I would like to start this article with a brief narrative from the Swedish part of Sámi Land (Sápmi), from an area we can call Jávregaska. Jávregaska consists of two large lakes. Between the lakes there is a muotki (strip of land), which is also the dividing line between the areas where two separate groups of Sami people have lived and shared the surrounding natural resources. Jávregaska is an area of jávrrehasat and reindeer herders. Jávrrehasat were settled people, living off their small farms and the resources of the surrounding areas. They also owned the homestead land, the so-called ”hemman” from where they could fetch materials, firewood, etc. For the reindeer herders, this was their summer pastures. At the time when it was customary for herders to also keep goats, they could leave them with the settled Sami during the winter. They also shared an area which was not part of the ”hemman” and they used this area as needed. The jávrrebasat sometimes needed the outlying areas as extra hayfields; though this need would vary somewhat. They also had permanent net fishing sites and had authority over these sites. There are also a good many cloudberry bogs in the area. Where to pick berries was based on an unspoken or spoken agreement between families and groups. Sometimes people would ask each other if they could take birch bark, for example, from a certain area, while on other occasions, people would start using a specific area, perhaps because it was near a fishing site they had used, and then others would accept that this family or group could do so in what we could call an unspoken agreement. Reindeer herders also used the same area; in addition to pastures, they needed the area to fish, pick berries and obtain other necessities. The reindeer herders chose the area as being suitable for their summer pastures as it was close to water. But they also needed an area with woods in order to obtain materials for their goahti (dwelling) and other needs. The jávrrebasat
were skilled boat builders and built boats for the reindeer herders. They could also undertake other practical projects, such as building a school (skuvlagoabti) in the locality.

Thus both the jávrrehasat and the reindeer herders used the area as needed, one group making a living from a farm and the outlying areas, the other from the reindeer. They used the area jointly, and also helped each other so that both groups would birget (manage, survive). They needed to fish, pick berries and obtain materials for various crafts and they had to agree on the use of the area, but they also exchanged services. One generation ”inherited” the use of a cloudberry bog, for example, from another generation and as children they would learn to find the way to (dádjadit) the bog to pick berries there.

Without doubt many people have experienced this kind of land use, where different user groups share the surrounding resources. Here I have described an area and its use at a time when people lived exclusively from the resources of an area, i.e. they survived in the sense of birget. By living in and off an area, people gradually enhanced their skills and knowledge, and learned how to manage this knowledge and the area. This is not only a question of traditional knowledge, but also of the management of knowledge by an indigenous people.

Here, I intend to briefly present some views on how concepts related to árbediehtu may be relevant to the elaboration of the phenomenon of «traditional knowledge» in the Árbediehtu project at the Sami University College. Árbediehtu (in general, traditional knowledge) and árbečēppodat (traditional skill) are concepts which relate to possessing knowledge, i.e. having knowledge about something (diehtu) and having knowledge in something (mūhttu). Choosing the term árbediehtu in the context of documentation and collection implies that collected and preserved knowledge is often knowledge of something rather than knowledge in something.

The Sami University College project on Sami traditional knowledge has chosen the term árbediehtu as a common term for both traditional knowledge and traditional skills. The documentation includes both revitalised traditional knowledge and traditional knowledge which has had continuity. The Árbediehtu project aims to develop methodologies for the collection, preservation, protection and further development of árbediehtu. The project will also provide a close link to how traditional knowledge is perceived in UN documents such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and
the Convention on Biological Diversity. Article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity specifically addresses indigenous traditional knowledge and the need for in situ preservation of and respect for such knowledge and also the need for local communities to consent to and participate in the use of traditional knowledge. The Convention is a global agreement on conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity (Convention on Biological Diversity 1992). The text of Article 8 (j) reads as follows:

"Subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices.” (Convention on Biological Diversity 1992)

