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Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Landscape

Introduction

In the early 1980s, the South Sami people themselves started to document their knowledge of their heritage, lifestyles, traditions and language. Almost 30 years later, in 2008, funds were at last allocated to a project called "Saemieb Saepmesne – I det samiska rummet" (Saemieh Saepmesne – In the Sami space) in order to continue this work. (Saemieh Saepmesne 2010). "Saemieh Saepmesne" is a joint Swedish and Norwegian Interreg project which attempts to cover the South Sami areas on both sides of the Swedish and Norwegian border, the partners being Saemien Sijte in Snåsa, Gaaltije in Östersund and Västerbotten Museum in Umeå1.

The object of this work is to throw light on the South Sami cultural landscape and the presence of human life within it. Language, place names, archives and cultural remains are important sources of knowledge about traditional uses of the landscape. Significantly, the project has been able to create networks between local South Sami associations and institutions on both sides of the Swedish- Norwegian border, and research institutions.

Specifically, the work involves providing interested Sami people from local communities with the tools they need to document and research different aspects of South Sami history and culture. These tools are provided through

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1 The project receives financial support from, among others, the Sami Parliaments in Norway and Sweden, the EU, Interreg, several counties, Äjtte Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Norwegian Council for Cultural Affairs.

courses in archival studies, interviews – conversations, mapping and place-name studies and survey courses in Sami cultural remains. The work is carried out in close cooperation with Sami villages, reindeer districts and Sami associations. The results from the work of Saemieh Saepmesne are put into a shared database. The data forms the basis for information sharing both within and outside the Sami community. Results of the project are communicated regularly through seminars, presentations and in written form on the website (Saemieh Saepmesne 2010).

When Sámi University College received funds from the Sami Parliament and the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion to implement a pilot project to develop a methodology for documenting, preserving, protecting and storing aerpiemaabtoe (traditional knowledge), the Saemien Sijte took the opportunity to participate with the Saemieh Saepmesne project. This has given us the chance to participate in discussions particularly on methodology and ethical rules. It has also been important to us to have the opportunity to show that physical remains, as much as other kinds of records, are part of traditional knowledge, and that in our part of Sápmi they are very much a part of people’s consciousness. Knowledge of these is transmitted both by oral tradition and by the identification and documentation of sites by earlier generations. Within the South Sami area, there is an emerging awareness of how important documentation is since it can have significant implications for future rights disputes. During the project a kind of manual of Sami cultural remains, prepared by Ewa Ljungdahl at Gaaltije, has been published. The manual "Om vi inte syns så finns vi inte – Vägledning och dokumentation av det samiska kulturarvet" (If we’re not seen, we don’t exist – Guidance and documentation of Sami Cultural Heritage) is intended as a help and inspiration to local registrars and custodians of Sami tradition and culture (Ljungdahl 2009). The title of the booklet shows how great the need is to document the Sami presence in the area through oral tradition, written sources and physical cultural remains. These last are an important archive of Sami history, since much of Sami history currently in use is written by people outside the Sami community.

**Historical background of the project**

In Norway, Sami cultural remains that are more than 100 years old have been protected since 1978. At the same time ethnic mobilization and increased awareness have developed within Sami culture, with a focus on
language and rights issues. With the Alta case, hydroelectric expansion in Finnmark was one of the more important developments. The Alta case in the late 1970s and early 1980s showed that the Sami areas were vulnerable to extensive exploitation (Fjellheim 1987, 6). Norwegian authorities with overall responsibility for cultural heritage sites in the country had little knowledge of South Sami remains at that time and the knowledge of authorities outside the Sami Parliament can still be said to be limited.

In the early 1980s two major projects to exploit the South Sami area were planned, namely a regulation plan for Luru/Grana/Sanddøla and a firing range in Fosen. After South Sami demands for an investigation into the consequences of these developments, the developer agreed to bear the cost of investigating their future impact on the affected areas (Fjellheim 1987, 6).

The events of the late 1970s and early 1980s also led to a greater awareness of Sami issues in archaeology and history (Schanche & Olsen 1984; Bergstøl 2009, 75). In the 1980s there was a significant shift in western, and therefore in Scandinavian, archaeology from positivism and eco-functionalism towards structuralism, with the focus on reading the material culture as text, and interpreting its symbolic content (Schanche 2000, 79). Archaeology’s earlier ethnocentric history was noted and criticised in parallel with the general movement towards Sami political mobilization. Archaeologists, particularly at the University of Tromsø, began to approach Sami history in a new way. This was sometimes met with resistance among colleagues who felt that it was not possible to attribute any ethnicity to archaeological materials (see Bergstøl 2009). In Tromsø, this kind of criticism was countered with the argument that it was impossible to construct a value-neutral history with regard to Norwegian and Sami identity because research is not conducted in a vacuum, but is rather influenced by political currents in society (Gjessing 1973; Olsen 1984; Bergstøl 2009).

In the early 1980s, Saemien Sijte encouraged activities that would strengthen South Sami self-esteem and unity between Sami people (Fjellheim 1987, 6). From 1980 onwards, the recording of cultural remains was a theme in all

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2 The Sami protests against the expansion were a major success in Norwegian society and became widely known around the world.

3 Saemien Sijte is an independent organisation founded in 1964 in order to establish a museum and a gathering place for the South Sami in Norway. The museum and cultural centre that exists today was completed in 1980 (Fjellheim 1987, 5).
Saemien Sijte’s annual reports, the idea being to access knowledge held by the custodians of tradition, usually older Sami, of Sami places no longer in use. The first survey course was held in 1981 with a total of 23 participants, from Hattfjelldal in the north to Elgå in the south (Fjellheim 1987, 6). In the summer of 1982, a pilot project was held in Røyrviks municipality after the Ministry of the Environment provided funding for a three-week pilot project registering Sami cultural remains. There was a sort of pre-registration week during which one person (Jonar Tomasson) toured Røyrvik and talked to various custodians of tradition who were thought to be knowledgeable about Sami cultural remains. Field visits to the reported locations were then carried out over two weeks. That same year, registrations of cultural remains were conducted as part of a Sami initiative in Engerdal (Fjellheim 1987, 7).

