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Reading the reindeer - Digital technology meets traditional Sámi knowledge

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Generations of reindeer herders have built up a traditional Sámi knowledge, about reindeer, the landscape and the environment. The Sámi culture and reindeer husbandry have been in constant change and never static which has been decisive for their continuing existence. The demand to integrate new technologies into husbandry has intensified in the last decades. This presentation brings together reindeer husbandry grounded in traditional Sámi knowledge and the use of a new tool: GPS (global positional systems) transmitters on reindeer, so-called GPS collars. This technology has changes every-day herding practices among the interviewed herders. The GPS transmitters are attached to the reindeers' necks, and generate the reindeer movement data, which is sent to the reindeer herders via satellite or telephone. This illustrates a shift in the way of knowledge is transmitted. Herders expressed it as "another way of knowing". The GPS system enables data to be transferred from multiple locations into one place, where herders can gain an overall view. The GPS collar not only has a profound impact on herders' ability to gain knowledge, it also enables herders to talk about the reindeer flows in communication with external actors. During the last decade, industrial investments have increased the pressure on reindeer grazing lands. In discussions with stakeholders, it is important for the Sámi community to be able to visualize and communicate reindeer husbandry's use of the area. Here, the GPS maps become an important tool with power.