

## Introduction

### Conference background

This volume is a collection of articles based on papers that were presented at the conference *Networks, Interaction and Emerging Identities in Fennoscandia and Beyond*, 13–16 October 2009. The conference was held at the University of Tromsø in Norway, and hosted by its Department of Archaeology and Social Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education. The University of Tromsø was the obvious choice of venue due to its explicit research emphasis on northern regions and indigenous identities, as well as its location in an area where hunter-fisher-gatherer populations persisted well into the second millennium AD.

The conference brought together scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines, including archaeology, history, geography, anthropology, ethnology, science of religion, historical and comparative linguistics, all investigating northern hunter-gatherer-fisher societies from the perspectives of networking and interaction. Altogether 54 participants representing eleven countries and over twenty academic institutions took part in the conference. Not all papers from the conference are found in the present volume. In particular we wish to acknowledge the significant contribution by the late Professor Marek Zvelebil, who gave the opening keynote lecture on ‘The historical role of hunter-gatherers of the European north: identity, lifestyle and survival’.

The conference concluded the research project *Early Networking in Northern Fennoscandia* based in the Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters in Oslo and carried out in 2008–2009. The research team of this project was an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars, most of whom have also contributed to this volume. The group consisted of project leader Charlotte Damm (Tromsø), Lars Forsberg (Bergen), Lars Ivar Hansen (Tromsø), Fredrik Hallgren (Uppsala), Peter Jordan (Aberdeen), Lars-Gunnar Larsson (Uppsala), Mika Lavento (Helsinki), Anja Niemi (Tromsø), Janne Saarikivi (Helsinki), and Marianne Skandfer (Tromsø). Among the participants of the project, there was notable expertise in Finno-Ugrian linguistics and the archaeology, history and ethno-history of the northern regions.

The point of departure for the project was the investigation of the long-term resilience of Fennoscandian hunter-fisher-gatherers and their interaction with neighbouring societies from the Mesolithic through to historical times. In other words, the focus was on the hunter-fisher-gatherer communities of North-

ern Fennoscandia and their interaction with each other and with farmers, metal-producing societies, and emerging states over the course of millennia, including the emergence and diversification of Saami identities.

The key concern of the project was to understand the role of northern hunters as strategic network actors, to explore how these communities actively engaged with surrounding societies, and to discuss how the integration in the wider Northern context affected their social and cultural identities. Through a number of case studies, the project participants investigated the changing characteristics of form, content and effects of long-term interaction and exchange within and between northern communities.

The project *Early Networking in Northern Fennoscandia* focused on material and linguistic variability. By breaking down supposed entities into any number of separate connections documented in available data, more detailed and nuanced insight into the substances of regional and interregional networks was gained in the research. Among other things, this general scepticism towards established entities of the research tradition concerned present-day ethnic groups and their predecessors, whether derived from archaeological cultures or language boundaries. It was assumed that such classifications, while often useful and necessary, also conceal many aspects of both the present and past processes that shaped the human groups and their connections. In such a way, motivation, processes and the socio-cultural consequences of cultural contacts were investigated in the framework of different disciplines and in different time-frames. The interdisciplinary composition of the research project played a central role in fulfilling this aim, as the groups explored how different types of data (archaeological, historical, anthropological and linguistic) may provide insight into such interaction. A particular interest was to explore new methodologies for more in-depth analyses of past interaction. Also many of the papers in this volume demonstrate that it is not possible to correlate material from different disciplines in any simple way, even if their research objects ultimately are related to the same (pre)historical processes.

The aim of the concluding conference was partly to create a forum where initial results of the project could be presented to a wider academic audience. We saw this as an opportunity to engage in a critical discussion with colleagues investigating similar issues both within and beyond Fennoscandia. For that reason, we invited not only colleagues working with Fennoscandian data and the areas bordering on our own research area, who would be well suited to assess our interpretations, but also a range of scholars working with hunter-gatherer interaction and identities in other northern regions. The conference thus included comparative studies from Alaska, Arctic Canada, Sub-arctic Canada, Greenland, Northwest Siberia and Japan, as well as papers providing the background and a greater overview of the context of the Fennoscandian world. In this way, we hoped to disseminate our results and approaches to colleagues working with hunter-fisher-gatherers in other northern regions. At the same time, we were also very much aware that while the research group had been interdisciplinary, schol-

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ars from several other disciplines not represented in the core of the project would have a great deal to contribute to the debate. To engage with research from such other perspectives we invited scholars from religious studies, ethnology, anthropology and geography to expand the discussion on the impact of interaction on northern hunter-fisher-gatherers.