Funds for a larger inventory project throughout the South Sami area were finally granted in 1984 by the Norwegian partner. The area was divided between ten historic and currently active Sami groups. Within these groups, registrars with access to the local community were sought, the thought being that a person from within the society, as opposed to one from outside, would have both the geographical knowledge and the support of the population. Also, these people usually know about past and present Sami settlements in the area, as well as about how the area has been cultivated and managed for reindeer. A local registrar is more likely to create a local network of informants (Fjellheim 1987, 8–9). Fjellheim (1987, 9) argues that the registration process builds up an understanding of the inhabitants’ own cultural background which then further strengthens this affinity. The work also creates a wider interest in other cultural activities. To summarise, the registration of cultural remains in the 1980s aimed to:

- Strengthen South Sami culture and sense of identity.
- Increase knowledge of their culture and history.
- Create local cultural activities.
- Create source material for South Sami culture and history.
- Document landscape use.
- Increase knowledge of Sami culture in the landscape.
- Provide a basis for planning and heritage protection.

The purpose of these registrations was to preserve historical sites and sources, while also helping to strengthen South Sami cultural awareness and historical roots. Lack of knowledge has meant that general inventories of cultural
remains conducted previously in Norway have not managed to any great extent to capture the remnants of Sami culture (Mjaatvedt 1987, 11).

In methodological terms, we relied heavily on the existence of tradition-bearers who could describe what kinds of remains were in the landscape, where they were and what they knew about them. The actual field methodology was followed by researchers interviewing local tradition-bearers and collecting data on cultural heritage and its contexts – for example, about who was the user/owner of any given site. Tradition-bearers in the 1980s were mainly elderly Sami who had been active in the area, either through herding or other work. The places they mentioned were located, when possible with the help of the tradition-bearer. They were marked on the map and the coordinates were set. They were then described and photographed, while both the terrain and the area closest to the remains were also described. The registration schedule used was provided by the Secretariat for Registration of Heritage Sites in Norway (SEFRAK, Sekretariatet for registrering av faste kulturminner i Norge)⁴. Inventory areas were made to coincide with reindeer grazing districts so as to enable researchers to monitor more effectively the annual cycle of reindeer herding through the spring, summer, autumn and winter migrations (Mjaatvedt 1987, 13). The project sought also to use Sami terminology for various remains, and to develop a dictionary to describe the remains both in South Sami and Norwegian (Mjaatvedt 1987, 14).

According to Mjaatvedt (1987, 11), South Sami history on the Norwegian side of the border, even in modern times, was at that time an essentially oral history passed down from generation to generation. There was a limited reference literature; knowledge had to be built in parallel with the heritage inventories. Since the 1880s, historical research into the South Sami maintained that the South Sami were an immigrant group arriving in the area that had been deserted as a result of the Black Death in the 1350s. For areas south of Snåsa, the Sami were considered to have arrived as late as in the 1600s. During both the 1980s and the 2000s, the late immigration theory was brought up again by historians from the University of Trondheim. The Sami’s own history, however, says that they have always existed in these areas (Mjaatvedt 1987, 11–12).

⁴ http://www.riksantikvaren.no/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=2959
Cultural heritage and context

Greater value should be placed on the contextual study of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is related to other cultural expressions such as language, the Sami way of life, food traditions, folklore, costumes and all the traditions relating to their habits and practices. Together they form a system that helps set the frame of reference for Sami culture (Fjellheim 1987, 9). According to this view, Sami cultural heritage forms an important part of a historical whole in which changes in land use and ways of survival become apparent as they happened across time, and as such form a history of social change.

Abandoned Sami remains of more than 100 years old are defined as heritage sites – and this creates favourable conditions for those with knowledge of them. Many of the registered cultural remains are part of what is traditionally and locally known. Local people often know who used a given site, in what way, and why. Of course there are even older Sami remains about which there is no information, but even here general traditional knowledge can provide good interpretative tools when similar remains are described. While many archaeologists in other parts of Scandinavia derive interpretative analogies from anthropological studies in other parts of the world, we often base our interpretative tools on traditional knowledge. Where it was important to show that the South Sami had been in the area, the older tradition-bearers were also of great importance in identifying ”known” human settlements.

As an archaeologist however, one is not wholly dependent on tradition-bearers for finding Sami cultural remains. They often appear during regular inventory research as well. Older remains are often recorded, even though there is no known tradition and the current land use of the site offers no clue as to its former use. In these cases, traditional knowledge can provide important information about the use of space and movement in the landscape as a whole. The greatest danger with this, as we will discuss later, is that one can miss remains that do not follow the pattern we have learned to recognize and to associate with reindeer herding.

Not surprisingly, Sami people name cultural remains with one or more Sami words to define what they are or were. A dictionary of South Sami terminology for cultural remains was started in the 1980s and has expanded during the course of the project. It has been reviewed locally by a South Sami language consultant. The glossary is not finished, and since the South Sami language is rich and varied, the glossary will probably continue to change and develop for
quite some time. There are often several different words for the same type of cultural remains, and our aim is to highlight this as far as we can.

The project’s documentary approach is very like that of the 1980s project. Both then and now, issues were discussed: inventory technique, interview technique – now called conversation technique – collection of traditional knowledge, etc. (Mjaatvedt 1987, 12–13). In conclusion, it appears that the project which started in the Norwegian part of the South Sami area in the 1980s now has a sort of sequel in which many of the questions from that time arise again and where the goal is similar. The main difference to the 1980s’ project is that the current project deals with the whole of the South Sami area on both sides of the border between Norway and Sweden, and one of our aims is to identify the whole of the South Sami area of distribution. The technology we use to show and highlight the Sami region and to disseminate information is now better and more suited to the task than it was 20–30 years ago, while we also benefit from the Internet and the accompanying social media to inform, receive information and make contacts.

