].

Countries in the Arctic sphere competing to create effective icebreaker technology, such as Russia and America, must now look at China's interests in the Arctic region. The Chinese government is already preparing for commercial shipping in the Arctic Sea to open. So far, China is the major nation to lead the authorized expedition of the three Arctic shipping routes. China in 2017 launched an icebreaker named *MV Xue Long*, an 83-day journey, 20000 NM, sailing through the TSR en route to the NWP. In addition, the ship is also used for Chinese scientific expeditions in the Arctic. Two experts from China also explained that the eighth Chinese Arctic expedition team crossed the Central Passage for the first time using the icebreaker *Xue Long* and opened a new sea route connecting Eurasia. In 2018, China established its first icebreaker *MV Xue Long 2* and launched its first journey in July 2020 [5].

### 3.2 Designing the future of Arctic infrastructure : Collaboration between State and Private Actor

The Arctic Railway is one of the infrastructure designs with a vision to open global trade routes from Europe to Asia. This train is the main pulse in connecting the distribution chain [6]. Starting from the melting of ice in the Arctic region due to global warming, there is the possibility of opening up access to transportation and logistics on Northern Sea Route [7]. The Arctic region is growing into an important area, this makes the Arctic countries, especially Finland, have the opportunity to change the country's logistics position [8]. Finland has the opportunity to turn into an international transport and transit hub. The Arctic Railroad is planned to pass through Lapland and will connect Europe to the Arctic Ocean and the Northeast Line by rail. In the long term, the Arctic Railway will significantly improve Lapland's accessibility. Better and more competitive logistics connections will contribute to the profitability of investments in the Arctic [8]. The potential for NSR in the future will significantly reduce the shipping time of logistics vessels between Europe and East Asia [9]. Compared to the Suez Canal route, which takes 30 days, the NSR cruise route only takes 18 days on average [5]. The NSR route is an alternative to the Suez and Panama canals and is an attractive route for trade with Northeast Asia (Japan, Korea and China) [10].

**Table 1.** Shipping route through Suez Canal and NSR [6]

	Suez Canal	Days	NSR	Days	+/- Days
China	12050 NM	37	6500 NM	21	-16
Korea	12400 NM	38	6050 NM	19,5	-18,5

Finland initiated a grand plan to build on the Arctic Corridor concept with two infrastructure designs. First, build a sea tunnel between Finland and Estonia, and secondly, develop a railway link between Norway and Finland. This initiative emerges from Finland in partnership with Norway and will involve various other global actors such as the European Union, China and multinational companies to design and finance the construction of Arctic Railways. The Finnish term “Arctic Corridor” is referred to as Jäämeren käytävä. The term has the meaning of Connecting Finland with the Arctic Ocean. The term is thought to have existed more than 100 years ago. The spokesman for the Contemporary Arctic Corridor Project, Timo Lohi, stated that he revised the concept or term in April 2008 and came across the English term “Arctic Corridor” sometime in 2009 [8].

The emergence of Arctic Corridor construction discourse made the private sector also seek to take part and play a role. Entrepreneurs like Peter Vesterbacka have prepared themselves to be involved in these infrastructure development projects. Since 2016, Peter Vesterbacka and his team have raised funds and have prepared critical initial steps. For example, to get permission and approval from the government. A thorough environmental impact assessment is critical for receiving permits and approvals [8]. In May 2019, Finish Bay Area Development signed a letter of intent with Norwegian development company Sør-Varanger Utvikling. This collaboration was to devise a model to obtain international costs for Arctic Railway. To obtain the necessary permits, Peter Vesterbacka's team worked closely with a consulting and engineering firm, Pöyry.

Geopolitically, Finland seeks to reposition its country concerning other European countries through the design of the Arctic Corridor. Interestingly, the Eurasian discourse used by Peter Vesterbacka's team is similar to that used by the project's promoter, which also aims to design a sense of spatial closeness to Asia. This discourse can legitimize the contribution of the Arctic Corridor project from Asian investors. Deputy director-general of the Network Department of the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communication, Risto Murto, said: "when Finland thought of a new corridor to China, Finland was halfway between Europe and Asia. Finland is not an island anymore, we are seeing our geopolitical position in a new way" [8].

In the context of infrastructure development, Finland must see the interests of other countries, such as China, which also has efforts to develop its influence in the European region. We can see this from the policies made by China in 2018, which focused on the importance of the country's presence in the Arctic region. The Chinese government officially proposed an Arctic Policy In 2018. It is explained that they want to support various parties who support the development of Arctic shipping routes. According to China's Arctic Policy, the Arctic Corridor is considered the Polar Silk Road. China presented their Arctic Policy which outlined Beijing's interest in projects in the Arctic, and described their proposal on the Polar Silk Road as an extension of the BRI (Belt and Road Initiatives). These authorised measures are in stark contrast to China's passive attitude in previous years regarding Arctic issues because they feared raising international suspicion of its ambitions in the Arctic region [8].

### **3.3 Indigenous Respond Against Arctic Railways Infrastructure**

The Sápmi people in Finland face a significant challenge to reaffirm their position in obtaining the right to self-determination. The ratification of the ILO convention 169 on Indigenous People was submitted to the Finland parliament in 2015, but there has been no further progress on an agreement Joona [11] because it collides with the article on land rights

[12]. However, several policies attempt to put the Sami in the context of participation in decision-making, such as the Mining Act, the new Metsähallitus Act [12], and the involvement of the Sami in funding the conservation of old forest in Lapland [13]. Sápmi people in Finland live in the northern part of Lapland, such as Inari Municipality. Sápmi people have cultural ties to natural resources and known as part of term "nature people" [14]. Reindeer herding is one of the main livelihoods of the Sápmi people, which is very important for transportation, living equipment and food sources [15]. However, dynamic changes in the lives of the Sami people continue by doing traditional live and developing tourist industry based on identity and culture [16][17][18].

