

Fishing in Inari and Utsjoki

Although the concept of "Sami livelihoods" has been used for a long time, what it actually means is vague (or unclear). When speaking of indigenous Sámi livelihoods (or occupations) the common understanding is a reference to a primary production as the source of income. It includes such activities as agriculture, reindeer herding, fishing, small-scale family forestry, gathering of natural products, together with the handicraft-like manufacture of traditional articles. Nowadays, due to changed circumstances, modern money-earning activities exist together with the traditional ones.

From the perspective of fishing for domestic consumption, the most important water areas are, the rivers Tenojoki and Näätämöjoki, and the fell (land) lakes. The most important tourism fishing areas are the Tenojoki and Lake Inarijärvi, where the local Sámi are able to benefit not only from fishing for the pot, but also by selling services to recreational fishermen, these services including accommodation, boat rentals and rowing services.

Fishing stands today as an essential economic activity. Indeed, fishing has always formed a substantial part of the use of natural resources by ancient Sámi population. Although, in our modern times, fishing is rarely the sole source of income for a household, it still enables the Sámi to meet their everyday nutritional needs. In summer, fishing tourists by the rivers Tenojoki and Näätämöjoki bring some extra income to the riverside population. Fishing is usually a secondary or an additional occupation, if not a mere hobby.

On the other hand, tourism proved to be a profitable field for the Sámi. Many Sámi people have built a holiday village or have established a campsite nearby their home. By the river Tenojoki, some of us hire boats and provide accommodation for salmon fishing tourists, others row boats while tourists troll for salmon. Fishing in the Utsjoki region is carried out mostly for own food, rather than for sale of fish to markets, in Inari, on the other hand, commercial fishing is an important support to the economy. The commercial fish are whitefish from Lake Inari and some of the smaller lakes in the area. All households in the area, whether engaged in commercial fishing or not, rely considerably on their outputs. Fishing is carried out by means of gill nets mostly, and almost every household carries out fishing activities at a number of different fishing locations. Since-ordinary nets are difficult to transport, most of them are near the houses, while gill-nets can be taken along easily for fishing even at the most distant lakes. Once again, mobility is a highly important aspect of these activities, and mobility is to a considerable extent a matter of over-land or over-ice travel, rather than boating on the lakes. This is because under-ice fishing plays a large role in the aspect of the household economy.

Hook and line fishing is a favourite sport of the boys and young men both in winter and summer. Ice-hole fishing begins about December and is stopped after June 1st. Lures of various colours are dangled through the ice-holes to catch perch, pike, grayling and trout. These catches are often very important additions to the family dinner table in households where income is slim. This kind of fishing is a fairly recent innovation among the Sámi.

Summer fishing with rod and reel is considered a sport, but brings in fair supplies of trout, grayling, pike and perch for some households. The cycle of fishing activities in the Inari and Utsjoki area in many respects moves contrapuntally with the reindeer herding. Some under-ice fishing goes on during the whole winter and early spring, it is especially December-May as the lake is ice covered that more intensive fishing begins for many households. Reindeer calving is nearly over when net-

fishing for whitefish becomes important for a brief period before midsummer. It is a good time to catch fish, and it is also high time to get away from the winter diet of reindeer meat.

The use of snowmobiles makes it possible to haul fishing supplies and equipment (including boats) to locations that were previously beyond the mobility range of an individual household. The men of Partakko and Sevetijärvi , for example, have since 1964 begun to make extensive use of lake Paudijärvi for under-ice fishing, but before the advent of snowmobiles they exploited that lake very little. A more striking example of this same increase in mobility in fishing is in the exploitation of lakes far in the backlands, such as lakes Kolmisjärvi and Surnujärvi. Some of the men from Partakko and Sevetijärvi have begun since 1964 to fish actively in that distant lake, since they are able to haul boats and equipment to the location using their snowmobiles. Numbers of other individuals in the region reported that they are now exploiting lakes that they had previously considered beyond their effective range of operation.

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