**Landscape, heritage and identity**

The documentation of Sami cultural heritage is important because it throws light on Sami history and prehistory. It shows a Sami presence in the area where perhaps it had previously been doubtful or unknown. As well as revealing economic, social and religious aspects of Sami life, it can provide evidence of Sami use of the landscape. In the South Sami area, this work is still important in the fight to preserve traditional livelihoods in traditional areas. In the wake of certain lawsuits (e.g. the Nordmaling case), there is a risk of the South Sami people losing reindeer grazing rights. In some areas they have already lost these rights. They have been unable to refer to rights from time immemorial, and have instead had to rely on the good will of private landowners. An example is Trollheimen, where there has been a longstanding conflict of interest between private landowners wishing to exploit the area and the reindeer herding Sami people there. Much of this conflict lies in the difficulty of getting the Sami prehistory recognized, and because of an inability to respect and acknowledge the value of the Sami presence in the area.

Several factors come into play in deciding whether cultural remains should be defined as Sami or not. One can generally say that they can be defined
as Sami if there is a living or recorded tradition of similar cultural remains, or if local Sami knowledge links them to a Sami cultural context. Ancient remains can also be counted as Sami if research results can demonstrate a Sami history or prehistory (Sami Parliament in Norway 2005). In addition to this, there are cultural remains that are related to Sami prehistory because they are tangible expressions of the processes that led to the establishment of well-known Sami cultural expressions. This means that even older remains may be seen in a Sami context. Thus, they become part of the Sami cultural landscape and they need to be treated as such (ibid; Jørgensen & Olsen 1988; Olsen 1984; Hansen & Olsen 2004).

Sami cultural heritage management involves not only the physical traces of human activity but also places with traditions associated with events, beliefs, myths and place names. Many people have grown up with these myths, stories and performances passed on through traditions tied to the landscape. Affiliation to the landscape involves more than just being attached to the place where you are or live. It is part of the wholeness of life. The landscape has been owned by and inherited from the ancestors; it is part of the cosmological scheme involving animals, humans, plants, ancestors, gods and demons (Østmo 2004, 18; Fossum 2006, 34f). A rock, when seen from outside its cultural context, can be considered as a beautiful formation in nature, while for those aware of the Sami community it may have a completely different meaning. The rock may be part of a holy place which has gained great importance across the centuries through the rituals, traditions and beliefs associated with it.

Cultural remains and sites on their own say something about the Sami understanding of landscape and nature as well as indicating the importance of the landscape to economic, social and religious conditions. The diversity of cultural remains shows long-term Sami use of Sápmi. The Sami cultural landscape has a great time-depth and is characterized to a high degree of continuity. This is evident not only in the use of the landscape over generations, but also in the stories and traditions about Sami ancestors who have shaped the cultural landscape across the centuries, reinforcing the links between the people and their territory (Norwegian Sami Parliament’s definition of Sami cultural remains, Sami Parliament in Norway 2005).

The protection of the Sami cultural landscape and remains must therefore help to strengthen and preserve Sami identity and its relationship of the Sami to their ancestral land. It also plays an important part in informing future
generations of their cultural identity by showing their historical roots in the landscape. This is why Sami heritage and cultural environments are important in a contemporary context; besides providing historical knowledge as to how we have related to the environment, they also show how we can and should continue to relate to it (Sami Parliament in Norway 2005).

At the end of the 1980s, the cultural landscape was accepted as a ”subject” to be studied. Landscapes around the world were ecosystems which to varying degrees were influenced by humans – through cultivation, buildings, cities and monuments, and by more subtle changes in vegetation caused by the grazing and fencing of animals – for example reindeer (Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 1999).

Traditional Sami industries, both reindeer herding and the activities of past hunting communities, have caused minor changes to the landscape. These are not always visible to the untrained eye and often require specific training to enable them to be identified. Sami culture does not always leave physical traces of itself. Sites may also have a strong secular and sacred significance in myths and traditions, and are as such an intangible heritage. Whether it’s a place you pass through or a place only visible on the horizon, it is equally important as a part of the Sami landscape as the place where the gåetie (the Sami dwelling) stands.

How the landscape is used depends on the user’s understanding and knowledge of it, the extent to which he or she belongs to it. Sami culture and way of life have always been closely tied to the use of the landscape. The Sami cultural landscape is, in effect, the Sami understanding of the land, which in turn is reflected in the activities carried out in it (Sami Parliament in Norway 2005).

In animist religions a key belief is that the landscape has soul. This makes nature and the landscape not just a passive backdrop but an active spiritual element in human life (Wiker 2004, 115; Fossum 2006, 34; Porsanger 2003). Man and nature are in a continuous process of interaction. Meaning is not written into the landscape, but is rather the consequence of that interaction (Bradley 2000; Jones 2006, 212; Fossum 2006, 34). The landscape exists in a dialectic relation between social action and geographical space, where social and cultural environments combined with experience create a cognitive map that determines movement patterns and behaviour in the landscape (Østmo 2004, 185; Fossum 2006, 34f). The landscape is changing, and change is
in itself an inherent result of our experience (Ingold 2000, 201). Its forms are clues to meaning rather than carriers of meaning (Ingold 2000; Jones 2006). Knowledge of and membership in an area are shaped by both practical experience and the transmission of knowledge between generations (see Sami Parliament in Norway 2005).

Landscape is part of social space; it is where structures become significant. Structures in social space are expressed by occupied space acting as a representation of social space (Bourdieu 1996, 150; Østmo 2004, 185f). Children are socialized in to society and learn social rules by moving around the home (Hodder 2004). Consciousness itself is largely shaped by the surrounding material reality and a particularly strong influence on the individual occurs during childhood and adolescence (Engels [1882] 1938, 37). Social space is a constructed, abstract representation in the same way a map gives an overview of the social world, and the material, concrete and symbolic can be expressed in the occupied room or landscape (Bourdieu 1993, 297).

