

CHAPTER 8

FROM REINDEER STEW TO PIZZA: THE DISPLACEMENT OF LOCAL FOOD RESOURCES IN SAPMI, NORTHERNMOST EUROPE*

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Abstract. The gradual displacement of endogenous food resources—the 'reindeer stew'—by food items that have exogenous origin and are globally marketed—the 'pizza'—is discussed by taking the Sami and their subarctic homeland, Sapmi, as an example. First is an examination of how the interrelationship among people, environment, resources, and food production can be linked to population density and carrying capacity in specific ecosystems. Secondly, a summary description of the historical Sami food household, based solely on subarctic fauna and flora resources is provided. Third, the modern process of exogenous food imports is presented by introducing the concepts of 'distant consumption' and 'de-localization of resources.' Finally, these concepts are applied to show the emerging local dependency on external resources and the resulting displacement of local resources with respect to their importance and values, economically and culturally, for Sami society.

1. SECURING LIFE: PEOPLE, RESOURCES AND FOOD IN THE SUBARCTIC

Food security and sustainable development, both essential for human beings to inhabit specific physical environments, are at the core of discussions in social sciences focusing on tenuous human environmental interactions. These interactions are currently at a critical juncture related to the impact of climatic changes, population pressures, and the increasing pervasiveness of cultural and economic globalization through goods and food (cf. Wein & Wein 1995). Both these aspects—food and development—are crucial elements of human life; both are closely interrelated and can be approached from different angles. It should be mentioned beforehand that the emphasis here is on food and development based on living resources, excluding the discussion of economic opportunities related to non-renewable resources or energy extraction. For that matter, I have selected to reflect on the historical processes that have occurred in the interplay among humankind, environment, living resources, and food in a specific ecosystem, the subarctic region. Furthermore, I have taken the Sami, the aboriginal people of Sapmi, as an example to explain the processes of successive displacement of endogenous food resources, symbolized

here, on the one hand, by the ever nutritious and satisfyingly filling 'reindeer stew,' with the evolving dependence, on the other hand, upon exogenous, de-localized food items, synthesized here into the gregarious 'pizza,' once of local provenance and limits, now of modern global appeal (for a more general discussion of this process see Pelto 1978, Müller-Wille L. 1987).

The Sami and their land, Sapmi, are today part of the contemporary states of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia in northernmost Europe where they are today a minority (see Ruong 1969, Sami Instituut 1990, Lehtola 1997), living mingled with the majority of Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, and Russians. The latter have moved into these tiers over centuries, added their adaptive patterns to this region, and introduced new types of resource utilization that, except for agriculture, are not discussed here. This paper focuses on the Sami's experiences with food resources and their sustainability, that are closely connected with the environmental conditions of these northernmost areas of Europe, characterized in their physical processes and natural limits of productivity by predominantly subarctic and, in their southern fringes, by boreal ecosystems. These ecosystems have provided and still provide renewable or living resources that allow the securing of food production necessary for the continued existence of

human inhabitants, albeit low in numbers, under these environmental conditions (Müller-Wille L. 1999).

The principal question for this discussion raises the issue of population growth and resource utilization, brought succinctly forward by Thomas R. Malthus (1798) just over 200 years ago, and continuously being discussed until today. Or rephrased in modern terms: how can larger human populations be sustained in their spaces, with a respectable level of quality of life, dependent on areas with specific environmental conditions and resources that secure continuous sustainable livelihood and access to food resources. In short, how can human beings balance the discrepancy between exponential population increase and required food supplies, to avoid ravaging catastrophes of starvation and environmental degradation? (Ehlers 1983:17).

Although these issues have been mainly discussed in relation to the earth's agricultural carrying capacity in support of an ever increasing global population and its density, it is worthwhile to focus here on northern ecosystems, e.g., in northernmost Europe, with extensive endogenous food resources from both fauna and flora that have been utilized by human beings for millennia. These local food resources have only been supplemented by limited agrarian production, introduced since the 17th century, which has seen a considerable decline since the 1960s. However, these endogenous resources have been displaced by a large variety of exogenous food items that have been introduced gradually over the last three centuries. These items, originating externally, have created a vulnerable dependency among northern local residents, and have also caused the reduction in the use of endogenous food resources leading to an imbalance between these two types of resource utilization. In the late 1990s, local Sami still stress the fact that '... living off the land' was still possible and feasible until the 1950s and 1960s with little reliance on external food items. By the end of this millennium, exogenous goods and food, as well as external institutional interests—i.e., central governments or special groups such as sport fishers—are pervasively either gradually displacing or diverting the endogenous food resources, limiting thus their availability for local residents.

