

Seeing the Wolf through Sami Eyes

– Understanding Human Dimensions of Wildlife Conflict in Northern Sweden

Alexander Sjögren, GPSS, ID 47-126871

Advisor: Professor Makoto Yokohari

Co-Advisor: Project Assistant Professor Toshinori Tanaka

Around the world, there are human-wildlife conflicts with negative implications for both people and wildlife, manifesting in forms such as crop raiding, livestock killing and retaliation killings of the animal transgressors. Human-wildlife conflict has been defined as “an overlap in the requirements of humans and wildlife”. It has however become increasingly recognized that human-wildlife conflicts are not just about humans having conflict with wildlife, but also about humans having conflicts with humans about wildlife.

The reason for such conflict lies in differences in interests for wildlife between various stakeholders, in turn determined by their underlying beliefs about nature, wildlife, and what kind of relationship humans should have to these. Generally, there is a divide between well-educated urban dwellers and their protectionist values of nature, and rural dwellers that typically have utilitarian values towards nature. While the ones creating wildlife management policy usually belong to the former group, those that mainly become affected by it tend to belong to the latter. Although there are economic elements involved in such conflicts, literature suggests that wildlife conflicts are often not about wildlife itself, but that they provide a battleground for deeper lying social beliefs held by the respective stakeholders. Further, the animal in question becomes a projection surface for the beliefs in question. One well-studied example is the wolf; while environmentalists typically view it as a symbol of freedom and a healthy ecosystem, its opponents view it as a symbol of governmental control and as a threat towards the existing order and traditional ways of life.

However, studies of the perspective of indigenous people in human-wildlife conflicts are however lacking. Indigenous people typically possess views of nature and wildlife which differs from that of the majority populations in their countries, leading to behaviors that might not fit in readily within the HWC framework. Further, their views which might prove valuable for our understanding of human-wildlife conflict in general.

In this thesis, the nature and wildlife values of the Sami, an indigenous, reindeer herding people in Northern Sweden, were studied. Historically marginalized, the Sami are currently being negatively affected by the carnivore management policy in Sweden, as well as the reestablishment of the wolf, and their resistance towards carnivores in general, and wolves in particular, creates tension between them and the government, as well as large portions of the majority population of Sweden.

The goal of this study was twofold; first, by characterizing the nature and wildlife values of reindeer herding Sami, the case study itself could be better understood. Second, but foremost; existing conceptual tools for understanding the human dimensions of human-wildlife conflict were tested on an indigenous people, in order to test their validity for such stakeholders. Data was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with reindeer herding Sami and analyzed using the following concepts, found in previous studies of human-wildlife conflict;

1. Man's place in nature (subjugation vs. domination): Whereas members of hunter-gatherer societies generally perceive themselves as subjects to the forces of nature, the shift to pastoralism brought with it a shift in mindset where nature is seen as something that can be tamed to suit human needs.

2. Perception of nature's value (intrinsic vs. material): Whereas environmentalists tend to acknowledge intrinsic values in nature and promote protectionism, people with a classic, utilitarian mindset tend to view nature foremost as a wealth of untapped resources awaiting human use.

3. Wildlife value orientations (mutualism vs. dominance): People with mutualistic values tend to feel an emotional connection with animals, acknowledge that they have an intrinsic value and believe they have rights, whereas people with a dominance view foremost value animals on the basis of their immediate usefulness to humans, and divide them into the categories "good" and "bad". There is a positive correlation between mutualism and urban residence, education and income.

4. Need structure (post-materialist vs. materialist): Whereas materialists focus on direct needs such as physical and economic safety, post-materialists focus on values such as self-expression and quality of life. Again, post-materialism is correlated with urban residence, education and income.

5. Access to social power (high vs. low): The environmental agenda tends to be dominated by a middle-class, urbanized worldview promoting protectionist values. Rural populations however, while often carrying the impacts of conservation policies they are seldom able to affect them. Because of this, they feel disempowered, and are likely to protest against such policies.

According to the predictions these concepts make about rural, livestock-owning people, the pastoralist Sami should display utilitarian, materialistic views of nature, and hold dominance values towards nature and wildlife. However, for concepts 1-4 the outcome was the opposite,

with the informants displaying strong mutualistic and protectionist beliefs towards nature and wildlife. Their access to social power was however, as expected, low. This has two implications.

First, the existing conceptual tools for studying human dimensions of human-wildlife conflict might be insufficient or inadequate when indigenous stakeholders are involved, as such stakeholders might share basic values of mutualism and protectionism with policy makers, but differ in their definition of “nature” as well as in their priorities in protecting nature.

Second, lack of recognition and lack of opportunities to shape wildlife policy has led to resentment among reindeer herders, which makes reconciliation difficult. Therefore, when creating environmental policy, it is important to involve affected stakeholders early in the process, as well as taking into account ideas about nature, people, and what the proper relationship between these are, for creating acceptance and ultimately success.