Indigenous and local peoples are important players in the implementation of the Convention, since indigenous and local communities have developed and preserved traditional knowledge (Tunón 2004, 93). Although this convention emphasises biodiversity, several bodies have expressed a desire to consider nature and culture together and not as dichotomies. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples stresses the rights of indigenous peoples to the conservation, protection and development of their cultures. Article 11 expresses it as follows:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.” (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007)

According to this, indigenous peoples have the right to make use of, and develop their cultural traditions, customs, skills and other manifestations of their civilisation. In many projects concerning traditional knowledge, the retransmission of knowledge is part of the self-determination process.
In Sami contexts, a great deal of literature has been published which focuses on Sami traditional knowledge, viewing the concept of traditional knowledge from different perspectives and disciplines (see Borgos 1993, 7–21; Dunfjeld 1993, 23–35; Kalstad 1993, 35–46; Kalstad & Viken 1996, 31–44; Kalstad 1996, 21–43; Helander 1996; Bjerkli 1999; Bergstrøm 2001; Dunfjeld 2001; Lund 2001; Somby 2003; Triumf 2004; Eira 2004; Magga 2006; Joks 2007; Porsanger 2007; Balto 2008; Kuokkanen 2009). Common to all of these studies is that they to some extent consider árbediehtu as it was in the self-sufficient society, or as it is used today, with continuity to the present day.

My approach and contribution to this concept will involve the distinction between the Sami concepts of knowing something and knowing about something, respectively máhttit and diehtit.

The concepts of máhttit and diehtit

A person may know a great deal about something, but will not necessarily know it. This may sound a little strange. But the distinction between diehtit and máhttit can be expressed briefly as the difference between, on the one hand, knowledge of an action and on the other hand, the ability to perform the action, i.e. bodily knowledge. Diehtit and máhttit express theoretical and practical knowledge (Guttorm 1993; Guttorm 2001; Dunfjeld 2001). Somebody may know (diehtit) how to make e.g. a gietkka ('Sami cradle'), even though this person has never made one themselves. He or she can learn this by looking at cradles, being instructed in how to do it or reading about it in books, etc. However, if he or she actually also makes a gietkka, he or she will gain hands-on personal experience, i.e. knowledge through action (Molander 1996; Guttorm 2001). In the example of the gietkka, máhttit in my opinion demands a certain skill to carry out the work. Čehppodat (‘practical skill’) is a Sami word used to express that a person is good at something, e.g. giehtačehppodat (‘handy’), čállinčehppodat (‘good at writing’), lávlunčehppodat (‘good at singing’), and it therefore deals with the concept máhttit.

We may say that personal experience is a prerequisite for the assertion that a person possesses a certain skill (máhttu). In theorizing about ways of knowing, this knowledge is often described as tacit knowledge (Molander 1996, 33–54; Polanyi 2000; Dunfjeld 2003; Fors 2004). However, in this context, I have chosen not to use the term tacit knowledge, because the idea of silence can be misleading. Máhttit is thus a more accurate term to describe a person’s
own experience. The preconditions for understanding an action one has not previously performed or experienced at first hand are firstly that one perceives what is happening and secondly, in order to fully understand this, one must actively participate.

A person may know that the marks in a book are letters, and he or she may very well have enough skill to draw (write) the letters, but still does not know what they mean, and thus cannot combine them into words and hence is unable to read and understand the words and text. Once a person masters the art of reading, i.e. has that specific skill, he or she can also acquire knowledge (diedut) from books on e.g. how to make a gietkka. But not until he or she has actually made a gietkka can we say with certainty that he or she has the skill (mabtit) to make one. On the other hand, if a duojar (here: ‘craftsperson’) who has never made a gietkka is asked to make one; he or she may well succeed, because this person has experience of duddjot (to create). In other words, we cannot draw a sharp line between diedtit and mabtit by saying that some knowledge requires personal experience (mabtit) and that other knowledge does not (diedtit), because there are different degrees of both diedtit and mabtit. When for example a parent lets a child go somewhere where the child has never been before, the parent first considers whether the child will find the way (manna daadjada). The parent may have given the child instructions about the way, and the child understands the instructions. This requires that the child has experience in receiving instructions, understands what the parent says and can imagine what the terrain looks like through listening to the instructions. In this case, we can say that the child has the skill to find the right way based on previous experience in walking in similar terrain, understanding instructions and assessing the area himself. The child combines his own knowledge and skills and copes (son birge). The child understands and can evaluate the difference between the north and south sides of a river, knows the difference between a big stone and a rock, etc. Experience is therefore not always associated with exactly the same tasks, but similar ones.