In Sami pre-Christian religion, the gåetie’s spatial design symbolizes society’s social structures. Social and religious aspects of pre-Christian society were given specific expressions, and came to play an important role in how the ensuing generations became socialized into the Sami conceptual world. In this way, the gåetie functioned as a microcosm in which the various components and structures in the gåetie symbolized the cosmological order (Rydving 1995, 100ff; Hansen & Olsen 2004, 97ff; Fossum 2006, 35). In the traditional gåetie, the centre is the core symbol of the sun and its life-giving rays. From the main entrance, two rows of stones or logs run towards the fireplace, with similar lines to the rear of the gåetie. The area between the fireplace and the back door was perceived as holy and was taboo for women. Hunting prey was brought in through the rear holy door, while milk and products from animal husbandry were brought in through the main door. In addition to the horizontal division of the gåetie, you can see the line between the smoke vent, the fire and the earth as a reflection of the vertical dimension of the cosmos. It was the image of the world pole that went between the different dimensions and which had its heavenly end point in the polar star (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 97ff; Fossum 2006, 175f).

The Scandinavian mountains are often described as Europe’s last wilderness, something that could imply that the area is essentially untouched by humans. These are the same mountains and landscapes that are part of the Sami cultural landscape where the Sami have been working through the millennia (Ljungdahl 2007, 28ff). It will have major consequences for Sami life and
culture if the traces of Sami presence are assumed to be part of the wilderness and not acknowledged as traces of a human culture. It may mean that the area becomes more accessible to further exploitation, which in turn could impose restrictions on reindeer herding and other Sami industries.

Today it is accepted in academic circles that the Sami have a long history and prehistory. The term Sami immigration is no longer referred to, but the question usually asked is: when did the Sami, Norse, Finnish and other ethnic identities arose on the Scandinavian Peninsula? What were the underlying causes, how did the phenomenon develop in different areas and how is it possible to detect its signs? In spite of the fact that today there is a broad consensus among archaeologists that the South Sami have been living in the area for a very long time and that they are descendants of the prehistoric people who lived here and inheritors of their culture, opinions surface occasionally which challenge this. In 2005, the collective publication ”Trøndelags historie” (The history of Trøndelag) (Bull et al. 2005b) came out, in which Ida Bull and Audun Dybdahl support the immigration theory even today (Bull 2005, 265; Dybdahl 2005, 159). This theory was put forward by Yngvar Nielsen in 1889 and, put briefly, argues that the Sami people immigrated to the area in the 1500s and 1600s. In 1889, he based his arguments for this on what he considered to be an absence of tombs and sacrificial sites and Sami place-names in the Røros area. In part 1 of the publication (Bull et al. 2005a) a different view is put forward by archaeologists who show that the Sami population existed in the central parts of Norway during the Iron Age (Aronsson & Ljungdahl 2008).

As a result of information contained in Trøndelag’s history, the Saemien Sijte foundation, together with the Nidaros diocese and the committee for South Sami churches (Nidaros bispedømme, utvalg for sørsamisk kirkeliv), organised two seminars during 2006 and 2007 in order to spread new knowledge about the South Sami settlement history (Lyngman 2007).

Recent surveys and archaeological investigations have also shown Sami settlements as far south as Valdres in Oppland county during the Iron and Medieval Ages. Under the direction of the Science Museum in Oslo, a Sami site was investigated which, on evidence about its use, can be dated back to the 900s (Skalleberg, orally).
The importance of meetings and participation

Dialogue as a method and our shortcomings

The point of dialogue as a method in the ”Saemieh Saepmesne” project is to increase our knowledge of the South Sami community, and amongst its members as well. It requires us as project organisers to listen to and ask questions about needs and interests. In theory it works so that when a need is identified, we create the conditions for something to be done about it. For example, people may want to know the research world’s historiography of South Sami society for a given time. We can then arrange for lectures to be given, or we can obtain the relevant literature on that area. Or people may ask what methods are available for tracking and documenting the past, for example, which archives are available online and where, in which records can we find data concerning the Sami, and the search methods for those archives. It could also involve how to look for cultural remains in the landscape or tips on how to conduct talks with tradition-bearers. Courses in archaeological survey techniques have been the most popular to date. This type of course has now been held five times in the area in the local Sami communities.

In theory it seems obvious that any activity arising out of the community itself should be supported and developed. In practice though all projects of this nature have inherent problems and contradictions. Projects often follow a set plan that is a prerequisite for grant funding. This sets certain limits which constrain the project’s scope and flexibility. It can for example be difficult to satisfy needs which arise locally and which are perceived as important if they haven’t already been presented in the funded project plan. Operations in the field do not happen by themselves. They must be continuously monitored and directed by the project management so as to ensure that desired objectives are achieved. This is not and should not be a one-way communication; many requests are received by those who work with ”Saemieh Saepmesne”, full or part time. However, there are differences between different areas.

The funds for this project came after an application process. Only when it was finished could dialogue with local communities begin. We believe the project ”Samieh Sapmesne” has such a project history, at least on the Norwegian side. Dialogue with the local communities started mainly after the project had begun. Once it had started, project staff went around introducing themselves and informing the local community about the project so as to create interest.
and credibility. This practice may have problems for several reasons: it can become difficult for the project to put down local roots; it risks being perceived as something imposed from the outside, while the idea of co-determining its design and goals may be seen as of minor significance. At worst, local communities that have not been engaged in dialogue before projects are started could come to see them as irrelevant. This is a shortcoming we are aware of, and it is a lesson to be learnt when any new application is processed.

Another important issue is that, in many cases, the staff hired for the project cannot themselves take part in designing the application. This problem is almost insurmountable. Posts have to be publicly advertised before anyone can be employed, and there can be no guarantee at the application stage that funding will be available. Personnel are therefore sometimes recruited entirely after the event so that the very people hired to implement the project can have no hand in its design.

In its defence, however, it should be said that those working on the project are very excited about it and have met with a good response and rewarding exchanges with local communities. The group that designed the project idea had the benefit of people with a special insight into South Sami society, for example, Ingvar Åhren. Åhren, a former project manager and operations manager from Gaaltje in Östersund, is South Sami and has a large network on both the Norwegian and Swedish sides. The local Sami community have long felt the need for a documentation project. We have heard a lot of people saying something like, ”This should already have begun, and should have started 10–20 years ago.” The project application was therefore designed in an atmosphere of goodwill, after the local need for it had been identified.

