

## 5. EDUCATION, RECREATION AND FAMILY

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### **The family unit**

A family is a unit of people who can be understood both as a close unit of people responsible for the care and welfare of those closest (like mother, father and children) and as group of people related through blood relations or through the acceptance of having a similar relationship. The family defined by law is not necessary the same as the family accepted by the people in the family. Historically speaking many communities have had a tradition for the use of informal adoption of children and of males and females living in relationships not registered as marriages. Similarly many children have been born outside of marriage. Unlike many other parts of the world it carries, in many parts of the Arctic, little stigma to have children outside of marriage. Among the well-known examples is the Norwegian Crown-princess who prior to her marriage to the Norwegian Crown-prince had a son born outside of marriage. Another example is the high acceptance of divorce. The most illustrating example probably being Vigdis Finbogadottir who despite being a divorced single mother served as the president of Iceland in four consecutive periods (1980, 1984, 1988 and 1992).

Even if the acceptance is high for relationship outside of marriage, single mothers and children born outside of marriage it is important to realize that there are differences also within Arctic countries. For example there are areas, some of them in the Nordic countries, where there are large minorities and historically majorities of fundamental Christians with moral objections to relationships outside of marriage.

In many Arctic communities each family was an integrated part of a larger community. One example was the Sámi villages or kin-groups called *siidas*, which functioned as a unit deciding how to share nature resources. In many ways it can be claimed that the *siidas* functioned as a kind of extended family. Due to a number of factors, among them the influence of national law and change in economical structures, the *siida* is no longer functioning as in earlier time ( Bjorklund and Eidheim 1997). However some of the traditions of the *siida* remain and have consequences for the function of the extended family. The mother, father and children unit is much more part of the larger community than in the ethnic Norwegian tradition. Among the Inuit people traditions of marriage and family structure far different from the European norm has been described (Kjellström 1973). One of the traditions have included the sharing children and informal adoptions. Those traditions still, to some extent, seem to exist.

Regardless of how it is defined the family has always been important as the backbone of Arctic communities. Children have been raised by their parents and have received their first education into social norms, in ways to behave and sometimes historically also the skills of surviving and living within the family and their local communities.

For indigenous populations, like the Inuit and Indians in the Canadian and US Arctic, the colonialism of outsiders have brought important changes to the fabric of local communities and families. The harsh policies of the past of removing children from their families, educating them in “national” languages and forcing them not to use their own language and interference with traditional religious practices have both brought a loss of language and cultural identity and pride. Part of the process being that children through the loss of their own

language lost the possibility to communicate with their own parents and elders. The two Canadian researchers Frank James Tester and Paule McNicoll (2004) argue that the extremely high suicide rate of Inuit suicide (six times those of country's southern provinces) in the newly created Nunavut territory of Canada's eastern Arctic has its roots in a history of colonialism, paternalism and historical events resulting in low self-esteem (inuusittiaqarniq).

Similar situations have existed among the Sámi of northern Europe, indigenous populations in the Russian Arctic and among Inuit's in Greenland. Even if practices of governments, missionaries and social agencies have had similarities all over the Arctic it seems like the policy of the US and Canadian government have been particularly harsh towards indigenous populations (Millroy 1999). The Soviet Union having an authoritarian policy directed towards an ideal state moulding the whole population into one kind of citizens, but not particularly targeting indigenous populations.

### **Demographic changes and the family**

Many parts of the Arctic have experienced changes in the demographics in their populations. It has been fairly typical with changes like the population growing older, young people migrating to urban centres and often deficits of young women and subsequently fewer children being born. Such changes have far-reaching consequences for families. In some areas, like the Faeroe Islands, the changes have been particularly rapid due to depletion of fishery resources (Hamilton, Colocousis and Johansen 2004). Similar situations have earlier occurred in Newfoundland in Canada and in other parts of the Arctic due to depletion of other kinds of natural resources like in mining operations.

In the case of the Faeroe Islands the reason for the population changes is fairly obvious. In other areas the reason for leaving local communities might be a different one. However the resulting movement from small local communities to larger towns and settlements have been fairly typical all over the Arctic. The result of such movement of population has often been a break in local traditions and an adaptation to those of the larger society.