Traditional knowledge thus includes both skills and knowledge. In the Arbediehtu project, mahtolašvuhta (‘having a skill’) will be documented, but once it is collected, it also becomes knowledge (diedtu).
Árbevierru – Árbediehtu – máhttu – álgoálbmot diehtu

There are different terms, such as árbevierru (tradition), árbevirolaš diehtu or árbediehtu and máhttu (traditional knowledge), álgoálbmot árbediehtu (indigenous traditional knowledge) and álgoálbmotdiehtu (indigenous knowledge). My goal is not to define these concepts fully, but rather consider some aspects of these concepts and how árbediehtu is reflected in reality. I shall concentrate solely on what is considered as indigenous traditional knowledge.

Álgoálbmot diehtu and máhttu, and álgoálbmot árbebevirolaš diehtu and máhttu are often considered to be identical concepts, but in my opinion they are not. Álgoálbmot diehtu is a broader concept than álgoálbmot árbevirolaš diehtu and máhttu.

Tradition

Árbevierru and árbediehtu are relatively new terms in the Sami language. People certainly did not think or said that something of what they did in their everyday life was árbevierru. When it became necessary to explain and refer to knowledge and skills, there was a need for a suitable term which could cover skills, thoughts and actions. The traditional expression árbevierru covers the concept of tradition. Árbevierru and árbediehtu do have something in common, but must also be viewed as two separate concepts with different content. The two terms have one word in common, árbi (inheritance), and in addition vierru (custom) and diehtu (knowledge) respectively. Diehtu is related to knowledge, while vierru is connected to customs, habits, etc. Árbevierru means that we have inherited customs, habits and usage, while árbediehtu is the knowledge we have inherited.

The concept of tradition is often and generally speaking related to «transmission» and more particularly «transmission from generation to generation». Certain content is transmitted, but this content varies. The Swedish Encyclopedic Dictionary divides tradition into inner tradition (e.g. views, values, beliefs, ideals) and outer tradition, i.e. manifestations such as verbal tradition (words, texts), behaviour (morals, customs, work practice), institutional tradition (community structure, ranking systems, organisation) and object traditions (buildings, clothing, tools, etc.) (Nationalencyklopedin 1995: entry: tradition). This division thus deals with the concept at different levels, firstly the inner level of thoughts, beliefs, etc. which are abstract and
reflect the inner attitudes and beliefs of man or of individuals. The second, outer level also contains abstract traditions, such as morals, customs and work practice, together with texts, stories, linguistic expressions, and concrete objects. According to the Encyclopedic Dictionary’s division of tradition, many of our social actions may be tradition, which may take place in various social settings. I take this division as my starting point.

If we consider traditional knowledge within tradition, it is the knowledge in the tradition which is transmitted. Árbevierru has been repeated and passed on from generation to generation. People pass on what they have in some way inherited themselves. This implies that a tradition requires repetition, but that in time the tradition will also change, cf. the concept of «traditions then and now» which of course alludes to change over time. One can discuss tradition at several levels. The general sense of tradition is that of a social practice, belief, institution, or object that is passed on from generation to generation. Asbjørn Klepp divides tradition into several levels; one may refer to the tradition of a particular culture, such as the Sami tradition, or the British university tradition, or a tradition of content, such Christmas traditions, or tradition as a characteristic or indeed as a cultural process (Klepp 1980, 196).

The outcomes/products of such ”traditions” are not necessarily considered to be traditional knowledge. The term tradition is for instance used in such a field as modern design, but then referring to a specific form of design or ”school”. But this does not mean that the design itself is traditional; this is more a question of an institutional tradition.