**Some examples from an ongoing dialogue**

In connection with a course in conversation technology that the project provided, many interesting reflections were made by participants. Among other things, these dealt with alternatives to the way conversations are usually planned and organised. One often reads that as an organizer, you should if possible avoid conversing with more than one person at a time on the grounds that it may be difficult afterwards to discern who said what. Personal or sensitive information may be inhibited by several participants. The practicalities of giving everyone space to be heard can also become difficult. Some of the participants on the course objected to this and pointed
out that there are also advantages to meeting several people at once. For example, bearers of tradition with common experiences can discuss and help each other to remember different events and stories. They are inspired by meeting each other and talking about old times and their memory can be helped by the energy of the meeting. This type of experience is not usually described in books about conversation and interview techniques (Crafoord 2005; Häger 2007). The problem of distinguishing who said what during conversations between two or three people at once is real. However, the gain in terms of knowledge may be greater and identifying who says what can be solved if one uses a video camera as well as a voice recorder. Perhaps today’s documentation practices are too fixated on the individual, often putting great responsibility on one person to remember and inform. It should surely be possible occasionally to vary documentation methodology, moving between one and several custodians of tradition, so as to get a more complete picture.

Sami traditional local knowledge is collective and may have a different alignment to the one suggested in the interview books.

Another issue raised by participants in the course on conversation technology was what to do if the person you’re talking to submits incorrect information? Many of those interested in the ancient uses of South Sami areas are experienced and aware tradition-bearers of that culture. This was an issue that we had to take on board and we tried to solve it as described below, in an account that was then included in the guidance on conversation techniques (Norberg 2010, 3):

”That memory is affected by time is well known, and dates and locations can be wrong. Some of this one can check, return to and complete, but we cannot require that everything anyone says should be completely correct. You are very much given the tradition-bearer’s view of various events and developments. The story may then be added to by different parts of second- or third-party information. Several stories about the same event may differ significantly on certain points; what we hear is one individual’s experience of it.”

Other questions raised concerns as to whether the South Sami community cultural remains should be published or not. Should they be in the public record? There are different opinions and views sometimes change over the course of time. Albert Jåma, a 60-year-old Sami engaged in reindeer herding within Åarjel Njaarke sjite, Vestre Namdalen is one of those who reflected on this issue. Albert said that he had changed his mind over whether or not the
existence and whereabouts of cultural sites should be disclosed. At first he thought they should be kept secret, but now he thinks they should be public knowledge. When asked why, he replied something like this:

”In the 1980s, I was involved in working with and documenting cultural heritage, and believed in concealing the remains. Part of the resistance to the publication of cultural remains was based on a feeling that we had already been robbed of so much. Rights to land and water, being questioned as native people, and constantly studied by people outside who then wrote their version of Sami history, religion and origin. Should we lose our cultural remains now too? I think I shared this feeling with many Sami in these parts.” (Albert Jåma 09/05/2009)

Later, Albert said he continued to work on surveys and records of all kinds of cultural remains in the area, not only the Sami:

”I saw that some remains had already been damaged; I have seen others be destroyed despite the fact that they are protected by law. You cannot save every one, but when cultural remains are publicly documented and then subsequently destroyed, for whatever reason, this becomes a historical document showing that these were Sami remains. Despite the fact that they’ve been lost and destroyed. The remains were perhaps not investigated archaeologically, but they are on the map of places where we Sami operated. Everyone can see it and have to recognise the written documentation. This conserves the data maybe for all time. If the remains are kept secret, then the information that could be used to fight any possible exploitation is lost. We Sami may know it was there, but it is not a clear and recognized historical document in the same way as it would be if it had been officially registered.” (Albert Jåma 09/05/2009)

This conversation led us to think and even understand some of the resistance to publication. It is possible to make the cultural heritage the group’s own by keeping it secret and there is probably some value and point in doing that. In the end it becomes each individual's opinion as to what is best for the future, and this opinion can change. If the remains are known, they receive legal protection and become part of history but there is still no guarantee that they will not be destroyed. They retain, even if they are destroyed, a preserved value as a recognized historical document of South Sami activities in an area and that’s what it takes to be recognized by the majority society.
We have learned a lot and many new ideas have come out of our time working in the South Sami area of Norway. The lessons and experiences have given us new knowledge and have in a way brought life and meaning into our own lives.

**Ethics**

In the 1980s, critical questions were raised around the world regarding how indigenous peoples’ graves have been treated in connection with archaeological investigations. A forum for these issues, the World Archaeological Congress (WAC), was founded where ethical principles were debated. The conference in 1989 that went under the title ”Archaeological Ethics and the Treatment of the Dead” was devoted to ethical issues and led to the 1990 adoption of ethical principles for members and obligations towards indigenous peoples (Olsen 1997, 260ff; Schanche 2000, 79; *First Code of Ethics 1990*).

That same year, i.e. 1990, Norway ratified the ILO Convention 169: ”Convention Concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries”. The Convention replaced the previous Convention on Rights of Indigenous Peoples ILO-107, adopted in 1957. The first convention was not ratified by Norway, but together with Mexico, Norway was among the first countries to sign the ILO-169 (Bergstøl 2009, 75). Sweden still has not ratified the convention on the grounds that Sweden does not consider itself able to meet the requirements of the Convention relating to Sami land rights.

In Norway, the Sami Parliament was established in 1989 and in 1994 it became a separate administrative body for Sami cultural heritage (Holand 2005; Bergstøl 2009, 75). Responsibility for cultural heritage sites in Norway and Sweden is structured similarly, but with a significant difference in terms of who is responsible for the Sami cultural heritage. Both in Norway and Sweden, the Directorate of Cultural Heritage has overall management responsibility, but regional responsibility is delegated to the counties’ respective county boards. The main difference is that in Norway, responsibility for managing the Sami cultural heritage is delegated to the Sami Parliament’s division for rights, way of life and environment. In Sweden, responsibility for management of Sami cultural heritage lies in the same place as other cultural heritage sites, namely the county boards. There are pros and cons for both systems; that is not something we will examine here. What can be said is that there is a
positive message in the administration being under the Sami Parliament and, in the spirit of self-determination, subject to Sami control.

