

# Debate concerning the early transport infrastructure in the Sámi area of Finnish Lapland

**RITVA KYLLI,**

*University lecturer,*

*History, Culture and Communication Studies, Faculty of Humanities,*

*University of Oulu,*

*Finland*

*Corresponding author: email: [ritva.kylli@oulu.fi](mailto:ritva.kylli@oulu.fi)*

**JUHA SAUNAVAARA,**

*Assistant Professor, Arctic Research Center, Hokkaido University,*

*Japan,*

## ABSTRACT

This article examines early Arctic transport infrastructure, especially roads, in the Sámi area of Finnish Lapland during the interwar period. The modernisation process accelerated the utilisation of northern natural resources, and the first roads in northernmost Finland also facilitated mining industry and logging sites. In the research concentrating on infrastructure, indigenous peoples have often been depicted one-dimensionally as victims and forces resisting development. While this study introduces the views of various stakeholders, it also emphasises the importance of understanding indigenous peoples as active agents, some of whom actively lobbied for plans to build roads. While the Sámi resistance to roads referred to, for example, their ability to damage and erode the traditional way of Sámi community life, the supporters underlined the economic possibilities and other benefits to be gained from the improved connectivity. Even though the vocabulary of the 1920s and 1930s differs from today's language use, many of the ideas which have been discussed more recently – such as remoteness as a potential asset and the value of being disconnected – were already present in the debates of the beginning of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** *indigenous peoples, Lapland, transport infrastructure, roads, Sámi*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Increasing attention has been paid to both the development of Arctic and northern natural resources, as well as connectivity in and throughout the Arctic area, but these are neither new nor unrelated issues (see, e.g., Keskitalo et al. 2019). As in other areas around the world, the connection between resource extraction and development of infrastructure is, and has been, strong in the Arctic – including the Barents Region. Roads are typical examples of infrastructure building that affect landscapes and ecosystems. Despite their potential to foster economic growth, roads have contributed to worsened social inequality and caused conflicts regarding land use (Forman and Alexander 1998; Coffin 2007; Perz et al. 2008; Perz 2014; Bennett 2018). Perz (2014, 178) argues that the reality of road impacts is decidedly mixed, and debate about building new infrastructure has intensified in recent years. While this may be true – not least because of the new information and communications technology solutions that have dramatically increased ways of sharing information and expressing opinions in a public forum – our article demonstrates the great number of conflicting interests involved in the road-building processes already during the interwar period.

The location of natural resource extraction sites have typically determined the course of the first roads in the Arctic and other sparsely populated regions (Masquelier 2002, 835). In Finnish Lapland, the discovery of gold in the Sámi municipality of Inari in the late 1800s, and the mining and road building that followed, attracted new people to the area, inflicting damage on the environment (Pari kesää 1873). Other types of road infrastructure projects in the Arctic were initiated only relatively recently. The examples from Finland show that these projects were preceded by vigorous debates, and the various stakeholders expressed arguments both for and against the planned projects.

This article finds inspiration from earlier studies describing the relationship between colonised people and roads (cf. Masquelier 2002), but emphasises the multiple voices of indigenous peoples and questions whether the colonised people have always regarded new infrastructure projects that aim to improve transport networks as a threat. We have sought answers to the following questions: How did different stakeholders, especially the Sámi, an indigenous people of northern Fennoscandia, react to the planning or construction of road infrastructure in northern Finland in the early 1900s; what kinds of arguments did they use to either support or oppose the proposed projects; and how did the Sámi present their case?

---

Highlighting different views and opinions in the historical context may also provide new perspectives on the ongoing transport infrastructure debates in northern Finland and the Barents Region.

The spatial focus of the study is on the border municipalities of Utsjoki and Inari in Finnish Lapland. The decision to concentrate on Utsjoki is based on the fact that, during the first half of the twentieth century, Utsjoki was the only municipality in Finland where the Sámi were in the majority, and municipal decision-making was in the hands of the Sámi people. Utsjoki had 491 Sámi and 37 Finnish inhabitants in 1920, and the villages of Utsjoki, Nuorgam, and Outakoski covered an area of some 5,000 square kilometres. In the past centuries, some residents from the Finnish areas had moved to Utsjoki, but they had usually quickly adopted the Sámi language and the Sámi way of life. In the interwar period, the Finnish population of Utsjoki consisted mainly of Finnish officials and their families, who had moved there from the south. (Rosberg et al. 1931.) For comparison, many Finnish people had moved to the municipality of Inari, situated south of Utsjoki, and the Sámi lost their majority position there during the early decades of the twentieth century. Many Sámi nevertheless remained active in the municipal administration and participated in discussions about the construction of road infrastructure.

This article consists of five parts. First, we will review research concerning infrastructure development and improved connectivity, especially in the context of indigenous people and road building. Second, the history of early transport infrastructure development in the northernmost part of Finland is described and placed in the context of the history of northern Fennoscandia. The third and fourth part examine the arguments different stakeholders made in order to resist or support the construction of roads. The conclusion summarises the most important findings and highlights the variety of different voices and motives behind them.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, DATA, AND METHODS**

The importance of core infrastructure, such as roads, airports, mass transit, and sewer and water systems, have been central when the relationship between aggregate productivity and government spending variables has been analysed (Aschauer 1989). Similarly, access to infrastructure services has been recognised as a key factor contributing to the reduction of income inequality and inequalities in the fields of healthcare and education. Furthermore, the improvement in the transport and tele-

communications infrastructure should, in principle, help the often underdeveloped remote areas become connected with the economic activities of the core regions (Calderon and Serven 2004; van Zon and Mupela 2016). While the improved connectivity appears to be a general good that produces positive effects in the lives of all community members, there are both contemporary and historical examples demonstrating hesitation about, even resistance to, the transport and telecommunications infrastructure projects.

