Mining and the exploitation of mineral resources in northern Fennoscandia (Lapland/Sápmi) are subject to controversies and entangled with diverse broader issues, such as nature preservation and indigenous rights. The debates over mining largely reflect differing present-day interests in northern environments, but underlying those immediate concerns there are also more fundamental issues of conflicting worldviews and modes of perceiving and engaging with the environment. These deeper tensions date back to at least the 17th century and are associated with the colonial past of Lapland/Sápmi and its manifold cultural expressions and legacies. This international project will study the historical foundations of the current issues around Lapland and the complex cultural impacts of mining in a long-term and cross-disciplinary perspective.

The project is structured around four work packages and several case studies, some of which have recently been completed while others are in progress. For instance, we have completed studies on the cultural and ideological background of Lapland mining from two angles. One case examined the rhetoric of mines as arenas of moral and cultural improvement, and the ways this rhetoric was expressed and aided by material culture as a part of the Swedish state’s civilising projects in the North in the early modern period. The other case took a broader view on the construction of northern Fennoscandia as a material and symbolic resource in the early modern period. It is on this ground that we are currently examining past and present governance practices of northern mining, looking particularly into how early modern ideas and practices are reflected in contemporary perceptions and discourses of mining. Another line of research that we are pursuing analyses long-term continuities and changes in mining landscapes, with the river Tornio valley as a case study. Our studies of the archaeological material from historic mining-related sites have progressed and the analysis of the ethnographic/interview data and conflicts around mining and land use in Lapland also continues. This question is being analysed from the perspective of mines and mining, but we have also looked into the multiple pressures of land use from the angle of reindeer herding to provide a broader perspective on the matter. The project has recently become a part of the NordForsk-funded Nordic Centre of Excellence, Resource Extraction and Sustainable Arctic Communities (REXSAC) coordinated by the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm.

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