This incongruous situation, characterized by considerable external pressures, begs the question: how many people can, in fact, comfortably and securely live in subarctic and boreal regions and still rely on the food security provided by endogenous resources without becoming over-dependent on exogenous providers, meaning institutional controls and consequent

subsidization? Are these northern areas of the modern industrialized world, based on environmental and socio-economic factors, evenly populated or, in fact, overpopulated, which would necessitate a reduction in the number of people residing permanently in these areas? (Müller-Wille W. 1978:22-28)—questions that are pressing in the minds of local residents at the northern fringe of human ecumene (Müller-Wille L. 1998).

Calculations have been made of population size and density related to politico-administrative units, as well as bio-climatic regions or ecosystems, in order to assess their human carrying capacity. For example, based on a global comparison for 1965 (the total world population density is given an index of 1.00), the subarctic and partially boreal areas that include Sapmi show an index of 0.08 or less with a factual density of between 0.5 and 1.8 inhabitants/km². At that time, in projection to the year 2000 and beyond, these northern European regions were depicted as 'stable' with respect to their population size and carrying capacity (cf. Müller-Wille W. 1978:51—Table 8, Hustich 1979). However, by 1990, these values had increased considerably, and density figures read now between 4 and 11 inhabitants/km² depending on the administrative unit (Seppänen 1995). These numbers tend to indicate that the region is currently overpopulated and possibly overexploited, mainly by expanding external interests giving attention to energy extraction and recreational use. If local self-reliance and -determination should not be jeopardized, then it is paramount that northern residents (i.e., Sami), make their own decisions on food security and sustainable development knowing their own capabilities to use the locally available living resources for one's own benefit for survival—a prerequisite for the continuation of cultural integrity (cf. Dahl 1998).

2. SECURING FOOD: ENDOGENOUS RESOURCES USED BY THE SAMI

The historical record indicates that, for centuries, food security (i.e., the supply of sufficient food for the survival of human societies in specific ecosystems), was provided and 'guaranteed' for the Sami by a large array of living resources accessible endogenously from fauna, flora, and water available in the boreal and subarctic environments. The extraction and processing of these resources for purposes of human consumption has keenly been developed through adaptation by the Sami over long periods of time (Itkonen 1948:253-298). The emerging and accumulating knowledge and related skills

to extract food from living resources have been transferred from generation to generation (Itkonen 1921). They both still shape the processing, preservation, and distribution of endogenous food items in modern times. Sami clearly believe that endogenous food resources, integral elements of their culture and economy, are healthy, tasty and sufficient to offer a rich diet including protein, vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients. In short, local food items are the 'ideal diet' defined by its physical properties and cultural values attached to it. Furthermore, particular items, having medicinal properties, have also been applied in the treatment of illnesses until contemporary times.

The subarctic and boreal fauna is rich in a variety of species that were and still are a principal food resource for human beings in these northern circumpolar regions. Originally, the Sami obtained their food with high protein and fat contents from edible mammals such as wild reindeer, moose (elk), bear, beaver, fisher, squirrels, and, to a lesser degree, from hare, wolverine (glutton), lynx, marten, and seals (excluding clearly wolf and dog) and, finally, the migratory reindeer with whom the Sami established a close link by herding and using them in a number of different ways (Itkonen 1921:36). Over centuries, the reindeer—also called *Godsend* by Sami (Itkonen 1921:2)—became the mainstay and staple of Sami food economy, and the central cultural symbol, by providing the bulk of the principal nutritional requirements for meat as well as dairy besides materials for clothing and tools (Itkonen 1921:5-58). [For a similar situation among subarctic aboriginal peoples—Algonkin Naskapi and Athapaskan Dene—see Meredith & Müller-Wille 1982 and Müller-Wille L. 1974]. Furthermore, fowl and their eggs, although not a predominant resource, were hunted, collected and consumed such as various species of grouse (ptarmigan, capercaillie, etc.) and waterfowl (ducks, geese, swans, and gulls). An additional food source, that continues in its importance to modern times, was fish—both fresh and salt water species—with the migratory salmon in its varieties as one of the primary and highly valued resources. Among the many land-locked species whitefish, trout, char, pike, grayling, and perch were mainly caught and consumed. Next to salmon, cod was an important salt water species, used by Sami along the Arctic Ocean coast.

Despite natural limitations in its range of species, the subarctic and boreal flora has offered the Sami a variety of food items that were crucial to their livelihood in these regions. Trees, such as birch for sap and pine for bark, provided items that were used as supplemental ingredients with other foods. This was also done with

plants such as angelica and sorrel, which were mixed in with other foods or eaten separately. The most important and valuable plant resource was, and still is, berries of a wide variety such as cloudberry—the crown among northern berries, crowberry, blueberry, and lingonberry that supply essential vitamins. Other plants that were part of the diet were mushrooms and lichens that were found in abundance in the forest environment.