The presence of various indigenous groups is a factor affecting most, if not all, infrastructure projects in the Arctic, but one should be careful not to oversimplify the relationship between indigenous peoples and roads. During the early 1900s, construction of roads lifted many indigenous groups from isolation and, in some cases, even led to their assimilation (see, e.g., Bodley 2008, 291–292). Ponsavady (2014, 6–9), who studied the introduction of motorised transportation in French colonial Indochina in the 1920s and 1930s, argued that colonial roads penetrating the inland were constant reminders of Western presence, even to the most isolated communities. The roads removed the tax money to colonial capitals and led colonial authorities to their villages. Meanwhile, Bennett (2018, 134–140) has brought this discussion into the context of Arctic indigenous communities, challenging the idea that roads would invariably be top-down initiatives which negatively impact indigenous peoples and their lands. Bennett has shown that the northern indigenous communities have also initiated and lobbied for road projects; for example, this was the case in the Canadian Arctic's Mackenzie Delta, even when there were threats of environmental degradation as well as cultural upheaval.

This research contributes to the analysis of relations between indigenous people and road infrastructure through a study of historical sources dating back to the late nineteenth and, in particular, to the early twentieth century. This was a period when the literacy rate had already risen, and an increasing number of newspaper articles and opinion pieces were produced by the Sámi themselves (Kylli 2012, 214). Furthermore, the publishing channels were also developing. A nonpartisan newspaper called *Rovaniemi: Pohjolan ja Lapin ääni* [Rovaniemi: The voice of Lapland and the North] was founded in Rovaniemi in 1921. The first issue stated that the province's own newspaper was necessary for its development: "After all, who could talk with the same devotion and expertise, for example, *about the further development of our transport vehicles* than ourselves in the columns of our own newspaper" (Lukijalle, 1921. Note: All translations from Finnish to English made by the authors).

The voices of the Sámi had often been silenced or neglected (see, e.g., Rese 1889), but the *Rovaniemi* also wrote about Utsjoki and Inari issues and the inhabitants' wishes related to government actions. The newspaper's relations with the Sámi were manifold. In some of the writings published by the paper, the Sámi were inevitably regarded as an extinct people. Eero N. Manninen, who had worked as a rural police chief in Utsjoki, authored an article in 1929 entitled "There is no need to grind the Lapps down, they will crumble all by themselves". In the absence of a vibrant culture, according to Manninen (1929), the Sámi had no opportunity to maintain their nationality among the more powerful people. At the same time, the *Rovaniemi* occasionally used the word *Sámi* (that the Sámi use for themselves), although it became more common in Finland only during the second half of the twentieth century. During the early twentieth century, the Sámi were still generally referred to as *Lapps* in printed matter (see, e.g., *Rovaniemi* 1926).

This study is based on external and internal source criticism: we have contextualised the historical sources and examined the data in relation to the source's purpose and functional connections. Such contextualisation is a starting point for any historical research, but is made all the more necessary by the presence of various political controversies in Finland. These reflect, for example, the legacy of the Finnish Civil War (1918), which highlights the importance of understanding the context in which the discussion concerning the roads took place. It is also worth recognising that the national historiography, being the product of its own time, still described the Sámi as a primitive tribe which had always stepped aside and made room for the stronger Finnish culture (Lehtola 1999, 18–19)

### 3. FINNISH SÁPMI IN A MODERNISING WORLD

The Sámi area of northernmost Fennoscandia (Sápmi) covers the area from mid-Norway and Sweden to northernmost Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. The long distances and scattered settlements as well as transport routes serving the need to transport goods for trade and taxation from north to south have always been typical for the region. As rivers and other waterways have traditionally been the key transport routes, they have also played a central role in the colonisation of the area (Forsgren et al. 2016, 420–423). Although the Sámi area of the Swedish Empire (which Finland was a part of until 1809) was protected against settlement by a special Lapland border until the middle of the seventeenth century, as of the late seventeenth century, Finnish settlers were able to cross the border of Lapland.

Lehtola (2015, 25–29) has pointed out that the colonial authorities in Finland repeatedly came out in favour of farming over hunting and reindeer herding, arguing that the settlement was “for the good” of the Sámi. The colonisation spread rapidly to the south of the present Saariselkä mountain range, which is the main watershed of the area. While the rivers south of Saariselkä flow into the Gulf of Bothnia, the rivers of the Inari and Utsjoki area flow north, which supported the tight connections between the Utsjoki Sámi and the coastal communities in Norway. (Nahkiaisjoja 2016, 112.)

While the Sámi in Inari and Utsjoki succeeded in preserving their own culture much longer than the Sámi living further south, the special kind of Sámi politics Finland had, compared with Norway and Sweden, also affected them. The Finnish policy was based on the controversial idea of equality and claim that no special treatment or privileges would be needed if the Sámi were given the same prerequisites for well-being as everyone else. The downside of equal treatment was, however, that the traditions and practices of Sámi culture were ignored and the values and premises of the Finnish society were applied to the Sámi as well (Lehtola 2015; Nyysönen 2009, 167–170).

During the early twentieth century, the last remaining Sámi municipalities in Finland started to face the increasing pressures of modernisation and Finnish colonisation. The government of Finland sought to encourage the settlement in northern parts of the country by the Act of Ground Rent (1909) and the Woodland Settlement Act (1922). It also endeavoured to contribute to northernmost Finland’s road building in order to encourage forestry and other economic activities in the area. As a result, the northernmost areas of Finnish Lapland started to become both culturally and economically more connected to the rest of the country (Lehtola 2015, 26; Elenius et al. 2015, 235–237, 271–302).

### 3.1 No roads?

The Northern Sámi language term for roads, *geaidnu*, refers to either a road or a passage. The Teno River (*Deatnu*), for example, was an important *geaidnu* for the Utsjoki Sámi, in addition to footpaths (Lehtola 2012, 71). However, from the perspective of Finnish authorities, Finnish Lapland seemed an area without any decent routes, and they had worked since the mid-nineteenth century to build roads in the north (Enbuske 2009, 236–258). The roadless state of northernmost Lapland also attracted public attention and was perceived as a national shame. A Finnish newspaper wrote that “although the population of Utsjoki is small in number, the dignity

of our state (...) requires that a good road should be built there in the near future” (Perimmäisestä 1926). According to another newspaper article, published in 1887, the absence of roads made travelling in northernmost Lapland a life-threatening pursuit. The writer described how roads would be the vital arteries to revitalise the ailing region (F–n. 1887). This vocabulary is not surprising; roads are commonly compared to life-sustaining blood vessels in argumentation for transport infrastructure, and blood circulation has often been used as a metaphor for road traffic (Ponsavady 2014, 8).