**Dábit and vierut**

The Sami language contains the terms vierut and dábit. In Konrad Nielsen’s dictionary, vierru is translated as custom or habit (Nielsen 1975: entry: vierr). The same translation is found in the Sami–Norwegian dictionary from 1995 (Kåven et al. 1995: entry: vierru). Dáhpi is also perceived as custom and habit. I cannot remember any mention of our árbevierru from my childhood days, but on the other hand both vierru and dáhpi are familiar concepts, which emphasised behaviour, morals, etc. Johan Turi also uses vierru in describing a ”tradition”:

”And in the old days it was customary, when a young man came courting, for the girl to go to meet him and unharness his reindeer,
and that was a sign that she would take him.” (Turi 1931, 205; the original text in Sami, see Turi [1910] 1987, 165.)

Here he uses *vierru* in the sense of “custom”. He states that the Sami since the old days (*dološ äiggis*) have had this custom when someone is courting. *Dološ äiggis* implies that the narrator is old and remembers far back. With our present-day concepts, we would certainly call this a tradition. *Dåhpi* is also perceived as a custom or habit, and in my view can also be seen as a characteristic or form of behaviour.

However, in some disciplines, there are also semantic differences between *árhevierru*, *dåbit* and *vierut* (I use the terms *dåbit* and *vierut* in the plural because it is not just a matter of one *dåhpi* or one *vierru*). Bertil Rolf (1991, 140) has interpreted Polanyi regarding the latter’s distinction between tradition and habit, and considers that tradition is deeper than habit. A tradition lasts longer and must, according to Polanyi, have been repeated for three generations before it can be seen as such. Maja Dunfjeld also uses this as a criterion for calling something a tradition (Dunfjeld 2001). A tradition includes a social contract between generations (Dunfjeld 2001, 157–158). This contract reveals the content of the tradition and what actions those involved will take in the handing down, e.g. the roles of the deliverer and receiver of the tradition. The social contract also shows cultural continuity.

Giddens is also of the opinion that tradition has certain criteria (Giddens 1994, 62–66). He points out that within the concept of tradition there are entities which preserve and lend authority in order to ensure that everything is done correctly, and that people adhere to certain rules. He therefore also finds that the person who receives the tradition has great confidence in the authority; this is also mentioned by Rolf (Rolf 1991). Another criterion for tradition, in Giddens’ view, is the existence of a common memory. In order for something to be considered a tradition, it must be experienced as a special event by more than one person, and for it to become a living tradition, there must be at least one person to hand it down (Giddens 1994, 65, see also Rolf 1991). For a tradition to be passed on, certain ritual aspects are necessary, so that things are done in a particular order (Giddens 1994, 65). Giddens emphasises the fact that in the transmission of traditions, social contacts are an important part of the process and rituals give rise to guidelines and communication (Giddens 1994, 79). This also means that authorities and the social group can make interpretations, and in the case of rituals, these must be so clear that the people concerned understand the ritual and its meaning. However, Bertil
Rolf interprets Polanyi as meaning that rituals are not required in order to pass on a tradition. Considering *vierru* in the way Johan Turi has used the term, I understand his story of *soakŋu* (‘courtship’) as an old ”custom” that has had continuity for generations, i.e. what Rolf via the Polanyi texts and Giddens mean by tradition. In the *soakŋu* example you will find authority like a *soakŋoalmmái* (‘matchmaker; marriage-broker’) who knows the ritual, and people involved in the ritual, who maintain the rituals and follow the rules.