## Framework and aims of the collection

The diversity of the disciplinary background of the papers at the conference is also reflected in this volume. The articles span a wide range of themes from vast networks of culture to the distribution of individual archaeological types and linguistic features. Many of the papers are based on material that derives from several different fields of study, such as linguistics and archaeology, archaeology and ethnohistory, history and anthropology, etc.

While the time-scale, disciplinary character as well as the geographical scope of the articles in this volume are very diverse, they are united by three aspects, namely insistence on the fluctuating character of the prehistoric populations as opposed to nominal groups and straightforwardly identifiable ethnic and linguistic entities; the focus on the hunter-fisher-gatherer populations rather than agriculturalists and sedentary communities that have been the subject of most research on networking and interaction; and finally the northern dimension.

The North has often been viewed as a marginal zone, and the northern hunting and gathering populations have earlier often been portrayed as the passive recipients of technological developments dispersing from the South via local adoption and/or population migrations. Yet, at the same time, there is a notable tradition of anthropological, linguistic and archaeological research on the northern communities that has demonstrated remarkable cultural similarities among the northern people across the globe. This research tradition has been particularly active with regard to the Finno-Ugrian peoples and the Fennoscandian hunter-fisher-gatherers, most notably the Saami, who have become one of the northern people most intensively studied in the history of ethnography and linguistics.

The northern regions have been drawn into modern political states with centres that lie outside the traditional realm of the northern indigenous populations. While established core-periphery models may have helped raise the awareness of the imbalance in this political and geographical relationship, they are increasingly criticized for perpetuating simplistic ‘top-down’ approaches to analyses of culture change. Areas perceived as marginal are portrayed as subscribing readily to the demands of the core, leading to a rapid process of directed assimilation, which eventually produces uniform areas of culture, language and identity. This is particularly so when, as in this case, the assumed periphery is inhabited by hunters and fishers. In the papers of this volume and the studies conducted within the research project *Early Networking in Northern Fenno-*

*scandia*, an effort was made to reverse this general position and to approach the theme of networking and interaction from the perspective of the hunter-fisher-gatherers, aiming to study the dynamics of the resident groups as well as the substance and processes of the networks from the point of view of the settlers of what is often labelled as a “periphery”. This was done in order to show that these northern communities were in fact involved in complex and dynamic processes of interaction, in which they made strategic choices rather than being passively assimilated into a wider network.

Scholarly debate in the 19th and 20th centuries often tended to reflect national research traditions with a focus on the emergence of ethnic groups and identities. As a result, the cultural diversity of the North has been understood from a categorical perspective. For instance, as has been continuously pointed out by the indigenous studies paradigms, the Saami people have long been investigated as the “other” in the history of the emerging Scandinavian states, Norway, Finland and Sweden. It is also evident that the Saami in these contexts have often been presented as a single, fairly homogeneous group in a vast northern area, although the ethnographic and historical data point to extensive cultural and linguistic diversity among the Saami. The papers in this volume engage with these issues and discuss the constitution, maintenance and changes in identities amongst northern populations by studying the emergence of identities and their material and linguistic expression. Most importantly, the papers also investigate heterogeneity within local and regional communities. As a result, the hunter-fisher-gatherers communities emerge as socially and culturally complex. This perception of internal dynamics also provides a different point of departure for investigating interaction within and beyond these groups.

## Fennoscandia and beyond

As outlined above, two key objectives of the conference were to situate the project case studies within a wider geographical framework, and to present preliminary results to scholars working within Fennoscandia and immediately adjacent areas. This is reflected in the organization of the papers in the present volume.

The first part of the volume consists of studies from a variety of northern contexts – beyond Fennoscandia. They provide comparative insights into hunter-gatherer networking, and in particular they present a range of highly varied theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of multicultural interaction and impact on social and cultural identities.

The contributions cover a number of central issues for research into past northern societies. While most, if not all, archaeological studies employ analogy, this has always been particularly explicit for hunter-gatherer studies as well as for northern regions. Through a comparative study of the Alaskan Iñupiat and the Classic Thule Inuit, Max Friesen investigates regional interaction in the Eastern Arctic, pointing out some significant differences between the two regions and

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their social impact. Peter Jordan's study of the Siberian Khanty and the introduction of transport reindeer demonstrates diversity in strategies and logistics even within individual settlements at a given time, thus challenging more traditional presentations of homogeneous groups. The persistence of hunter-gather communities throughout long-term external interaction is a central research topic. Mark Hudson, Mami Aoyama and Kara Hoover explore the role of social networks for the promotion of long-term resilience through a comparative study of different groups within the Ryuku Islands. Their analysis indicates the complexity of factors involved in the outcomes of interaction. Through their interdisciplinary approach, Robert Jarvenpa and Hetty Jo Brumbach investigate the effects of interaction on cultural differentiation. Also this study emphasizes the complex nature of multicultural interaction, and in particular they point to often very diverse social landscapes with numerous indigenous societies. In this context, it is demonstrated that some of the societies perceived as indigenous actually emerged and were shaped in interaction with immigrant groups.