When Petsamo (Pechenga District) became a part of Finland after the Treaty of Tartu (1920), Finland had its own corridor to the Arctic Ocean. The building of a road from Rovaniemi to Petsamo – which went through the traditional Sámi areas and the village of Ivalo in the municipality of Inari – was a great source of pride for Finns. Not only did the wide road enable speeds unseen on the narrow roads of northern Norway (Autolla 1930) but the discovery of nickel ore in the early 1920s further stressed the importance of the Petsamo region (Dunkers 1935). This example of Petsamo also underlines the role of the construction of infrastructure in assuming control over Arctic regions. According to Lähteenmäki (2017, 72), Finns began to develop Petsamo in the 1920s by legislation that favoured Finns in land acquisition and settlement, building Finnish schools, developing port operations, subsuming the area under Finnish postal and telegraphic systems, building a road, planning a railway connection, developing tourism, and by opening the Aero Yhtiö (founded in 1923) flight connection from Helsinki to Petsamo.

Petsamo’s railway connection sparked much discussion and hope in the 1920s, but the locals also considered other infrastructure needs. According to Ida Lehmusvirta, a Finn who worked in Inari as the headmistress of Riutula Children’s Home and was interviewed in 1924, the railway seemed like a dazzling dream. While its construction seemed impossible at the time, she underlined the importance of government funding earmarked for roads in Lapland. The road already reached the village of Ivalo and had been extended to north towards the village of Inari, but because of lacking funds, the project had been abandoned. Lehmusvirta further argued that the lack of roads hampered the development of economic prosperity of Inari residents, as it was not possible to transport trout, for example, elsewhere for sale (Mielenkiintoisia 1924). Eventually, by 1926, the road was extended to the village of Inari (Pohjolassa 1926).

### 3.2 “The most remote municipality”

The Sámi of Utsjoki had traditionally made their living primarily by fishing, animal husbandry, hunting, and reindeer herding. Some reindeer-herding Sámi families had moved to Inari in the late 1800s, but until that time, the Inari Sámi were mainly fishermen who also had some sheep (Nahkiaisaja 2016). In Utsjoki, the population had grown modestly even during the late nineteenth century, when, for example, Inari witnessed a remarkable population growth, and the Finnish settlement had not developed as the climate and soil conditions in the region did not seem capable of supporting a larger population (see, e.g., Buharov 2010, 173). During the interwar period, fishing was still practised to a great extent in Utsjoki, and reindeer husbandry was one of the main sources of livelihood (Kuvia Utsjoelta 1939). Although it was possible to journey from Utsjoki to southern Finland using a narrow footpath, Utsjoki was very much isolated from other parts of Finland. However, Utsjoki’s economic ties with the Norwegian side were quite strong, so much so that the local currency was the Norwegian krone (Rosberg et al. 1931, 358–375).

According to a travel report published by a Finnish magazine in 1889, the “civilised world” was right next to Utsjoki. In other words, there were plenty of telegraph poles on the Norwegian side of the border, thanks to which the guests from afar would have been able to send messages to their homes. The author described how unfair it seemed that, while railways were built in southern Finland every year, northernmost Lapland did not even get one road. In the winter, people in Utsjoki usually travelled along the Teno and Utsjoki Rivers, their sleds pulled by reindeer. This prompted the author to argue the case of a presumably cheap road passing the *Keneskoski* rapids, where many travellers took cold baths during the winter. He did not, however, trust the Sámi to take the initiative: “Do not, however, expect that the residents of Utsjoki will ever suggest it themselves; they have no idea of a road because they have never seen one, and are accustomed to moving throughout the forests and fells” (Rese 1889).

The construction of transport infrastructure eventually started to progress also in Utsjoki during the 1920s and 1930s when the ministry in charge of transport (*kulkulaitosministeriö*) granted funding for the construction of a few bridges (Utsjoen kunnan 1925). As travelling was very difficult during the *rasputitsa* (*kelirikko*), the Utsjoki municipal council approached the governor of the Province of Oulu and requested that measures be taken to alleviate the autumn and spring traffic. It was hoped that the main pedestrian path would be cleared to the extent that travel with a horse-drawn sleigh would be possible (Ahola 1926b; Utsjoen tiekurjuus 1926). A few kilometres of state-



funded roads had also been built in Utsjoki. The purpose of one short stretch of a road was to ease the transfer of boats past the Alaköngas rapids in the river Teno (Kehvas 1934). These roads were accessible only by horse-drawn vehicles and required further improvement before cars could be driven on them (Neitiniemi 1928).

Kaarlo Hillilä, who was appointed governor of the Province of Lapland – established in 1938 – wrote that roads construction was necessary for Finnish Lapland's economic development. According to him, the municipality of Utsjoki especially needed many improvements because it had to rely on the services offered by Norway in many matters:

Utsjoki is the most remote and backward municipality in our country, the development of which is a duty of the state. This is all the more striking not only to the local residents, but also to the many foreign tourists who travel from Hammerfest via Karasjok to the Teno valley or then via Skiippagurra to Nuorgam and have to make comparisons between Norway and Finland. (...) Norway has built a road to the Karasjok Sámi (Lapp) village from Hammerfest. Another road will take you from Vadsø via Skiippagurra to Kirkenes, and in addition, another road from Skiippagurra to Karasjok is being built. (...) On the Norwegian side, Karasjok has also a hospital, a doctor, a daily bus connection, services for tourists, etc. (Hillilä 1939.)

Hillilä also wanted to improve the safety and well-being of the Utsjoki inhabitants through the construction of roads. Utsjoki did not have a doctor of its own, and in cases of serious illness, inhabitants of the municipality had to seek help from the hospitals on the Norwegian side of the border. Health sister Saimi Lindroth (1970, 52–57), who worked in Utsjoki during the late 1930s, recalled later that she had once travelled with a patient to the Norwegian hospital in Vadsø for an appendectomy. To get an airplane rapidly enough was uncertain as Utsjoki had no airport, nor was it possible to land on the lake during the night. A horse carriage trip to Vadsø was therefore considered the safest option, but this proved too exhausting for the patient, who did not survive.

