
Bartjan – Sámi Summer Gathering in Jämtland, Sweden. A Climate Risk Assessment of the Cultural Landscape and Sámi Community

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Key Theme: Climate change as a risk driver for culture and people

Summary

Bartjan highlights the situation in general for Sámi communities and Sámi cultural heritage sites in Sápmi, covering the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Climate change affects structures and environments directly and indirectly, through change of usage of each site. An increased interest in land use makes it even harder to maintain the traditional method of reindeer herding, a problem exacerbated by climate change effects.



(Photo 1) Bartjan, means the place between the forest and mountains, Source: CC BY.

Geographical Context

Bartjan is the site where the Tåssåsen Sámi community gathers in summer to label reindeer calves. It is a time of festivities when the whole community is gathered together. Bartjan is a site for recreation – for hunting, fishing, skiing and enjoying nature – and is used by visitors and tourists as well. The site has a long history and a mix of old buildings (kåta/gåetie=tipi), traces of ancient herding practices like storage buildings, foundations of tipis and modern cottages and huts. It is situated between the forest and mountains, a 1.5-hour drive from Östersund and another one hour walk to reach the site (Photo 1). There are no modern installations for water or electricity.



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(Photo 2) Bartjan's location in Jämtland, a province of Sweden, Source: CC BY.

Jämtland is a Swedish province in the heart of the Scandinavian peninsula in northern Europe (2). Jämtland covers an area of 34,009 square kilometres, 8.3 percent of Sweden's total area, and is the second largest province in Sweden. The entire province is more or less a highland region with the highest peak being Storsylen, a peak in the Sylan mountain range with an elevation of 1,728 metres. Jämtland has a temperate climate and belongs to the temperate zone's northernmost area. Jämtland is a sparsely populated region (total 131 810, 2020) of only 3.3 persons per square kilometre and the population is unevenly distributed. In Jämtland County (including the province of Härjedalen), 34 percent of the total population live outside an urban area, making Jämtland one of the most rural regions in Scandinavia. (Source: Wikipedia)

Reindeer husbandry is a Sámi industry reserved for the Sámi in Sweden. According to the Reindeer Husbandry Act, reindeer husbandry can only be exercised by a Sámi who is a member of a Sámi village. A Sámi village is an economic and administrative association with its own board that, for the common good of the members, leads reindeer husbandry in a certain geographical area. Reindeer grazing rights prevail in approximately 50 percent of Sweden. That area is divided into 51 Sámi villages.

There are about 4 600 reindeer owners (who own at least one reindeer), of which 85 percent live in Norrbotten County. 40 percent of reindeer owners are women. Within a Sámi village, there are several reindeer husbandry companies. There are just over 1 000 reindeer husbandry companies in Sweden. Approximately 2 500 people are dependent on income from reindeer husbandry. The reindeer herding profession has become a male-dominated profession. Only 18 percent of the reindeer herders in charge of the group are women.

Reindeer husbandry today mainly focuses on meat production. Reindeer husbandry still plays a major role in Sámi culture. It is a bearer of tradition with great symbolic value. Being a reindeer herder is a tough profession, but it is also a lifestyle. As a reindeer herder, you are also a carrier and mediator of the Sámi reindeer herding culture. The number of reindeer in Sweden varies between 225 000 and 280 000 in winter herds. The reindeer industry is dependent on large grazing areas because the reindeer move according to the seasons. For the walks between different pastures, the reindeer use ancient trails, the same trail as previous generations. In some areas, the relocation routes are cut off by, for example, industrial activities, car roads and railways. Then the reindeer must be transported to new grazing areas by truck. (Source: Sámi parliament of Sweden)

Description

Bartjan highlights the situation in general for Sámi communities and Sámi cultural heritage sites in Sápmi, covering the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Climate change affects structures and environments directly and indirectly through change of usage of each site. Climate mitigation measures such as wind turbine farms and mines for minerals used in windmills and car batteries also indirectly affect the traditional method of reindeer herding. This is a very important business for Sámi communities as well as an intangible heritage and a traditional lifestyle in close relationship to nature and climate seasons. The reindeer herders act as an early warning system for climate change effects since they experience the changes on a daily basis. The reindeer react to changes by changing their moving pattern, away from insects and away from heat, searching for pastures. The freeze thawing winters make it harder for the reindeer to find food, which has forced the herders to support feeding. An increased interest in land use makes it even harder to maintain the traditional method of herding, and climate change effects exacerbate this issue. A large part of the Sámi cultural heritage originates in reindeer herding (3 and 4).



(Photo 3) Ancient pasture and fence, Overgrown, Source: CC BY.



(Photo 3) Ancient storages in ground, Source: CC BY.

Climate change exposure and regular maintenance as an adaptation measure

The site is exposed to seasonal changes in seasons: summer is longer and hotter, and winter is colder or shorter with less snow. This can cause a shortage in natural springs for water and summer storage for food. Pastures and biological heritage overgrows since the reindeer move to the forest to get away from insects. The maintenance of buildings is harder to keep up for the owners when the usage of the site changes and local materials are harder to harvest. However, this regular maintenance is one important measure to adapt to climate change (5).



(Photo 5) Tipi in need of renovation. Source: CC BY.



(Photo 6) A well maintained Tipi. Source: CC BY.

Mapping and engaging younger generations to preserve tangible and intangible Sámi heritage

According to the Sámis, preserving culturally valuable constructions or landscapes is important but impossible to separate from the preservation of all the stories, myths and knowledge that the objects or sites carry. Nonetheless, we need to acknowledge the need for monitoring and strategically plan for the long-term maintenance of their cultural heritage sites. It is important for managers of cultural heritage sites to start mapping the effects of climate change and develop action plans to manage them. It is also important to engage younger generations.

Sámi communities pass over their traditional knowledge from generations orally and by learning through doing. Storytelling and the language are important parts of the intangible heritage, which climate change also threatens – for example, words describing weather phenomena and plants that no longer exists. The local history and traditional handicraft of tipi building is threatening to disappear without the maintenance of knowledge of the sites. Knowing that history builds the basis for handling the present times and the future.

Bartjan, case of Adapt Northern Heritage project

Swedish National Heritage Board initiated the case study as associative partners of the project [Adapt Northern Heritage \(interreg-npa.eu\)](https://interreg-npa.eu), as part of the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014-2023. The case was developed in partnership with Tássåsen Sámi community, who manage the site, and the Foundation Gaaltije. The project performed a climate risk assessment of the site by workshops at the site in 2018-2019 and initiated a Climate Risk Management Plan. The aim of the case studies of the project was to act as test beds for developing the toolkit for Risk Management of Cultural Heritage and Climate Change. More information: Climate Risk Management Plan for Bartjan, [AdaptNorthernHeritage_CRMP_Bartjan.pdf \(interreg-npa.eu\)](https://interreg-npa.eu)

Key Outcomes

This study explains the impact of climate change on the tangible and intangible heritage of Sámi communities. The need for monitoring and strategically planning for the long-term maintenance of cultural heritage sites must be acknowledged. In this case, it is also important to engage younger generations to pass over the traditional knowledge of traditional tipi building handicrafts, storytelling and the spoken language. Knowing the history builds the basis for handling the present times and the future.