### **Parental attitudes and expectations**

In November 2003 I travelled to Greenland. In one of the many places I visited there was a picture of happy children jumping from one ice floe to another. They were smiling and laughing and it looked like they had great fun. It struck me that such a picture would never have been shown in my own home country of Norway. It is dangerous to jump from one ice floe to another and they had no visible safety equipment like a swimming belt.

Three researchers in the Sámi part of Norway made a cross-cultural comparison of parental attitudes and expectations between Sámi mothers and fathers and Norwegian mothers and fathers. They found that parental permissiveness was higher in the Sámi group. Among other differences were self-regulation of food and sleep, co-sleeping and less toleration of child aggression from Sámi parents. Similar patterns are found among other indigenous cultures in the circumpolar region (Javo, Ronning and Heyerdahl 2004 and Javo, Ronning, Heyerdahl and Rudmin 2004). Similarly Kvernmo (2001) and Kvernmo and Heyerdahl (1998) discuss the importance of cultural factors for the development of a person's behaviour.

From the point of view of traditional Inuit culture mastering ice and be able to move in the Arctic environment must have been of crucial importance. The authors concludes that both

individual autonomy would be important and the ability to live as part of the group. They emphasize that individual autonomy should not be confounded with the individualism of European liberalism.

Even if life-styles of the past, like hunting gathering, is no longer the backbone of the economy of many indigenous populations the child-rearing patterns and traditions might remain. Differences in attitudes in child rearing might have far reaching consequences. Even to the extent that what is thought of as irresponsible in one culture might be thought of as responsible in another.

Such differences will have obvious consequences for the educational system. Both children and parents will be influenced. What is right and wrong pedagogy will depend upon the traditions of each individual family.

### **The educational system**

Historically speaking the school systems have been important tools in order to create national identities as opposed to local. Most often creating national identities has included the thought of all people in a nation sharing one common language and culture. Thus minority languages, like that of the Saami in Norway, has been consciously ignored and quite often fought, while the national language has been promoted. In Norway this process had its heydays from the last part of 1800 century until the late 1960s.

Today's educational system has changed from that of yesterday in all the Arctic countries. However, some part of the old structures and way of thinking will of course remain. In the same way some of the old attitudes towards the educational system are likely to remain. Thus groups of people regarding the educational system to be part of colonialism and repressive policy decided by outsiders are likely to at least be somewhat sceptical towards that system even long after it is changed.

The increased expression willingness to support an indigenous Arctic language resulted in Norway in the Sámi language act enacted in 1992. The act established the principle of bilingual education. Even if it might be claimed, like the Canadian researcher D. Corson (1995) does, that the act had emancipatory implications it also made visible the severe injustice and discrimination made towards the Sámi as part of Norwegian nationalism.

Arctic educational systems operate under several national authorities. Those national authorities all have their own standards and it varies how flexible they are to meet local demands. Still, basic skills in order to function in society is always taught in the schools such as reading, writing, arithmetic and basic social skills and values. Historically both Christian religious values and national ones have been taught in the schools. In the Soviet Union the focus was upon the political values of that society. In countries like Norway, Sweden and Finland the focus of education was upon National unity and Christian values. In the case of Greenland upon teaching Danish, Christian values and communicating the values of Denmark. In Iceland since independence the focus after the Second World War have been of teaching the values, language and Christian values of the state. In Alaska and Canada similarly, though Canada have had both French and English as major languages for the provincial school system.

One characteristic of educational facilities in the north has been the dependency upon outside teachers and often administrators. Alice Eriks Brophy of the University of Toronto and Martha Crago of McGill University (2003) has focused upon the variation in instructional discourse between Inuit and non-Inuit teachers in northern Québec. Their findings suggests “that the cultural variability of discourse features that have significant ramifications for teachers judgment regarding students’ academic and communicative competence” (page 396). Even if such differences are particularly large when teachers have a different language and ethnic background it would be logical to assume that the same would be true with teachers coming from a far different background like that of a large town compared to a small fishing or farming community.

Visiting Nenet, Nganasan and Dolgan families in Taimyr in Siberia I was told of the complexity of problems facing nomadic families with the residential school system. One of the most important being that the children in long periods had to spend time away from the family and due to that not acquiring the skills necessary in order to live the nomadic life. Those skills were closely related to the cycle of nature, adaptation to the changing conditions, hunting, fishing, reindeer herding and the use and production of tools and equipment connected to that life style.