#### **4. SÁMI AREA OF PROTECTION? RESISTANCE TO ROADS**

Although water transportation had traditionally been the dominant method of transportation in the area that is today referred to as the Barents Region, technological improvements such as diesel engines made roads increasingly important during the first



*Map 1. Autoilijan tiekartta, the Motoring road map of Finland, first published in 1927.*

*Source: Autoilijan Tiekartta Suomi 1927: = Bilstens Vägkarta Finland 1927. [Helsinki]: [Maanmittaushallitus], 1927.*

half of the twentieth century (Forsgren et al. 2016, 421–423). At the end of the 1920s, the *Rovaniemi* newspaper shared with its readers exciting observations concerning the modernisation of traffic conditions and improvement of the overall economic situation. Cars had taken over the roads of Lapland, and horses were no longer used for longer journeys. The so-called backwoods roads no longer satisfied the needs of the travellers after people had become used to the speed and comfort of automobiles. After all, it was now possible to take a bus on the 300-kilometre-long road from Rovaniemi to Ivalo in just 11 hours. The settlements had also spread to new areas, and the roads increased the value of forests in the northernmost part of Finland, as they were now more easily accessible (Autot wallanneet 1928; Peräpohjolan ja Lapin maantieverkoston 1929).

Quick and comfortable travel did not, however, impress everyone. Over the years, doubts about the transport and telecommunications infrastructure projects in northern Finland have taken various forms. One example emerged in 1925 when the municipal council of Utsjoki approached the national Parliament suggesting that the municipality should be codified as a “Sámi area of protection” in which Finnish habitation, roads, or telephone networks should not be allowed. The inhabitants of Utsjoki

left their proposal with A. A. Neitiniemi, who represented Lapland in the Parliament (Huomattawa esitys 1925). According to Neitiniemi, Utsjoki municipality's proposal to protect Finland's "only whole" Sámi population was to be taken seriously. The initiative would not even have slowed down the progress of agriculture in Finland, as it was difficult to establish new farms in the semi-arctic climate conditions anyway (Lehtola 2012, 220–221). Utsjoki had already witnessed many unsuccessful agricultural experiments over the past decades, and some Finns were of the opinion that Finnish settlers had no reason to move there (Huomattawa esitys 1925).

Neitiniemi introduced the proposal in the Parliament of Finland, but the Commerce Committee rejected it. According to the committee, there had not been any disadvantageous changes in the population situation of Utsjoki, and changes were not expected either. As a barren northern area, Utsjoki was, in any case, protected from overly aggressive settlement, and the Finns interested in moving to the north preferred Petsamo. Subsequently, the proposal was ignored in the Parliament, and there was no further discussion (Lehtola 2012, 219–229). Yet, the proposal was seen as a very strange initiative because the general form of argumentation was to blame the government for not spending enough money on the construction of transport infrastructure in the border areas. The newspaper *Rovaniemi* had, for example, regarded the construction of new roads as the most urgent need in Lapland, especially in the municipality of Utsjoki (Nykyhetken kipeimmät 1924). It was an annoying surprise to suddenly find out that the official governing body of the municipality did not want to have a road connecting it with the rest of Finland. In May 1926, *Rovaniemi* wrote on the isolationism of Utsjoki: "Not even a telephone line is allowed to create the connection, not to mention the road. (...) It seems difficult to think that a region (...) opposes something that has definitely meant well" (Utsjoen eristäytymispyrkimykset 1926). The paper subsequently published many articles and opinion pieces related to the resistance cultivated in Utsjoki, and the discussion spread to other Finnish newspapers.

At the same time, Lapland was facing considerable population pressures from southern Finland. Governor Hillilä wrote at the end of the 1930s that population growth in the Province of Lapland had been stronger than elsewhere in Finland. There were many opportunities for work in Lapland's mines and logging sites, and the growing population demanded more farmland and dedicated development of the road network (Lapin läänin tieverkoston). It was within this atmosphere that the contemporaries began to worry about the potential damage the building of transport infrastructure might cause to the traditional way of life in Sámi communities.

Rural police chief Manninen (1929) believed that Sámi culture would die more rapidly, as more of the Sámi residential areas were acquiring transportation vehicles and modern roads. The municipality of Utsjoki also attempted, by resisting transport and telecommunications infrastructure, to ensure that the Sámi population would be fully protected in the future, i.e., Utsjoki would remain a Sámi municipality. The starting point of the proposal was that Finnish people could move to the Utsjoki area as settlers only with the permission of the municipal council. According to the council, Utsjoki was one of the most barren areas in Finland where farming had very poor prospects and reindeer herding was considerably more profitable. The Sámi residents of Utsjoki made their living in the semi-arctic region, but settlers who came from elsewhere did not manage as well. The proposal referred to cases where a Finnish settler had moved to the municipality, started a family, and tried to make living by agriculture. Finally, he – or at least his family – had become impoverished to the point of being dependent on municipal poor relief (Huomattawa esitys 1925).

The proposal was therefore based on the Sámi people's desire to protect their own community and the region from Finnish migrants. During the previous decades, new villages and mining and logging sites had been created in the Sámi residential areas. The municipality of Inari served as a warning to Utsjoki residents: since the early 1900s, roads from south had been built to Inari, leading to many new Finnish residents in the area (V.H. 1939). Roadsides gathered population now the same ways as river stems had before, roads went through the reindeer pastures, and the area started to become more dependent on the southern direction (Lehtola 2015, 29). The Finnish population in Inari had exceeded the number of Sámi in 1915. According to the book *Suomenmaa*, published in 1931, it seemed that lively transit and tourist traffic to the Arctic Ocean, development of animal husbandry, and increasing forestry were strengthening the Finnish culture in Inari even further (Rosberg et al. 1931, 344).

From the Utsjoki Sámi perspective, the Inari municipality, which had struggled with growing poor relief expenses during the 1920s, had more unrest due to Finnish people with “evil manners”. The Utsjoki Sámi had found that lumberjacks and even criminals had arrived from the south. The purpose of the Utsjoki municipal council's initiative had thus been “to prevent inactive human wrecks from arriving to the burden to the municipality” (Utsjoki 1925; Hytönen 1927). Interestingly, some clergymen of Finnish Lapland had also feared that good roads would bring “southern rabble” to the population centres of the north. The log-floating sites offered them examples of social unrest caused by the temporary workforce (Elenius et al. 2015, 284).

