### Anna Järpe

### “Ever against the wind...”Lifescapes and environmental perception among Sámi reindeer tenders in Västerbotten, Sweden (2007)

This dissertation considers the relationship between reindeer tending Sámi in Swedish Sápmi, and the natural and social environment within which their livelihood is set. For Sámi reindeer tenders in Sweden, ensuring safety and the continuation of their way of life has become a matter not only of adapting to the rapidly shifting seasons of the Arctic year, but also of adapting to the continually shifting influences of an expanding, modern Swedish nation-state society.

By adopting a holistic, relational, livelihood perspective, following the reindeer tenders through the seasons of the year and considering the interplay between their livelihood conditions and activities on several levels, I  onsider aspects of the environment – institutional as well as ecological – in which reindeer tenders’ lives are immersed, that they are shaped by, and resonate with. The chapters of this thesis represent an anthropological journey through the year of reindeer tending Sámi in the county of Västerbotten, and parallel to the ethnographic descriptions of people, landscape, events, and institutions, I explore aspects of environmental perception as they unfolded in the context of my fieldwork: knowledge and education, risk and safety in the dynamic environment of the spring mountainscape, notions of identity and interpersonal relations within the reindeer tenders’ social network, and perceptions of authority and the impact of taxonomic institutional structures on a fundamentally relational livelihood. In doing this, I show how reindeer tenders relate to their world through contingency and flexibility, constantly attentive and continually adjusting to the dynamic context of their livelihood – regardless of whether that context is primarily perceived as ‘natural’ or ‘institutional’; a perception that changes with the shifting activities and situations of the different seasons.

In order to fully understand the reindeer tenders’ perception of their environment, I adopt a theoretical framework that, instead of being premised on an assumed prioritization of one set of determinants over another, acknowledges that the balance of the ecological and the institutional is not just subject to, but in a sense constitutive of, seasonal variation. This I suggest is a fully relational theory of the perception of the environment: a theory that focuses on complementarity rather than opposition.