The same kind of comments I have heard among fishermen, farmers and Saami reindeer herders of the north of Norway. The school system gives certain kind of knowledge like reading, writing, arithmetic and languages. That kind of knowledge is important in order to function in the greater society, gain access to further education and a certain part of the work market, but most often not to participate in traditional local activities.

However, education has been important in order to put those local activities into a greater perspective both of a national and a cross-national scene. Thus one result has been to some extent to create a shared kind of identity among the indigenous populations of the north. In other cases to create other kind of shared values.

In the Nordic societies one of the seemingly shared values seem to be to follow an extreme policy of equity (Nordkvelle 1999 and Grauphard 1986). In the Norwegian school system an “extreme policy of equity – geographical, social class- wise, and in the last 30 years – gender and multiculturalism” has been pursued (Nordkvelle: 1999:1). Such a policy might both have benefited adaptation to local cultural variations and resulted in just the opposite. Equity according to national norms might have resulted in discrimination of local culture.

### **The complexity and challenges of modern society**

Most people, even in the Arctic, live their life in ways, which are closely related to modern economy. Many are employed in public or private administration and enterprises. Others are employed in health- and social services, teaching and research. Some are within transportation and trade. A few have their main income from farming, fishing, hunting and reindeer herding. They all depend upon modern technology and need to relate to modern society.

It is easy to have a romantic idea about the qualities of the past. Without doubt they exist and it is important to acknowledge them. Still it is important to acknowledge the challenges of modern society and the need for updated education.

Grauphard (1986) emphasize that one of the characteristics of the Nordic society is “the passion for equality” or as he emphasize their unquestioned commitment to a minimum social support for every citizen. The practice of teachers will most likely reflect prevalent attitudes of their societies. Thus the Nordic “passion for equality” do not give priority to elite thinking.

Both basic and advanced education is provided for free in the Nordic countries, Russia and Canada. In the USA higher education requires payment of tuition. In addition there are differences in how centralized or decentralized both the ground level school system and advanced education is organized. For instance while Sweden has given priority to centralization Norway has given priority to trying to provide up to college level education in a decentralized manner (Rust 1989).

Distances in the Arctic are great. Obviously quite some people will have to travel long distances in order to take higher education. In some cases they will even have to go outside their own region. One example is the population in Greenland who in many cases will have to take higher education in Denmark.

### **The recreational aspect of life**

Today we experience recreation as time off from activities connected with earning money or time for chores necessarily performed in order to maintain living and taking care of others close to us. Often activities connected with surviving in the past have changed to be important recreational activities of modern day. For example the hunting and fishing necessary to get food and to avoid starving of yesterday have in many instances changed to be the recreational activities of today.

Still it is important to realize that such activities might keep their cultural importance even if people are not dependent upon them for survival. From that point of view they will also be important arenas for socializing children into the cultural heritage of their own culture. Today recreational activities are often developed into commercial activities targeting both tourists moving into the region and locals who buy various kinds of recreational activities (Smith 1989, Hall and Johnston 1995). Thus activities that remain important for the local culture might have an entirely different role for outsiders.

Many of such recreational activities are focused upon hunting and fishing. Both of which represent limited local resources. In the Sámi areas of the Arctic such harvesting have traditionally been done according to kin-group or in Sámi “siida” agreements (Viken in Price and Smith 1996). Other activities do not have to do with harvesting, but rather use of nature for recreation al purposes like skiing, snowmobiles and so on. Quite often those moving into the areas traditionally used by indigenous populations, like the Sámi, have been people with another background living in the Arctic. In the northernmost part of Norway (Finnmark) many of them came from the Norwegian population along the coast.

It is also important to realize that what for some people has changed to be recreational activities for others remain activities traditional activities connected with survival and work. Which means that fishing which for one person is his main income might be recreational for his neighbour.

Recreational activities have also opened up the world for quite some Arctic people. Both in the way that outsiders travel to the Arctic and in the way that Arctic people travel to other

parts of the world. In quite some areas of the Arctic, like the Nordic countries, Greenland and North America, the local population increasingly travel to other parts of the world. As the two Norwegian researchers Kirsti Pedersen and Arvid Viken points out; “The people...switch between local and global roles, identities, and cultures” (in Price and Smith 1996:86)

### **The changing world of the Arctic**

Some years ago I was introduced to the music of the British pop star Samantha Fox. It happened after several days of travel by boat in a small community in Taimyr in Siberia. A few years later I visited a mixed Norwegian Sámi family in Karasjok in northern Norway. It was sort of a family gathering one of the boys in the family had just arrived back from Spain and his sister was home from Mexico. In both the village in Siberia and in Norway we discussed about local traditions of handcrafts, reindeer and traditional life.