The large logging sites and their lumberjack culture were considered particularly threatening to the Sámi culture, and this partially explains the Utsjoki municipality's determination to oppose the road from Finland (Ahola 1926a). Inari Sámi Uula Sarre (1929) described in a newspaper article how reindeer husbandry in Inari had recently faced problems, and the reindeer herds had been reduced. Inari residents had tried to improve the situation and made applications to the governor, but the "mosquito's voice hadn't carried up to heaven". When the number of reindeer became smaller, people were forced to seek a living in forestry, working alongside Finnish lumberjacks. Sarre wrote: "In order to succeed in lumberjacks' working sites, a Sámi must live, talk, and dress like they do. And in order to protect himself in this inhospitable company from mockery, he will naturally try to fully adapt to the environment as soon as possible".

While the Sámi and Finnish values clearly collided in the discussion concerning Utsjoki roads, the debate was also seasoned with political prejudices. The period of Finnish independence had started with a civil war fought between the Reds and the Whites in 1918. This was very traumatic, and fear of communism prevailed in the young Finnish state until the Second World War (Jussila et al. 1999). In the 1920s, some Finns wondered whether it was possible that Utsjoki's isolation efforts stemmed from communism (Ahola 1926a). Unpatriotic thoughts were strictly condemned at this stage, and the possible spread of communism was closely monitored in Lapland. Fears were stirred up by the Pork Mutiny (*läskikapina*), organised by the Communist Party of Finland, in northern Finland near the Soviet border in 1922. However, communism never touched the municipality of Utsjoki (Aatsinki 2008). Utsjoki Sámi J. Guttorm (1929) wrote in the *Rovaniemi* that the Sámi world view was directly opposite to communist principles. Therefore, a good way to keep communism out of Finland's northern borders was to keep the area as Sámi as possible.

Some Finns also suspected that "Norwegian agitation" might be behind the Utsjoki residents' unpatriotic statements. During the First World War, Utsjoki had received food aid from officials on the Norwegian side of the border (Utsjoen oloihin 1926). Subsequently, in 1919–20, proposals had been made concerning the possibility of Utsjoki joining the Kingdom of Norway (Rosberg et al. 1931, 358–375). The *Rovaniemi* newspaper also asked for a contribution to the Utsjoki road debate from Utsjoki's Finnish minister, Juhani Ahola. According to him (1926), residents of Utsjoki were used to being afraid of Finns in the same way the Finns were afraid of the Russians. Residents of Utsjoki had no confidence in Finland, and they saw the proposals and actions by the Finnish government, authorities, and local Finns

only as restrictions on their freedom. For example, Utsjoki residents did not want a telephone line from Finland because they feared that it would be accompanied by the Finnish Border Guard.

Teacher O. J. Guttorm (1926), chairman of the municipal council of Utsjoki, denied that the inhabitants of Utsjoki would have wanted to isolate themselves from Finland. He emphasised that it was in fact a great honour for the Sámi to belong to Finland, the government of which they found much more prominent than the Norwegian government. According to Guttorm, the road from Finland was unwanted because the road-borne carriage of goods would not be advantageous until the railway, which now reached Rovaniemi, was extended at least to Ivalo. A telephone line from Finland was welcome, but the Finnish Border Guard was not. Lastly, Guttorm wrote: “Utsjoki residents would like to develop alongside with the Finns as Sámi.”

The editors of the *Rovaniemi* wondered, after reading Guttorm’s piece, if Utsjoki residents smuggled goods requiring customs clearance, as they refused to have the Finnish Border Guard. In any case, there seemed to be something very unpatriotic and suspicious in the resistance of the Utsjoki residents. According to the *Rovaniemi*, the residents of Utsjoki also showed a tendency towards isolationism by highlighting their Sáminess (*Rovaniemi* 1926). Lauri A. Yrjö-Koskinen (1926), a member of parliament, also commented that Utsjoki had by no means been ignored by the Finnish state. According to him, it was necessary to build a road from Inari to the Church of Utsjoki. He believed that although, at first, the residents of Utsjoki might not need the road leading to the south that much, the road would allow Finnish settlers, reindeer men, fishers, and traders to move in and settle in Utsjoki. It could then be expected that Utsjoki’s salmon, reindeer meat, and berries would move along the road through their own country to global markets.

Juhani Ahola noted that the interpretations made by the Finns concerning the arguments of the Sámi reflected existing prejudices and was of the opinion that the rapid construction of the telephone line would make Utsjoki residents more positive towards Finland. According to him, the Sámi believed that because they were *only* Sámi, the state did not pay any attention to their needs (Ahola 1926a; Ahola 1926c). Eero Maamies, who worked as a border-side consultant, emphasised that the telephone line would also be very important to the trade of reindeer products. The lack of telephones reduced Utsjoki reindeer herders’ competitive position compared to the reindeer owners of neighbouring countries (Utsjoen oloihin 1926).

## 5. “SAVAGE PEOPLE, WHO DON’T EVEN NEED THE ROAD?” – SÁMI SUPPORT FOR THE ROADS

Although Utsjoki and Inari had been part of the territory of Finland much longer than Petsamo, the roads of Petsamo were better funded and prioritised by the Finnish government. The benefits of the mining and tourism industries were considered more important than the possibility of the Sámi selling more fish or reindeer meat (Neitiniemi 1928; Peräpohjolan ja Lapin maanteitä 1929). While some Finns justified their opposition to the road for Utsjoki by the existence of more heavily populated areas that also lacked roads, there were also those who argued that public funds should not be used in the construction of infrastructure benefitting people whose “cultural level is low” and whose “development potential may be completely non-existent”. However, the Utsjoki road also had its supporters. Inspector Hytönen, for example, wondered why many saw Sámi reindeer herding as an insignificant source of livelihood even if much capital had been invested in the reindeer herds of northernmost Finland and that the area was an ideal location for reindeer herding (Utsjoen oloihin 1926; Hytönen 1927).