As Turi suggests in the quotation above (1931, 205), we are concerned with a phenomena which has lasted for some time, has had continuity for at least two generations (as he uses the term *dološ áiggis*, i.e. ”in the old days”) and which also existed in his time. But on the other hand, *vierru* does not necessarily have continuity, but can be e.g. the particular habit of an individual. We might call a Sami festival a *festivalavierru* (‘festival custom’) and if it lasts long enough, it ends up being an *árbevierru* (‘tradition’), if the criterion is the duration. But can we know for certain that everything that we call tradition has a certain duration and how long this duration will be? How can we be quite sure whether an 18th century tradition really lasted three generations, by interpreting the sources? *Vierru* and *dáhpi* can be seen as synonymous with *árbevierru* (tradition) and in the example used, Turi uses *vierru* in a way which may be considered as tradition. But *vierru* can refer to a shorter period of time and thus allows for the view that things may change and that new traditions may be created.

**Árbediehtu**

As I pointed out in the beginning of this article, there is a distinction between *diehtit* and *máhttit*, and *diehtu* and *máhttu*. *Diehtu* is knowledge, but when something is considered *árbediehtu* (‘traditional knowledge’), it is something other than mere knowledge. When considering the árbediehtu of indigenous peoples in their own context their experience as indigenous peoples must also be emphasised.

Mikkel Nils Sara approaches Sami traditional knowledge by considering the characteristics of traditional Sami society (Sara 2003, 124–127). His view is that the old self-sufficient Sami society was a traditional society. He thus relates *árbediehtu* to a life of self-reliance. He considers various forms of traditional knowledge, or *árbediehtu*; in a social group, where there is some common knowledge. People take into account the local environment; this is something
all groups have in common. People use nature, and agree on such use. Thus he means that the exchange of views is a hallmark of traditional society. Sara also sees that there are skills that are directly related to livelihood activities. He believes that people in the traditional society exploited the surrounding area in order to *birget* (survive). One way of viewing traditional knowledge is thus to take nature into account and study peoples understanding of life in nature. Using nature as the starting point for an examination of traditional knowledge also has a basis in the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Many scholars who have discussed *árbediehtu* in the Sami context have emphasised the holistic aspect and the place of man in nature; they have highlighted interaction with nature as an important factor in traditional knowledge (Sara 2003; Kuokkanen 2006; Nergård 2006; Joks 2007; Balto 2008). In his book on the use of *árbediehtu* in school, Asta Balto stresses that man’s place in nature is part of *árbediehtu* - how to subsist in nature, how to find one’s way in nature, how to observe and interpret natural phenomena, how to communicate with nature, etc. (Balto 2008, 47). With regard to *árbevierru*, we can see that there are both ethical and moral aspects involved, and the traditions may be ideological or spiritual, and they may be institutional or object traditions; and in all these forms of tradition, knowledge is handed down. Within *árbediehtu* we must operate with the distinctive concepts of knowledge (*diehtu*) and experience-based knowledge (*máhttu*). If we consider this knowledge in relation to the Convention on Biological Diversity, much of *árbediehtu* will be in the context of nature.

I shall return to my introductory narrative to ascertain what kinds of *árbediehtu* and *máhttu* are to be found there. Approaching this I used the term *birget* as a starting point to discover the different niches of *árbediehtu* revealed in this account. I mentioned that the people engaged in agriculture also used outlying fields as additional land for hay and they had the ability to decide which particular area was most suitable for this purpose. They also had knowledge of the hay itself, when it could be used, e.g. as a supplement to the summer supply of fodder, or for a year with poor growth (*birget*). This is knowledge associated with a particular livelihood activity as described by Mikkel Nils Sara (Sara 2003). Similarly, reindeer herders assess the terrain in relation to their needs. The reindeer herders and farmers also had common interests such as cloudberry picking. They knew where the berries grew, they had learned which bogs had berries, where the berries ripened early, and where they ripened subsequently. Such knowledge can partly be acquired through learning blindly from the previous generation, but also through
personal experience by observation from year to year, i.e. reading nature, so to speak. This can be compared to any observation over time where the results are subsequently systematised.