In recent years, the Sami population in Sweden has made increasingly clear demands for cultural self-determination and control over cultural heritage issues. An important part of these demands has been to restore and re-bury bone material taken from Sápmi for archaeological studies, and skeletons and skulls collected for biological and medical research. The demand for repatriation and the right to bury their dead is about respect and recognition of the abuse the Sami community has suffered at the hands of the majority. Since the 1970s, these demands have been made around the world, and in the USA and Australia it is now impossible to pursue archaeology without being aware of these issues. In the United States the requirements and the debate led to Congress in 1990 adopting repatriation legislation into U.S. federal law, namely the ”Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)” (Ojala 2009, 236ff).

In Scandinavia, there have been a few re-burials of human remains in the Sami area. The first was the re-burial of the skulls of Mons Somby and Aslak Hætta, each executed by beheading for their part in the Kautokeino uprising in 1852. The skulls had been taken to the Anatomical Institute at the University of Oslo for research purposes. In 1997, after many years of struggle by their descendants, the skulls were taken back to Sápmi and buried next to the Kåfjord church outside Alta (Olofsson 2001; Sami Parliament in Sweden 2007). In addition, there have been re-burials in Finland (Lehtola 2005) and one in Sweden (Heinerud 2004). In 2002, the skeletal remains of Soejvengelle\(^5\) were buried in the original grave in Aatoeklibpie (in Swedish Atoklinten) in a collaboration between the Västerbotten Museum and Västtjen Saemieh Sijte. The grave was investigated in 1950 by Ernst Manker, and the skeletal remains were then moved to the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. The material was kept there until 1973 when it was transferred to the National Historical Museums, also in Stockholm. In connection with the investigation, Manker promised in a letter to Nils Axelsson in Ström (Tärna parish) that the bones would be returned and re-buried in their original location. However, it took over 20 years before the demands by Vadtjen Saemieh Sijte led to Soejvengelle being re-buried (Heinerud 2004; Fossum 2006; Ojala 2009, 255). This is so far the only re-burial of Sami skeletal remains that has taken place in Sweden. Today at least nine institutions in Sweden have Sami skeletal material in their

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\(^5\) Also Suovengella (in South Sami) the ‘shadow man’.
collections from an unknown number of individuals (Edbom 2005, 31). At the same time there is a tradition of re-burying remains that is starting to emerge for different reasons, for example from abandoned cemeteries (Ojala 2009, 255). In Finland during the 1990s, it became known that there were skulls at the University of Helsinki which were from Inari, Utsjoki and Muonio and which had been collected during the 1800s and 1900s. After debate and demands from the Sami population, 95 skulls were brought back to Sápmi and re-buried on an ancient Sami burial site in Enareträsk (Lehtola 2005, 84; Harlin 2008, 196; Ojala 2009, 268).

These may be the only examples of the repatriation of skeletons so far in the Nordic countries but these are far from the only examples of the collection of skeletal material, holy stones, and so on. These collections were assembled mainly during the late 1800s and to some extent into the 1900s. Ernst Manker, ethnologist and former director of the Nordic Museum, can be cited as an example of a collector. During the 1940s and 1950s he travelled around Sápmi gathering information, knowledge and materials that he brought to the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. Manker published major works full of information about Sami culture and their archaeological remains. One of his great works ”Lapparnas heliga ställen”(The Lapps’ holy places) (Manker 1957) provides much information on places of sacrifice in Sápmi with both pictures and descriptions of places of sacrifice. By reading Manker, among others, people can quite easily find the major important places of sacrifice, something which could have repercussions far into the future. The sites could at worst be damaged by looting but they may also be used by various New Age movements.

Memories of the rampage in Sápmi by previous researchers still live on, and the experience has bred some scepticism about cooperating with archaeologists and scientists. Those who currently document Sami prehistory have a completely different ethical framework in their approach and working methods. One important change is their view of Sami prehistory and history. Earlier students of Sami society did not start from the position that the Sami actually had a history. Now this prehistory is recognized and studied (Olsen 2000). The right of the Sami themselves to define what kind of training is needed for this study, is also recognised. In addition, more and more researchers come from the Sami communities, and much of the work is being done by Sami researchers or Sami institutions.
Saemien Sijte – South Sami Museum and Cultural Center is a Sami institution. We shall work according to our own codes of conduct consistent with museum standards. We shall follow best practice as set out in museum and research ethics guidelines, as well as in the main guidelines laid down by the Sami Parliament. Yet our work and our ethical guidelines remain locally grounded in the South Sami society.

It is therefore important that institutions and projects working with an indigenous cultural heritage are aware and work within the ethical guidelines and conventions drafted by the UN and the ICOM (*International Council of Museums*). At the same time each country also has ethical guidelines (*National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway* 2010) and we have the *Archaeological Code of Ethics* mentioned above (*First Code of Ethics* 1990). Without going into them in detail, we want to mention the UN Framework Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 169 and the draft UN guidelines for the protection of indigenous heritage (*Principles and guidelines for protection of the heritage of indigenous peoples* (*Convention on Biological Diversity* 1992; *Declaration* 2007; *ILO Convention* 2003; *Draft Principles* 2000; see also *Ethics in Sámi and Indigenous Research* 2008). Field work carried out shall be in accordance with academic standards and relevant national and international laws and agreements in the field (United Nations conventions, ICOM’s rules, Archaeological Code of Ethics). Field work will respect the views of local communities. It is also important that we know where our ethical boundaries lie. What are the limits of my professional practice? Do I agree to work on investigations in relation, for example, to future exploitation? Thinking about different issues before they occur can be a great help.

The documentation of prehistoric and cultural remains is based on our working methods, and always involves at least two types of ”products”. First, the physical ancient remains in the Sami region which may be in danger of being physically destroyed; second, the oral and/or written information about the sites and the area as a whole, which draws on traditional knowledge.  