The question of roads and telephone lines in Utsjoki split opinions among the Sámi. While some resisted, others hoped for cheaper groceries and new job opportunities. The *Rovaniemi* newspaper published an interview with Hans Laiti, a successful Sámi tradesman who had recently travelled from Utsjoki to Helsinki in February 1925. The journey had lasted 14 days, first by reindeer and then by horse and train rides. It was no wonder that Laiti considered the creation of a decent transport connection with the rest of Finland as the most burning question for Utsjoki inhabitants. He maintained that the considerable rise in the prices of consumer goods and foodstuffs in Norway made the lack of a road even more painful. He also argued that the residents of Utsjoki wanted to have an electrical telegraph such as the people on the Norwegian side had already had for a very long time (Utsjoki, 1925).

Inspector Hytönen (1927) participated in the debate on Utsjoki road infrastructure in early 1927, when the most passionate discussion had already started to die down. He wrote:

Today it is a common wish in Utsjoki to get there a road from the Church of Inari. A little earlier (...) the inhabitants opposed it because of the fear of unsuitable Finnish material flooding into the municipality as a burden to the municipal poor relief. This fear remains, it has not evaporated. But there

have been recent experiences showing the difficulties this region faces if people are dependent solely on Norway.

For example, during the previous winter's severe shortage of fodder, Utsjoki inhabitants had been forced to buy hay from Norway, although the traders of Rovaniemi would have had significantly lower prices. According to Hytönen (1927), Utsjoki municipality's suggestion of a Sámi area of protection was perceived too much as a tendency towards isolationism. The fact that the municipality had tried to protect itself from vagrants and other "bad Finnish material" had only shown "a healthy social instinct rather than unacceptable isolation from the rest of Finland".

Inari Sámi Antti Aikio (1929), who worked in Inari as the head of the municipality, described the pending cases which needed the state's financial support in 1929, referring to the Laanila road and a plan to build a road from Inari village to Sikavuono. The alignment of the first of these was criticised. The road was not serving the needs of the local residents in the best possible way, because it had been built to Laanila at the beginning of the twentieth century after a small amount of gold had been discovered in the area (Lapinmaan kulta 1904). The planned eight-kilometre-long Sikavuono road would have connected Inari residents who lived in the western and northern regions (around the Muddusjärvi water system) to the traditional centre village of the municipality. Inari's municipal council had made its first appeal concerning this road in 1916, but the project had not made much progress in over thirteen years, although the municipal council had continued to submit new appeals. The road would have made it easier for many Inari residents to transport foodstuffs from the central village of Inari, especially in the summertime. Aikio complained: "At present, the only way to transport them is to carry them on one's back, but that, in itself, is already too severe for a person performing the task, and in the modern world these kinds of tasks should belong only to the slaves and savage people". After that, he wondered whether the Finnish authorities thought that the Sámi residents – especially those living in the western and northern parts of Inari – were among these savage people who required no road. The lack of a road was unbearable, especially to the poorest people, according to Aikio, because they could not purchase and transport all the necessary commodities during winter when sleds pulled by reindeer were used.

In 1929, the *Rovaniemi* wrote that the Norwegian state had shown, with great sacrifices made to supply roads as well as telephone and telegraph lines, how much care it had provided for its distant Sámi people. For example, the telephone lines located on



the border next to Utsjoki had not been driven by commercial interests, and they did not generate profit for the state. Instead, they had been built “solely for the well-being of the local population, few in number though the population was”. The conclusion was that, even if Utsjoki was not significant to the national economy, and so far no metal resources had been discovered, the state of Finland was also obliged to take care of its Sámi residents (Utsjoen maantie- ja puhelinkysymysten 1929).

At the end of the interwar period, telephone connections were built in Utsjoki, but only about 10 kilometres of roads existed (Hillilä 1939). This did not mean, however, that there would not have lived modern Sámi in Utsjoki, even though the idea of Sámi modernisation efforts sometimes provoked irritation. According to Veli-Pekka Lehtola (1999, 15–20), some travellers came to Lapland in the 1920s to seek “authentic Lapps” far away from the influence of civilisation. Because the Sámi were considered an archaic tribe, Finns may not have understood that there were also Sámi, such as senior juryman J. E. F. Holmberg living in Utsjoki’s northernmost village Nuorgam, who – according to one traveller – wanted to buy a car, but it was impossible, because there was no road that would have reached his home village (Kehvas 1934).

During the Second World War, the construction of roads, railways, and airports intensified in northernmost Finland and Norway. The snowploughed ice road that was made on the Teno River by German soldiers was also used by the locals. From the south, it was now possible to reach the village of Syysjärvi, 48 kilometres north of Inari, by car. In Utsjoki, the Germans constructed a road from Kaamanen to Karigasniemi which was situated southeast of the village of Karasjok in Norway. This simplified the transport of goods, especially in summer, because the main villages of Utsjoki were easy to reach from Karigasniemi by boat on the Teno River (Aikio 2006, 44–45).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Indigenous peoples have often been depicted one-dimensionally in research concentrating on infrastructure as forces resisting development. According to Bennett (2018, 137), researchers have tended to focus on confrontations and have seen indigenous peoples as victims of industrial development rather than as active agents. While the indigenous people and their resistance to colonial governments and modern nation states have been romanticised (Abu-Lughod 1990, 41; Bodley 2008,

1–3), the road construction projects have often been described as centrally-oriented, top-down processes in which the indigenous perspectives have been totally ignored (Masquelier 2002, 835; Perz 2014, 178; Smoker 2011, 212).

In reality, the situation has often been much more complicated. In Utsjoki, where the municipal administration was in the hands of the Sámi, the locals were accustomed to taking their own decisions. Neither the construction of a road nor telephone network was desired, as both could potentially increase the Finnish civil servants' or border guards' ability to control the lives of the Utsjoki people. Finnish geographer Ilmari Hustich wrote in 1946 (50–72) that Utsjoki seemed like a republic of its own and did not appear to need Finland for anything.