The Arctic is no longer isolated from the rest of the world. It is very much part of it. Still certain part of local cultures has their own characteristics. Family-structures, child rearing and quite some traditions are distinct to local cultures. Particularly this is true for the indigenous cultures of the Arctic.

Then the environment is important like the darkness in winter, the cold weather and low temperatures of winter and the light in summer and in the inland abundance of mosquitoes. Dr. Stenton of the University of Alberta (1991) concluded in an article of culture adaptation on Southern-Baffin-Islands that terrestrial environment played an important role in the development of Arctic hunter-gather adaptations. Those conclusions are not surprising. Living in the Arctic the environment will always play a crucial role. Both family structures, patterns of education and recreation will be influenced.

One of the problems of today is the standardization of modern societies, which do not take the particular needs of local people into consideration. The educational system is one good example of that. Admitting the need of adaptation to local culture it is still important to acknowledge that the Arctic cultures are flexible and changing.

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Dolgan:** A Turkic-speaking people, numbering around 6000 people, inhabiting the Taimyr Peninsula west of the Yenisey River. Formerly the Dolgans were reindeer herding people; nowadays they are mostly reindeer hunting and economical activity centred on small villages and the towns in Taimyr.

**Education:** The word education is mostly used about methods of teaching and learning in schools or institutional environments. Still it is important to acknowledge that important parts of socialization is done outside of educational facilities and that important skills are taught outside of schools. Thus it is possible to separate between formal education done in schools and by professionals called teachers and informal education done by others often by doing things together. The latter have very much been the case for some of the most important skills necessary for survival and living in many Arctic cultures.

Formal teaching is often divided in elementary or primary education giving the most basic education (age 5/7 to about 11/13), secondary education lasting until about 12 years of teaching have been completed and higher education giving further training like in universities.

**Family:** While kindred through bloodlines are related and can be called an extended family, the family unit is thought of as a household unit with mother, father and children. However there are differences in how separate such households might be from others. In some cultures the mother, father and child unit represents a more flexible unit than in other cultures. Many indigenous Arctic cultures do have more flexible family units than those of the urbanized western societies. The family unit is an important unit of socialization and in many cases of learning skills necessary for survival and living. The latter has very much been the case for many cultures centred on activities like fishing, hunting, farming and herding.

**Inuit:** The word Inuit means “the people”. They are widely called “Eskimos”. The Inuit’s populate the Arctic from Greenland in the east, across northern Canada and Alaska to the eastern part of Siberia. There are about 110.000 Inuit living in the Arctic. The language of the Inuit is called Inuktitut.

**Nenets:** Ethnolinguistic group living in northwestern Russia. The northernmost part of the Nenets are the tundra Nenets consisting of about 25.000 people. They inhabit Russian arctic from the Taimyr peninsula and the Yenisey River in the east to the White Sea in the west. The word nenets means “man”. The Nenet culture has been centred on reindeer herding, some fishing and hunting.  
(In Russian singular Nenets, in plural nenetsy, formerly Samoyed or Yurak – in older literature the later forms might be used).

**Nganasan:** A high small group of people (less than thousand) inhabiting the northernmost part of the Taimyr Peninsula. The Ngansans are related to the Nenets. Formerly reindeer herding people, nowadays mostly reindeer hunting

**Recreation:** The word recreation comes from Latin *recreation* – *recreation* which means restoration to health and from *recreare* which means create anew or refresh. In daily language it has come to mean time off from work and chores – or to put it like time for pleasurable challenges, experiences and “playing”.

**Sámi:** Traditional population of the northern part of Finland, Norway and Sweden and the Kola peninsula of Russia. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the official numbers of Sámi were 6000 in Finland, 40.000 in Norway, 20.000 in Sweden and 2000 in Russia. Traditionally reindeer herding and nature based activities like fishing, hunting and small-scale agriculture has been the most important part of the economy. Today the Sámi is very much part of the modern economy of their home countries, however nature based activities remain both culturally and economically important.  
(The name Sámi is also spelled Saami, Same, Same and sometimes called Lapp)

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