Included in this first part of the volume are also two articles providing important overviews, which serve as background for several of the following Fennoscandian case studies. Pekka Sammallahti explores the prehistoric background and context of the Saami languages in a global perspective reaching back to the origins of human language, while Evgenij N. Chernykh presents the development of the Eurasian Copper and Bronze Age societies with which the Fennoscandian hunter-fisher-gatherers interacted for millennia.

The second part of the volume presents studies from Northern Fennoscandia. Here, the papers are organized chronologically to emphasize another important aspect of the comparative approach that permeates this volume, namely the diachronic perspective. Investigating interaction over the course of millennia across highly diverse social and cultural contexts provides an opportunity to study relations between hunter-fisher-gatherers and many different kinds of societies, thus exploring transformation, possible long-term trajectories and breakdowns in networks.

In her study of interaction between various hunter-fisher-gatherer communities in the Stone Age, Charlotte Damm suggests an approach whereby traditional cultural entities are broken up and interaction is instead pursued through the study of other types of collectives. Fredrik Hallgren emphasizes that the Early Neolithic contacts between hunter and farmers by no means indicate a negative imbalance in the relationship, but were based on conscious choices by both parties. Marianne Skandfer explores the active employment of memory and material culture for the constitution of identities in the last two millennia BC, emphasizing how reinventions of practices were introduced at the time of significant transformation in networks relations. Janne Saarikivi and Mika Lavento examine the potential for correlating archaeological and linguistic data on the basis of material from the Inari region and its surroundings where three different Saami groups reside. They conclude that while many types of correlations are discernible in the material culture and language, many of the models employed

in the description of the emergence of the language areas seem to be far too simplistic. In this vein, they express criticism towards those approaches to prehistory where past archaeological culture areas and reconstructed language areas are made to correlate in straightforward ways.

Lars Ivar Hansen's detailed analysis of tax records from the 16th century allows him to detect significant variability between different fjords and settlements. In addition, he is able to trace relocations between settlements for individual tax-payers, providing us with unique insight into residential mobility at the time. Jukka Korpela investigates the hunter-fisher populations of the Finnish inland, where the Lapps (traditionally considered as the Saami) are mentioned to reside according to many medieval historical sources. He criticizes the prevailing view of the historical population expansion in the 15th and 16th centuries, and explains the emergence of Finnic-speaking population in Eastern Finland as a result of the integration of the earlier hunter-fisher population into the Swedish realm.

Dikka Storm traces the Lutheran missionary network in Troms in the 18th century, demonstrating the importance of local organization and the interaction between immigrating missionaries, the local Saami population and by no means least marital relations for changes in the social landscape.

In the last paper of the volume, Lars-Gunnar Larsson suggests a new grouping of the Ume Sámi dialects. In a different manner to most of the investigations into Sámi dialects, which focus on phonological and morphological variation, he investigates the dialectal variation on the basis of vocabulary. He demonstrates that the borders of the Sámi dialects and languages could be different if the lexicon were the basis of classification and thus underlines the importance of lexicon as a source material for the study of past cultural contacts.

This volume presents many different perspectives and contributions to the study of the organization, substance and impacts of interaction. However, two recurrent themes in the papers are the diversity within the hunter-fisher-gatherer communities and the complexity of their interactions with each other and with societies with different social and economic structures. The authors employ many different theoretical and methodological approaches, but it is noteworthy that the majority actively seek to explore interdisciplinary research or, at the very least, are clearly inspired by perspectives from beyond their own discipline. The conference and this present volume demonstrate a tremendous diversity and potential in studies on northern hunter-fisher-gatherers that will hopefully continue to enrich the field

All of the articles published in this volume have been peer-reviewed by two anonymous reviewers in order to guarantee the scientific quality of the series *Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*. The editors have, in most cases, preserved the terminological choices and the transcription of the foreign names in the English text. Thus, for instance, both the name forms Saami and Sámi may be found in the articles.

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