Although outsiders' views concerning the Sámi might have been constructed on images of primitivity, a Finnish writer who commented on the road question in Utsjoki concluded that the Sámi could present their case very wisely and were not at all as primitive as often presumed (A.G. 1926). Some Finns also noted that citizens of the "Utsjoki Republic", too, were interested in economic benefits: At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were many Sámi merchants in Utsjoki who had permission to bring commodities from Norway to Finland exempt from customs. Besides selling their products to locals, these Sámi merchants were making a good living serving customers from the Norwegian side of the border (Rajakauppa koskevia kirjeitä 1927–1941). These merchants were ready to welcome roads, especially if the roads were built between Utsjoki and Norway (A.G. 1926).

However, many considered the road as a channel through which troubles might arrive. The residents of Utsjoki wanted the population of the municipality to be limited in order to secure the Sámi people's ability to earn their income from reindeer herding and other traditional livelihoods. At the same time, the arrival of the so-called "civilisation" was considered a threat to the Sámi people's old habits and customs (Utsjoki 1925). Also, the discussion concerning poverty and economic possibilities was somewhat distorted. While the Finnish flank emphasised the economic opportunities, and at least some locals deemed the road building as a positive development from the perspective of their businesses, the Sámi community was also fearful that the road would bring poverty in the form of Finnish inhabitants unable to take care of themselves. The Finnish authorities also described the roads as factors increasing the safety, health, and well-being in the northern part of Finnish Lapland. Those Sámi who supported the road agreed with this argument.

All in all, even though the vocabulary used in the 1920s and 1930s differs from today's parlance, many of the ideas which have been discussed more recently – pertaining to remoteness as a potential asset and the value of being disconnected – already seem to have been present in a debate which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## REFERENCES

- Aatsinki, U., 2008. *Tukkiliikkeestä kommunismin: Lapin työväenliikkeen radikalisoituminen ennen ja jälkeen 1918*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Abu-Lughod, L., 1990. The romance of resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women. *American Ethnologist: Journal of American Ethnological Society*, 17, 1, pp. 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030>
- A.G., Utsjoen kysymys. *Rovaniemi* May 29 1926.
- Ahola, J., 1926a. Utsjoen kysymys. *Rovaniemi* June 19 1926.
- Ahola, J., 1926b. Utsjoen tiekysymykset. *Rovaniemi* October 7 1926.
- Ahola, J., 1926c. Keskustelua Utsjoen asiasta. *Iltalehti* November 17 1926.
- Aikio, A., 1929. Asioista, jotka nykyisin ovat Inarin kunnassa vireillä ja siis inarilaisten sydämillä. *Rovaniemi* November 9 1929.
- Aikio, Á., 2006. Johtolagaid ja johtinneavvuid nuppástusat = Kulkureittien ja -välineiden kehitys. In: V. Hirvonen, ed., *Dološ áiggi muitu: Eilinen keskellämme*. Ohcejohka: Ohcejohnjálmmi gilisearvi, pp. 42–53.
- Aschauer, D., 1989. Is public expenditure productive? *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 23, 2, pp. 177–200.
- Autolla Tampereelta Petsamoon ja Norjaan. *Aamulehti* August 4 1930.
- Autot wallanneet Perä-Pohjolankin koko liikenteen. *Rovaniemi* October 11 1928.
- Bennett, M. M., 2018. From state-initiated to indigenous-driven infrastructure: The Inuvialuit and Canada's first highway to the Arctic Ocean. *World Development*, 109, pp. 134–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.04.0>
- Bodley, J., 2008. *Victims of progress*. Fifth edition. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Buharov, D. N., 2010. *Matka Lapissa syksyllä 1883*. Helsinki: SKS.
- Calderon, C. and Serven, L., 2004. *The effects of infrastructure development on growth and income distribution. Policy research working paper No. 3400*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- Coffin, A. W., 2007. From roadkill to road ecology: A review of the ecological effects of roads. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 15, 5, pp. 396–406.
- Dunkers, R., 1935. Petsamon nikkelitunturille kulkee tie pilvien yläpuolella. *Suomen Kuvalehti* November 23 1935.
- Elenius, L., Tjelmeland, H., Lähtenmäki, M., Golubev, A., Niemi, E. and Salo, M., (eds.) 2015. *The Barents Region: A transnational history of subarctic Northern Europe*. Oslo: Pax forlag.
- Enbuske, M., 2009. *Vuosisadat Pohjan teillä: Tiet, liikenne ja tiehallinto Oulun läänin alueella 1600-luvulta 2000-luvulle*. [Oulu]: Tiehallinnon Oulun tiepiiri.
- F–n., A. B., 1887. Lapinmaan kulkukeinojen johdosta. *Uusi Suometar* February 24 1887.