The use of an area is a social contract requiring interpersonal action. The names of bogs can sometimes give us an insight into these social contracts. One example is ”Elle ábkun jeaggi”. Why is a bog given such a name? The name tells us that Ábkun Elle (grandmother Elle) made it her vierru to pick berries in that bog, and everyone accepted this, because she had bad legs and couldn’t get to bogs farther away. There is thus a story behind it which is contextual. But ethical attitudes are also revealed here, i.e. a woman with weak legs ”gets” a swamp to help her survive (birget). Bjerkli describes the local population in Manndalen as having an understanding of how the area in Svartskogen is to be used and this use has changed over time according to needs (Bjerkli 1999, 187). Even though he does not use the term birget in his account of the traditions of the area, the knowledge of the use of the area is still related to the art of survival (birget).

In árbediehtu there is a spiritual dimension. Grete Gunn Bergstrøm argues that the distinction between traditional local knowledge and traditional indigenous knowledge is precisely a question of emphasis on the spiritual dimension of traditional indigenous knowledge (Bergstrøm 2001). This spiritual aspect is not necessarily tied to a particular religion. Rauna Kuokkanen has used the Sami term láhi (‘gift’) as an entry point for understanding the relationship between man and nature, and also, in my interpretation, the spiritual aspect. In Kuokkanen’s opinion, láhi demonstrates the affinity the Sami have traditionally had with nature. The relationship between man and nature must be balanced if it is to persist (Kuokkanen 2006, 24). Láhi is related to what we receive from nature, and our ability to share nature’s benefits. This is a question of sharing with one another both at the material and the spiritual level. In the North Sami language, we have a word to express this sharing with others: oassi which means part, not only a specific part, but it is also used in expressions such as luonddu oassi, meaning what nature should have, or what is connected to luck. A group of people fishing may for example agree that everyone will be ”partial owners” of all catches. Luonddu oassi is the part that one releases to nature, e.g. by not fishing more than one needs. But it can also serve as a thought, or consolation, when it is possible to catch more fish, but the fishers are out of luck, and have to be content with what they get. The relationship between man and nature is preserved in individual or communal rituals where central elements are sharing the gifts provided by nature and
letting nature keep her part (Kuokkanen 2006, 24). As mentioned above, the Swedish Encyclopedic Dictionary (Nationalencyklopedin 1995) differentiates between inner and outer tradition, where the interior is attitudes and ideals. The category of inner tradition will include the spiritual aspect in the sense that we as human beings see ourselves as part of nature and act accordingly. In order to survive (birget), to maintain our luck or vuorbi (‘destiny’), we gain knowledge through certain rituals and the guidance associated with them.

We also take part in this knowledge today through the handing down of outer traditions, which include language, objects and organisations, according to the Encyclopedic Dictionary. Today, when we take part in ideals, attitudes, etc., we find the relevant knowledge precisely in terms such as läbi, vuorbi and luondu oassi. The knowledge is also of course to be found in various duodji and practical objects which again have different niches of knowledge (Dunfjeld 2001; Guttorm 2001; Guttorm 2006), such as the choice of material, knowledge of an area, the actual skill involved, the use, ethical factors, the economic aspect and ideals.

**Ways of collecting, preserving and developing**

In considering Sami traditional knowledge and explaining its forms of expression in the Sami community, a suitable approach may be to ascertain how it is expressed in the Sami language, as Rauna Kuokkanen and Mikkel Nils Sara have done. Inherent in the understanding of läbi as described by Kuokkanen is the idea is that people share their knowledge with others (Kuokkanen 2006; 2009, 106–117). This knowledge has evolved in a social context where the bearer of the knowledge is the authority, as has also been suggested by Bertil Rolf (1991) and Giddens (1994). Gry Fors has used the term čalbmi for the knowledge bearer (Fors 2004). As I understand her explanation of čalbmi (which literally means ”eye”), the bearer of knowledge has the overview and experience, and in the context of transmitting the knowledge, will always have an overall picture of a situation (Guttorm 2001, 45–62), and the ability to assess what is necessary for the work to be performed correctly. Sara uses assessment as an important criterion for traditional knowledge, and as I understand ”assessment” in relation to e.g. knowledge transmission, the authority has an overview and can thus assess what needs to be done. In the context of the collection and preservation of traditional knowledge, we must ask ourselves what kind of knowledge we want to collect and what the collection will be used for. An árbečeahppi (‘knowledge bearer’) may not be
able to give a theoretical explanation of snow, but will easily be able to explain snow in the context of his work. The person who documents traditional knowledge has one role, and the person who participates in a transmission context has another role. In the following, I shall use a particular project as an example of the collection, documentation and transmission of traditional knowledge. This project is called Goabtehuksen (‘building a turf hut’), and is one of the sub-projects carried out by the museum association RiddoDnutarMuseat (RDM), one of the partners in the Árbediehtu Project (RDM 2010, see also the RDM Annual Report 2009, 13).