The project will document Sami ancient and cultural sites and characterise them where possible. This is done primarily by recording cultural remains in the database developed for the project and to the Sami Parliament. Access

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For ethics in the documentation of Sami traditional knowledge, see Åsa Nordin Jonsson’s contribution in this article collection.
to the database is given to those who participate in the project, meaning the South Sami population. The presence of registered sites is shown on a map, and eventually the number of points on it will grow as more and more places are identified. It is possible to protect sensitive sites in the database, such as graves and sacrificial sites, so that they do not appear on the map, i.e. they can be excluded from being published. The Sami Parliament also has a requirement that all Sami ancient and cultural remains that are registered shall be included in the FMIS (Fornminnes Informations System, which is Information System for Cultural Heritage, http://www.fmis.raa.se) and in Askeladden (Database for cultural heritage, http://askeladden.ra.no/sok), which is the public database for ancient remains in Sweden and Norway.

In theory, all ancient remains are protected by law if they meet the requirements for protection. But in practice, it is only when they are registered that the authorities can ensure that the remains are not destroyed – for example, by road construction. Our demand has been that sensitive remains such as graves and sacrificial sites shall not be publicised so that they can be protected from destruction by curious people, plunderers and so on. In the two public databases available today, there are two levels of access. First, there are the public search tools, available to anyone on the Internet; and secondly, there are some that are only accessible by login and password. To get the login and password, the user has to belong to a relevant authority or research institution. Today, fragile remains are protected from disclosure in the sense that they are only accessible to those with a login, i.e. the Directorate of Cultural Heritage, the county administration and boards, the Sami Parliament and the universities.

As a result of the methods we use we also receive a relatively large number of oral narratives. Conversations with tradition-bearers take place with free and informed consent. They are fully aware of what the information will be used for, and agreements about the use of the material are made before the conversation begins. Where conversations with tradition-bearers are either recorded on tape or filmed on video, these talks are stored on a server and are available to the tradition-bearers if they wish to have a digital copy. The material is also available to participating institutions and staff in the project. An agreement or a contract should also state clearly what restrictions the tradition-bearers have concerning the use of the material and the extent to which other researchers may or may not have access.
As a responsible institution, the project owners and cooperating institutions are required to ensure that the material is not abused and that the material may not under any circumstances be given or sold to organizations, businesses or put to other commercial use. We and the project workers are also responsible for protecting confidential information which becomes available to the project during the work; this may in practice mean that we cannot include sensitive information e.g. the location of sacred places.

Cultural heritage and identity – then, now and later

Using archaeological remains and stories to create national history is not unusual, and certain events are often part of the national myth (Olsen 1997, 271ff). Traditionally, archaeologists and historians in the Nordic countries have had little interest in Sami history, probably because it does not play an active role in the national myth. For the periods where we have been able to distinguish between Sami and Nordic prehistory, it has usually been the latter that has been studied.

The research view from the 1600s until about 1870 saw the Sami as the indigenous people of Scandinavia. Subsequently the Sami population was gradually marginalised by the Germanic peoples (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 17) and during the 1860s the majority society’s policy and scientific views became more hostile to the Sami. Views on the earlier concept of ‘the noble savage’ changed throughout the western world. In the 1870s, a theory of a late Sami migration from the east was launched. In 1891, Ingvar Nielsen claimed he had proved that the Sami south of Trøndelag and Hedmark had only come to these areas during the previous 200 years and that consequently they could not be an indigenous people in the central parts of Norway (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 23–24).

In the period from 1910 to 1960 historians and archaeologists rarely studied Sami history. Most felt that the Sami were a relatively recent immigrated people and they were subsequently seen as representing an ethnographic field of study (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 26). As recently as the 1970s the story of Northern Scandinavia was the history of Swedes and Norwegians alone (Olsen 2000, 29; Fossum 2006, 17). In archaeology, their own (Norwegian, Swedish or Finnish) national history was important while ethnographic studies were regarded as the study of the other, the primitive, and the alien.
As mentioned earlier, there are still some historians who hold views rooted in this academic tradition.

There is also another group of researchers who, more indirectly, subscribe to the theory that Sami history is short. Lennart Lundmark (1998, 2008) is a historian who is often critical of society’s significant and damaging impact, particularly in the Swedish part of Sápmi. His books often give a brief description of the sources that exist concerning the Sami. These are all written archival sources (they are considered the most objective by Lundmark) where the Sami appear in different contexts. In his prefaces, he often argues that the Sami people disappear in the obscurity of history during the 1000s when the written material runs out, but is it really so? We would argue the opposite. We believe that in rejecting the source value of archaeological materials, Lundmark (and certain other researchers of Sami history and religion) also denies the South Sami people the right to a long history. This approach contributes to a picture of a static Sami society, unchanged by time, where any pre-historic traces that do not fit the written source material, become invisible. By recognizing the source value of archaeological materials and using them in conjunction with other source material, you can give a better picture of Sami community, social life, beliefs and regional variations, and with a much greater time depth than the fragmented historical material can ever give (Fossum 2006, 17). Historians of religion such as Louise Bäckman (2000, 17), Håkan Rydving and Rolf Kristoffersen (1993, 198) have been cautious in referring to the archaeological results of their research. One can just about acknowledge that early institutional practices did not accept an adjacent historical discipline, as archaeology is to history, but it is a cause for concern that the situation is unchanged today in the 2000s.

Sami cultural remains are one, perhaps the foremost, of the sources available today for the writing of early Sami history from within the Sami community. Remains of many settlements from different periods are still there in the land where the Sami lived and worked, but that is rarely mentioned in the written material. On this view, archaeology plays an important part in the writing of Sami history and is almost the only source, apart from a few Roman and Greek sources, for material on the Sami in the period before the 1000s and the Middle Ages. The archaeological survey of Sami remains from the Late Iron Age and early Middle Ages in southern Norway has also reinforced the few historical sources available, such as the reference to Harald Hårfager and Finnekonge Svåse, who had a gåetie near the royal estate in Dovre (Sturluson 1995, 72–73). Archaeology has been a great help in understanding how society
was re-organised as a consequence of the domestication of reindeer and when
that happened. Sven-Donald Hedman’s (2003) research in the Arvidsjaur/
Arjeplog area clearly shows that the domestication of reindeer caused the
settlements to be moved away from lakes, rivers and good hunting grounds
to dry heaths in more moor-like areas. Pasture together with an adaptation to
the needs of the reindeer were the main factors in the new settlement pattern,
along with access to water and firewood, and this is reflected in the change in
the area during the Late Iron Age in the 600–700s.