- Forman, R. T. T. and Alexander L. E., 1998. Roads and their major ecological effects. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 29, pp. 207–231.
- Forsgren, A., Shpak, A. and Sychenkova, E. V., 2016. Transport. In: Mats-Olov Olsson et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of the Barents Region. Volume II* N–Y: Oslo: Pax, pp. 420–427.
- Guttorm, J., 1929. Lappalaisuus ja lapinkieli. *Rovaniemi* July 11 1929.
- Guttorm, O. J., “Utsjoen eristäytymispyrkimykset” y.m. kirjoitusten johdosta. *Rovaniemi* June 19 1926.
- Hillilä, K., 1939. National Archives Oulu, Kaarlo Hillilän arkisto De:7. Utsjoen kunnan oloja, August 25 1939.
- Huomattava esitys lappalaisasutuksen turvaamiseksi Pohjois-Lapissa. *Rovaniemi* February 7 1925.
- Hustich, I., 1946. *Tuhottu ja tulevaisuuden Lappi*. Helsinki: Kustannustalo.
- Hytönen, V., 1927. Rajaseutujemme köyhäinhuolto-olot. *Sosiaalinen aikakauskirja* January 1 1927.
- Jussila, O., Hentilä, S. and Nevakivi, J., 1999. *From grand duchy to a modern state: A political history of Finland since 1809*. London: Hurst.
- Kehvas, 1934. Rajaseudun kuvia. 20. Utsjoeka, Tenon tienoota ja Ruijaa. *Rajaseutu* October 1 1934
- Keskitalo, E. C. H., Pettersson, M. and Sörlin, S., 2019. Introduction: Understanding historical contingencies into the future: Cases from northern Europe. In: E. C. H. Keskitalo, ed., *The politics of Arctic resources: Change and continuity in the “Old North” of Northern Europe*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1–17.
- Kuvia Utsjoelta. *Suomen matkailu* October 1 1939.
- Kylli, R., 2012. *Saamelaisten kaksi kääntymystä: Uskonnon muuttuminen Utsjoen ja Enontekiön lapinmailla 1602–1905*. Helsinki: SKS.
- Lapin läänin tieverkoston kehittämissuunnitelma s.a. National Archives Oulu, Kaarlo Hillilän arkisto De:7.
- Lapinmaan kulta. *Turun Lehti* May 5 1904.
- Lehtola, V., 1999. Aito lappalainen ei syö haarukalla ja veitsellä: Stereotyyppiä ja saamelainen kulttuurintutkimus. In: M. Tuominen, S. Tuulentie, V. Lehtola and M. Autti, eds., *Pohjoiset identiteetit ja mentaliteetit, Osa 1, Outamaalta tunturiin*. [Rovaniemi]: [Lapin yliopisto], pp. 15–32.
- Lehtola, V., 2012. *Saamelaiset suomalaiset: Kohtaamisia 1896–1953*. Helsinki: SKS.
- Lehtola, V., 2015. Sámi histories, colonialism, and Finland. *Arctic Anthropology*, 52, 2, pp. 22–36.
- Lindroth, S., 1970. *Terveysisärensä tunturipitäjänsä*. Mäntsälä: Tekijä.
- Lukijalle, 1921. *Rovaniemi* December 10 1921.
- Lähtenmäki, M., 2017. *Jälkiä lumessa: Arktisen Suomen pitkä historia*. Valtioneuvoston kanslian julkaisusarja 8. Helsinki: Valtioneuvoston kanslia.
- Manninen, E. N., 1929. Lappalaista ei ole tarvis sortaa, se sortuu itsestään. *Rovaniemi* April 27 1929.
- Masquelier, A., 2002. Road mythographies: Space, mobility, and the historical imagination in postcolonial Niger. *American Ethnologist*, 29, 4, pp. 829–856. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2002.29.4.829>.
- Mielenkiintoisia haastattelutietoja Lapista. *Aamulehti* August 8 1924.
- Nahkiaisaja, T., 2016. *Saamelaisten maat ja vedet kruunun uudistiloiksi: Asutus ja maankäyttö Inarissa ja Utsjoella vuosina 1749–1925*. Oulu: Oulun yliopisto.
- Neitiniemi, A. A., 1928. Lapin maantierakennustyöt. *Kaiku* October 28 1928.
- Nykyhetken kipeimmät tarpeet Lapissa. *Rovaniemi* February 21 1924.
- Nyyssönen, J., 2009. De finska samernas etnopolitiska mobilisering inom statliga ramar. In: L. Elenius, P. Lantto and M. Enbuske, eds., *Fredens konsekvenser: Samhällsförändringar i norr efter 1809*. Studier i norra Europas historia 7. Luleå: Luleå tekniska universitet, pp. 167–178.
- Pari kesää Ivalojoella. *Suomen Kuvalehti* February 1 1873.
- Perz, S., Brillhante, S., Brown, F., Caldas, M.,

Ikedá, S., Mendoza, E., Overdevest, C., Reis, V., Reyes, Jf., Rojas, D., Schmink, M., Souza, C. and Walker, R., 2008. Road building, land use and climate change: Prospects for environmental governance in the Amazon. *Philosophical Transactions of Royal Society B, Biological Sciences*, 363, 1498, pp. 1889–1895.

Perz, S. G., 2014. Sustainable development: The promise and perils of roads. *Nature*, 513, 7517, pp. 178–179.

Peräpohjolan ja Lapin maanteitä varten ehdotetaan ensi vuodeksi n. 13,3 milj. mk. *Rovaniemi* August 8 1929.

Peräpohjolan ja Lapin maantieverkoston kehittämisen. *Rovaniemi* June 29 1929.

Perimmäisestä Lapista ja Petsamosta. *Huoltaja* November 5 1926.

Pohjolassa valmistunut tai valmistumaisillaan useita tärkeitä maanteitä. *Pohjolan Työmies* July 13 1926.

Ponsavady, S., 2014. Indigènes into signs: Incorporating indigenous pedestrians on colonial roads in 1920s and 1930s French Indochina. *Transfers*, 4, 3, pp. 4–23.

Rajakauppaa koskevia kirjeitä 1927–1941. National Archives Oulu, Utsjoen nimismiespiiri HIII:2.

Rese, K., 1889. Lapissa. *Suomen matkailijayhdistyksen vuosikirja* January 1 1889.

Rosberg, J. E., Hildén K. and Mikkola E., 1931. *Suomenmaa: Maantieteellis-taloudellinen Ja Historiallinen Tietokirja. 9. Osa, [2. Nide], Oulun Lääni, Pohjoisosa*. Porvoo: WSOY.

*Rovaniemi* June 19 1926.

Sarre, U., 1929. Haluaako Suomi säilyttää Lapin kansan ja kielen? *Rovaniemi* April 27 1929.

Smoker, J. F., 2011. *The terra nullius of infrastructure: Roads to remote indigenous towns*. Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. School of Humanities. Curtin University of Sustainability Policy (CUSP).

Utsjoen eristäytymispyrkimykset. Mistä ne johtuvat. *Rovaniemi* May 11 1926.

Utsjoen kunnan kehnot tieolot. *Rovaniemi* October 22 1925.

Utsjoen maantie- ja puhelinkysymysten puolesta. *Rovaniemi* April 16 1929.

Utsjoen oloihin alettiin kiinnittää huomiota. *Rovaniemi* November 13 1926.

Utsjoen tiekurjuus. *Rovaniemi* October 14 1926.

Utsjoki, kappale eristetyssä asemassa olewaa Suomea. *Rovaniemi* February 24 1925.

V.H., Saame-kansan saavutuksia. Maa: *Suomen maatalousseurojen aikakauslehti* February 1 1939.

Yrjö-Koskinen, L. A., 1926. Agronomi Maamiehen haastattelun johdosta. *Iltalehti* November 17 1926.

van Zon, A. and Mupela, E., 2016. Connectivity and economic growth. *Macroeconomic dynamics*, 20, pp. 2148–2172.

