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Multi-level governance in renewable resource industries in Norway and Finland

Multi-level governance is often seen as constituted by complex overlapping networks of decision-making, including state actors as well as business and interest organisations in a field. This organisation of decision-making necessarily poses questions about its legitimacy and responsibility to those impacted by the decisions. This paper summarises the results from a study of multi-level governance in forestry, fishing and reindeer herding sectors in northernmost Norway and Finland, based in some 40 interviews with local and regional government, local and international business represented in the area, public and private interest organizations, and local practitioners. The study describes changes in the governance systems over time, their current situation, and the limitations and possibilities of the actors to adapt to changes—environmental or socio-economic—in situations. The paper shows that forestry and fishing have over the last generation developed from local labour intensive livelihoods to relatively globalised, capital-intensive businesses governed by international corporations. As major economic actors, these industries bring external financing and the capacity to invest through crises to the areas, but at the cost of placing the control over resources and revenue at the international rather than the local or regional level. Reindeer herding, on the other hand, has remained a comparatively more localized, family-based business, but its resulting low profitability and limited distribution networks limit its available resources and thereby its ability to adapt. However, the comparatively limited power of reindeer-herding organization has made it place an increased focus on international indigenous processes, as a way to provoke changes in national regulation and in this way increase its leverage. The paper thus illustrates how both political and economic globalization impacts sustainability and rights at the local level through powerful, largely external organization, thereby placing the focus for local resource governance on national and international levels.