



Photo: Jan Kunnas

Dear reader,

Autumn is over, and winter is fast approaching. In Paris, the COP21 climate conference has just ended with an international agreement on joint efforts to ensure a global future. But for us, it is once again time to direct our attention northwards to the researchers in Mistra Arctic.

Path dependence influences the decision

The term 'path dependence' was discussed during the research team meeting in Kirkenes in October. Path dependence can mean different things in different contexts. In the Mistra Arctic project, the term path dependence is used to explain why developments have gone in different directions; why we ended up where we did, especially when that is somewhere we know we should not be. We realise retrospectively that there are better and more effective solutions, but because of earlier decisions, great effort is now required to change the situation.

One example of this would be the northern mainline of the Swedish railway. When it was constructed, more than 100 years ago, it was placed several tens of kilometres away from the coast for military reasons. As a result, environmentally friendly railway transport is still forced to take unnecessary detours to reach all destinations north of Umeå. This makes it easy for the fossil-fuelled road transport to successfully compete against the railway. In addition, this is making it particularly difficult for decision makers in the north to live up to the reduced carbon dioxide emission targets recently set at COP21 in Paris.

Four possible futures for Pajala

Despite the issue of path dependence, decision makers and other actors must still try to form their own understanding of the future. In October, a report from the workshop in Pajala was published in which this was discussed from a local perspective together with local and regional actors. The discussions were based on four different descriptions of a common global future. Based on these future scenarios, there were then discussions of what the story of Pajala might be in these four different contexts. The results of the workshop have been published in an academic report, which is written in English and can be downloaded from the SEI website: <http://www.sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/NEW/sei-wp-2015-uncertain-futures-nilsson.pdf>.

Selected parts of the report, which describe the participants' views on the future of Pajala in more detail, will be translated into Swedish and posted on the Mistra Arctic website in spring 2016.

Three million to study the future of sparsely-populated areas

The Mistra researchers Dean and Doris Carson are also interested in how different futures may affect life in the north, especially in smaller villages. They have recently received SEK 3 million from the Swedish Research Council Formas to develop their methods, which are based on computer simulations. What happens when a school closes down or a new business opens? What happens when a mine is established or a farmer goes bankrupt? What happens when tourists discover a paradise and want to go there? The project is based on villages in Vilhelmina, Storuman and Arvidsjaur and will continue until 2018.

Eight professors in Mistra Arctic

In autumn, Urban Wråkberg was appointed Professor of Northern Studies at the University of Tromsø, the Arctic University of Norway. The proportion of professors in the Mistra Arctic research team has thus increased from the previous seven (18%) to eight (21%). Urban Wråkberg's research deals with sustainable development, with a particular focus on natural resources and industries in the north.

Focus on reindeer herding at the climate conference in Paris

In December, another of Mistra Arctic's professors, Peter Sköld, participated as a lecturer at the seminar "Arctic Lessons", a fringe event to the COP21 in Paris. The seminar was hosted by the University of Tromsø (Norway), together with representatives of Umeå University (Sweden), Aarhus University (Denmark), the University of Lapland (Finland) and the University of Iceland. In his lecture, Peter Sköld underlined the vulnerability of reindeer husbandry as the climate gets warmer. Constant freeze-thaw cycles create a layer of ice on the ground, which makes it difficult for the reindeer to access their natural food source. Old migration trails must also be adapted to new weather conditions, and the risk of infectious diseases spreading among the reindeer is increasing.

Peter Sköld's lecture attracted the attention of the newspaper Västerbottens-Kuriren, whose report is available on the Mistra Arctic website: <http://www.mistraarctic.se/wp-content/uploads/VK-28-november-2015-sid-18-19.pdf>

Open meeting in Kittilä 12 April 2016

This newsletter will both open and close on the events of the climate conference in Paris. The European Arctic may be the focus of our research, but it is important for us to also consider our areas of study from a global perspective – what goes on in the world decides what future will be possible for all people, both those born in the south and those of us who live and work in the northern hemisphere. The next open meeting will be held in Kittilä in northern Finland, where anyone interested in these issues can meet the research team on Tuesday 12 April 2016 at 18:00. The location for the meeting will be announced at a later date.

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