So far, archaeological investigations in the South Sami area have been few,
but they have been useful for contemporary society. However, this has not
prevented archaeologists from believing that, for interpreting prehistoric
societies, what is documented is representative of the whole. Evert Baudou
(1992, 110–111) argues for example that it is possible to see an ethnic border
from northern Ångermanland diagonally across to northern Jämtland on the
basis of the presence of asbestos ceramics and moulds for ananino bronze
during the millennium BC. Although this type of pottery and this type
of mould exist north of the border there have been fewer finds south of it.
Baudou believes that the border remained visible during the Iron Age and
into the historic period and to some extent still remains. According to him the
border separated areas inhabited by the Sami (the North) and by the Nordic
agrarian population (the area south of the border). Later he refers to the fact
that south of the ”border” the place names are Nordic and north of it they are
more Sami (Baudou 1992, 112). In our opinion, this reasoning is extremely
simplified because no critique of the archaeological source record is offered,
for example about what may have shaped this distribution. Furthermore
Baudou disregards abundant material on both sides of the ”border” from the
same period, for example bifacial arrowheads of quartz and quartzite (in use
from about 2000 BC until the beginning of our era, perhaps to as far as the
400 AD). Another set of remains which Baudou (1992) does not mention is
the lake graves on both sides of that border and other ”transnational” remains,
for example catch pits and cooking pits. Last but not least, it seems Baudou
forgets who printed all the public maps since they were first made, with a
monopoly on the naming of places.

There have been two major archaeological excavations of burial grounds
in Härjedalen: Vivallen in Funäsdalen dated to the 900–1000 AD and
Krankmårtenshögen by Storsjön, dating from the period 200 BC to 200
AD. Here Baudou (1992, 153) only deals with Vivallen which he accepts as
a Sami pre-Christian burial ground, without discussing it in relation to his
significantly more northern border. Baudou, however, does make the reflection that no burial ground like it had been discovered in the “undoubtedly Sami area in northern part of Norrland.” He also notes that burial practices can vary across a widespread geographical group (Baudou 1992, 153). Therefore Baudou has identified a group that seems to be distributed far south of the border on the basis of un-problematised archaeological finds.

Like all historical sources, archaeological remains and research are open to multiple interpretations. The published results can then be used by society in various ways: in school, in study groups or in local history societies. Sometimes, and this happens especially in the South Sami area, they figure in legal disputes over land and water between landowners and Sami. The results of archaeological research have been instrumental in several trials, as evidence for South Sami cultural continuity in current South Sami areas over the last two millennia. Without these research results the immigration theory would almost certainly still be asserted by a larger number of academics and law practitioners than it is today. The phrase: ”if we’re not seen, we don’t exist” or perhaps even more explicitly ”if we’re not seen on your terms in written documents, we don’t exist” is, in this context, made very clear.

Reflections and conclusions

The theoretical conditions for this project have been good. In practical terms, we have seen growing interest and involvement from the local Sami communities as the project has progressed. Interest in history and prehistory is great and this should strengthen personal identity and bring added value to local communities in many ways and on different levels.

Initially, the practical implementation of the project was out of step with today’s theoretical starting points. By that we mean that the project could have been better anchored in the affected communities before the application for funds was made. The fact that it wasn’t may have meant that the project was initially perceived as an imposition on the community from outside, the result of something formulated elsewhere, and that the locals lacked influence. In our project and in all others that we will do, we are going to be more attentive to this in the future, especially now that we hope to work further, with an extension into 2012. The issues to be addressed then, whether they concern research or pure documentation, will be rooted from the start in the local communities.
Registration of cultural remains and the collection of traditional knowledge are very important in the South Sami area, as in all the Sami areas. Sami cultural environments are created by activity in the area. Working with people who themselves have lived in a similar way to the people who actually made cultural marks on the land gives a further dimension to the understanding of tradition. As mentioned, we should not focus only on remains from historical times and from later reindeer-herding communities but try to follow the history of the area in a continuous line back in time.

In South Sami society, especially in the southern parts, it is very important to register the older remains in order to problematize and question the various migration theories. In these areas, the issues for the affected communities are mostly to do with land rights. The burden of proof is still on the Sami community to show that they existed there before the 1880s. This inevitably means searching the land with limited means and resources for traces that will then be scientifically analysed and interpreted. Will there be areas in Norway where the Norwegian population may have to do the same in order to be allowed to continue with their livelihoods? There are a lot of sites that had no Norwegian farms before the 1800s in Norway.

What we can see from archaeological research on prehistoric Sami communities is that settlement patterns changed radically when the society went from being a hunting and fishing society to a reindeer-herding community. There are other factors that determine the location of settlements. When the Sami mainly lived by hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering it was the availability of resources which largely decided where they settled. When they started reindeer herding it was the availability of grazing which determined the choice. On the Norwegian side there has been no comprehensive research into the earlier periods, which means that we do not have as good an overview of how the settlement pattern changed during the transition to reindeer herding. If registrations reflect only the use of the landscape for reindeer herding practices, we will lose remains from earlier periods as well as research opportunities for discovering when these transitions were made locally.

What we have seen at our courses is that local tradition-bearers become extraordinarily skilled in finding old remains after they have learnt how to recognise them in the terrain today. Their appetite for new knowledge combined with their own knowledge of the area, myths and places, and
their ability to move in harmony with the landscape means that they quickly develop an insight into where and how to find older remains.

Something that is perhaps unique to this project is that it makes use of traditional knowledge to give South Sami society some visibility in the world beyond. Open meetings and seminars, and the marking of South Sami cultural remains on the same map on both sides of the border between Sweden and Norway have all helped to make this happen. Our hope for this project is that by these means we will help to give South Sami society a strong sense of itself, while also strengthening its position in the nation states of Sweden and Norway.

Sources

Oral information

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References