The Sami prepared and preserved the above mentioned food items in various ways, depending on the type, season, and requirements; these ways were boiling, frying, drying, and smoking, or immediate consumption of raw food. The variety in food processing contributed to securing the availability of these items throughout the annual seasonal rhythm—practically a system of food security (although knowledge existed that an even level of food production was not always guaranteed and that periods of scarcity needed to be faced and overcome). The success of this supply strategy was mainly dependent upon environmental conditions and socio-economic circumstances, that included the acceptance of starvation periods which occurred from time to time.

An expansion of the endogenous food resources occurred in Sapmi with the gradual introduction of state-supported and encouraged agricultural colonization since the 17th century that utilized existing natural conditions favorable to the establishment of hay-dairy farming. This type of farming, relying on local resources, became fully integrated into the Sami economy and is seen by them as being part of the endogenous food cycle. Wherever the soil and climatic conditions were favorable to develop arable lands, these activities included the tilling of fields for hay and limited grain (mainly oats) production, vegetable plots to grow potatoes, carrots, parsnip, etc., and the keeping of livestock (dairy cows, sheep, goats, and even horses, but not pigs) for meat and dairy products. Agricultural products did supplement the Sami diet; however, because of their natural limitations, they never played a dominant role in the supply of locally produced food items as part of the original economy. In fact, in more recent times, in particular since governmental programs were introduced to reduce agricultural productivity in the north since the 1960s, local farm activities have almost completely been abandoned in some areas. Their products have been replaced by imported processed food items as discussed below.

3. DEPENDENCE AND GLOBALIZATION: THE INVISIBILITY OF FOOD PROVENANCE

Historically, it is understood that the food system, described above for the Sami in northernmost Europe, did not exist in isolation. External relations with surrounding peoples to the south have resulted in the steadily increasing introduction of exogenous food items that, over centuries, have altered the dietary habits and conditions of the Sami considerably. External trade with aboriginal Sami can be traced back some thousand years at least—in fact, these trade relations are the beginnings of first supplementing and then gradually displacing endogenous food resources. At that time—between 800 to 1,000 years ago—external interests in Sapmi expressed by Scandinavians, Finns, and Russians were focused foremost on fur resources as a valuable trade item with the Orient. However, the very exogenous food item central to this trade became alcohol, as a means of payment and enticement—a substance unknown to the Sami that would shape the relationships between them and their southern neighbors and would have a lasting impact on how Sami society developed internally and externally over the years to come (Länsman 1999). Other exogenous food items, whose usefulness and nutritional value is today doubted, but whose recreational and cultural value has been highly placed within the food household, were, in succession: tobacco, beer, coffee, tea, and sugar. These food items have been introduced to and readily accepted and integrated by Sami since the 17th century.

In the 1930s, Israel Ruong, a Sami himself, studied the process of the gradually changing foundations of the Sami food economy in a reindeer herding community in northern Sweden that had experienced an increased loss of control over its lands and resources and, in particular, a mounting degree of dependency on external commodities such as food items (Ruong 1937, cf. Müller-Wille L. 1987:352). Ruong called this process and situation 'distant consumption' (Ruong 1937) referring to the erosion of the endogenous, (i.e., local control) by the Sami with regard to securing their own food resources that could be assured by self-determined means. Ruong's keen interpretation of the process of an ever-present dependence on external resources is still today characteristic of the situation in Sapmi, however, can also be applied to other regions of the world.

In the 1970s, Pertti J. Peltó, having studied the introduction of the snowmobile into reindeer herding

(Peltó 1973), introduced the term of 'de-localization,' meaning "...the tendency for any territorially defined population to become increasingly dependent on resources, information flow and socio-economic linkages with the systems of energy and resources outside their particular area" (Peltó 1978:31). His interpretation focused on the import and integration of technological innovations, such as motorized off-road vehicles, into ecologically adapted economic activities, such as reindeer herding. These innovations, whose suitability and applicability was rapidly accepted, radically altered work and land-use practices and strategies as well as socio-economical relationships and conditions. However, they also created a strong dependency on items whose origin, design, and maintenance could not easily be influenced, since their infrastructure was exogenous to the Sami. Peltó's concept applies also very appropriately to the rapidly expanding increasing process of the de-localization of food resources and items.