Sápmi people are shrouded by images of the exploitation and expression of the resource frontier [19][20] in the Arctic region. The uncertainty will appear when they are connected to global issues involving many actors, both across countries and the private sectors. The Sápmi people in Finland have to fear losing access to resources that are inherent in their daily lives. It is feared that Arctic railway plan will disrupt the pattern of life and main livelihood in the form of reindeer herding, where the railroad will cut off the deer's migration path [21][22][23]. The response of indigenous people can be seen from their actions supported by the international NGO network to reject the Arctic railway's plan in September 2018 [24][25]. Sami Parliament also rejecting this plan because this "railroad will influence swamps, grazing areas, rivers all way between Kirkenes and Rovaniemi" [26].



**Fig. 1.** Arctic Railways Map [6]

Sápmi people in Norway and Finland imagine losing access to the resources inherent in their daily lives. It is feared that this plan will disrupt the lifestyle and main livelihood of reindeer herding, where the railway will cut off the deer's migration path [22][23]. The Arctic Railroad project has been strongly criticized by the Sami community. According to the Speaker of the Sami Parliament, Tiina Sanila-Aikio, the Sami community also needs to be

involved in the planning of this project. The Arctic Railway will cross their territory and it will threaten their traditional culture and livelihoods. Railroads will cut off and fragment land that is important for reindeer herding. In line with Tiina Sanila-Aikio, according to the Sami herding cooperative, the rail line will also damage the conditions for deer herding practices. The path that crosses the Rovaniemi and Kirkenes areas, is inhabited by the Sami people. The trail also crosses 6 Sami people's reindeer herding areas. In the southern part of the Sami region, the arctic trail traverses five reindeer herding areas. In addition to the area, this path also crosses the deer herding area in Norway. The track or railroad is expected to hinder deer grazing in these areas.

The Sapmi indigenous people's movement against the construction of the Arctic Railway is supported by civil society groups in Finland. The response of indigenous peoples can be seen from their actions supported by the international NGO network Greenpeace who rejected the Arctic railway plan in September 2018 [25]. Sápmi people in Norway and Finland imagine losing access to the resources inherent in their daily lives. It is feared that this plan will disrupt the lifestyle and main livelihood of deer herding, where the railroad will cut off the deer migration route [22][23]. The connections and networks that the Sapmi indigenous people have with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) that pay attention to environmental issues have existed for quite a long time. The relationship with Greenpeace, for example, has been built when the NGO supports the Sapmi community in dealing with and fighting land use from the industrial sector. The industry is considered capable of destroying nature and reindeer herding, which is the identity of the Sapmi community. This network was finally revived when the governments of Finland and Norway drafted plans for the Arctic Railway in early 2018. These two entities joined forces to fight and resist this large-scale Project by holding demonstrations [24].

The collaboration between the Sapmi community and Greenpeace formed a joint alliance movement to fight the construction of the Arctic Railway infrastructure by presenting the main issues related to the lives of the Sapmi indigenous people. A study conducted by Kakko [24] shows that crucial issues resulting from the meeting of two interests in this movement were conveyed in demonstrations. The Sapmi people feel anxious about this infrastructure plan because it is considered to be destroying the cultural future of the Sapmi people. The future in question is about nature and livelihoods connected to nature. The fear in the future is that this train line could disrupt the flow of rivers, lakes, and also the land on which the Sapmi people depend for their lives. In addition, the main issue that is important to discuss regarding the route can break the reindeer migration path. The livelihood of reindeer herding is closely related to the deer's migratory pathways to find food in the Lapland region. The Sapmi community asks the planner to recognize their rights in Lapland regarding the design of this Railway project. During this design process, the Sapmi community was never involved and consulted about the benefits and impacts that would occur. They feel that the Arctic Railway project is like a continuation of the "colonialism" project in the past. Their memories are drawn back in time to memories in the 1960s of the artificial lake project in the Vuotso area. Through this project, the Sapmi community living near the artificial lake area had to be excluded and forced to leave their homeland. With those memories, they must move and fight together a large-scale project to ensure that exclusion never happens again in the future.

The good news for the Sami community emerged in mid-2021 regarding the continuation of the Arctic rail infrastructure development project. In May, the "Regional Council of Lapland" decided against developing such infrastructure in their area. In this way, the Northern Lapland Provincial Plan for 2040 will be reviewed because it considers the negative impacts that could occur on the life and culture of the Sapmi people if this infrastructure

continues to be built [26]. However, the Sapmi community still has to face uncertainties and threats in the future when this plan is supported by two major powers, the states and the private sector.

## 4 Conclusion

Disappointment and fear emerge from the perspective of the indigenous Sapmi people living in both Norway and Finland. The Sapmi indigenous people feel that in the design of projects carried out by two countries (Finland and Norway), their involvement does not seem to be considered important. This feeling of disappointment arises as a result of policies that have been felt to discriminate against the lives of the Sapmi people. Although globally and nationally the indigenous peoples movement is well known, their representation and voice in this project is very lacking. On the other hand, if this design for the construction of the Arctic railway is to be executed, fear will overshadow the lives of the Sapmi people. They imagine that their main livelihood related to reindeer herding will be disrupted by the presence of these infrastructure lines.

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