Historically, the transition from locally based systems to spatially broader and exogenous systems occurred in Sapmi after World War II and, in particular, since the 1950s and 1960s when the institutions of the Nordic welfare states expanded their centrally-run social and economic programs nationally. For the northern regions in these states, this meant the accelerated construction of an infrastructure (roads, central settlements, communication, and service facilities). By roughly the mid-1970s, practically all, until then isolated and scattered, settlements and homesteads were connected with the national (and thus international) network of transportation. This new geographical condition of broader interconnectedness developed parallel to the extension of distribution patterns to import more and more packaged, prepared, and processed exogenous food items through commercial marketing, that was fed by national and international interests and networks. Marketed first through individual traders and then predominantly through chain stores, exogenous items competed with endogenous food resources that were distributed *via* exchange and barter through family and community networks locally. Gradually, endogenous food resources were displaced in their importance, and their portion of the daily diet was reduced, although never fully replaced. In more recent times, changes in economic activities and employment also altered eating habits of local Sami whose daily schedule became more rigid and fragmented. Store bought food and the menus of 'globalized food'—e.g. 'hamburger,' 'hot dog,' 'pizza', etc.—offered by the rapidly expanding chains of fast food restaurants in even

the smallest settlements have become, in fact, one of the main sources of nutrition, and thus food security for the local population. What type of food of what substance, ingredients, and ecological origin is introduced and sold is not guided any more by endogenous conditions and resources. Rather the guidance is taken from market assessments based on commercial principles that do not necessarily take into account values of nutrition, health, and culture. In order to succeed under these circumstances, endogenous food items have to be processed and marketed in the same way as exogenous items if their position should be maintained to benefit local resident populations as they did historically.

Thus today, endogenous and exogenous food items exist next to each other, deriving, on the one hand, from local living resources whose economic importance has been gradually reduced (and in part usurped and controlled), by external interests (cf. sports fishing, Burgess 1999). On the other hand, exogenous food originates from far distant resources whose exploitation and utilization is under the control of others who have developed global markets for their distribution. The value and appeal of exogenous food can be debated; however, in many cases they have positively contributed to better the conditions for nutrition and health. Still, their application has also caused nutritional, physical, and cultural changes among the Sami in subarctic regions that cannot be discussed extensively. Rather, I like to focus on the future place of endogenous food in Sami society as the continuing link of the human environmental interactions that are expressed through the utilization of endogenous living resources securing and sustaining economic opportunities and maintaining, at the same time, a distinct cultural foundation.

4. DISPLACING LOCAL FOOD: THE FUTURE OF ECOLOGICALLY AND CULTURALLY BASED DIETS IN SAMI SOCIETY

Most of the endogenous food resources that have been used by Sami are today still part of their diet, although to a much lesser degree than before the period of modernization. Some items have even disappeared altogether from the local menus, e.g., some wildlife, bark, sap, lichen, grass, reindeer milk and cheese, etc. These components were quite often items of scarcity and rarity that were eaten during emergencies and starvation. Introduced exogenous food items have had their inroads by displacing local food resources from the daily diet. Thus, in the late 1990s, it is fair to say that

reindeer, fish, berries, and, to some extent, fowl, have remained as the major endogenous food resources that are still very much maintained and appreciated and are, as much as possible, part of the local food consumption.

Sami society, as mentioned above, has put a high nutritional and cultural value on endogenous food items which, in the context of and in contrast to the increased import of exogenous food, have now obtained the status of 'cultural or ethnic food,' meaning that they are distinct and labelled as being Sami. To compensate for the loss of its dominant position in the daily diet, the harvesting, preparation and consumption of endogenous food today has evolved also into an expression of one's cultural identity, by stressing the fact that these food items are elements of Sami culture maintaining distinctness. Thus, even the composition of the diet can also take on symbolic and ritual dimensions for some people, by celebrating specific types of food at particular times to infer the Saminess of this food item and the resource, e.g., the preparation of reindeer products such as blood cakes, boiled bone marrow and hoofs, dried and smoked meat, to name just a few as an example.

Another aspect of "distant consumption" and "de-localization" is the displacement of local control over endogenous resources by external interests that have usurped a local food resource as theirs by imposing encroaching regulations for its harvest issued by the central state. The salmon is a prime example as it has become the fish with the highest appeal to sports fishers who have, through lobbying, forced local Sami fishers to reduce their take. In this case, the salmon harvest serves the external market, and so much any more the local dietary and cultural needs which have been disregarded and displaced (Burgess 1996).

Sami have fully realized the evolving process of dependence and globalization and its impending impact on local conditions, environmentally and culturally. Their position is clearly stated by Pekka Aikio (1992), saying that the rights to use the resources in one's own environment is closely tied to human rights, cultural self-determination, and governance. Food security, the access to local living resources through appropriate sustainable development, is one element of maintaining control over one's own destiny.

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