**Documentation and transmission as preservation**

One of the goals of the Árbediehtu Project is the development of a methodology for preservation and documentation. In the discussion of how best to preserve árbediehtu and the methods to be used in the documentation, an understanding of preservation is central. I shall draw on experience from the documentation of turf hut building (goabtehuksen) as an example of how to document, preserve and transmit both a tradition and árbediehtu.

A goabti (‘turf hut’) is in itself a tradition, an outer tradition as defined by the Swedish Encyclopedic Dictionary (Nationalencyklopedin 1995). At the same time a goabti with its architecture can also be regarded as an embodiment of traditional knowledge. The construction of a goabti requires knowledge of the area, the materials, the earth, the seasons etc. The Goabtehuksen project had as its objective to document how to rebuild a goabti. It was completed at Gilišillju (Kautokeino Village Museum), where such an old goabti was rebuilt in 2009. Three huts were to be built, two sheep huts and one dwelling hut. For this project, the RDM could call upon three experienced and talented goabti builders (goabtečeəhpiτ, ‘people who know how to build a goabti’): Aslak Anders Gaino, Per Mikkelsen Utsi and Jon Ole Andersen. Parts of the building process were filmed, such as the fetching of bealjiti (‘curved poles’), the construction process, choosing the birch bark, obtaining lavdnji (‘turf’), demolition of an old goabti and reconstruction of the goabti. Solveig Joks was responsible for most of the filming and the editing of the documentation. Nils John Porsanger filmed the collection of bealjiti. Different people were involved in the documentation of árbediehtu, e.g. the goabtečeəhpiτ and the person whose task it was to document this. The Sami University College participated with students on the 2009 Bachelor course in duodji (Sami handicraft), and the author, as their handicraft teacher, was responsible for the participation...
of the students. The College contacted RDM to offer help in building the goahti. The bachelor course includes the learning of various traditional skills, and the Goabtebuksen project offered the possibility of a large-scale learning activity such as the building of a goahti. Through the participation of the students, another factor in the Goabtebuksen project was realised, namely the transmission aspect. The students were to work with the tradition bearers Aslak Anders, Per and Jon Ole. Jon Ole’s role was to transmit the knowledge, and in this way he was also the authority on goabtebuksen. At the same time, Aslak Anders and Per were transmitters of knowledge of the work process.

The project started in early summer 2009, when fetching the wood for the bealjit was filmed and documented. The College joined the project at the stage of the demolition and reconstruction of the goahti. The first meeting between the RDM, árbečeabpit, the film-maker Solveig Joks and the college students took place on the land where the goahti would be built. Karen Elle Gaup, the director of RDM, presented the project, its objective and the roles of the people involved in it. This sequence was of great importance for the project, as everyone present came to realise what the project consisted of and could all feel involved in it. Jon Ole, Per and Aslak Anders had an overview of the elements of the work process and said that we would be able to build the goahti in a week since the students were taking part. They had this overview at all times, while we (the students and I) could only follow the instructions given by Jon Ole, Per and Aslak Anders.

In my view, the film (RiddoDuottarMuseat 2010) had two functions: it is a documentation of how to build a goahti, but it also conveys how traditional knowledge is preserved in a social context, e.g. how things are done in a certain order, such as how the authorities position themselves, and the inauguration of the goahti).

The Goabtebuksen project can serve as a good example of the possibility of a systematic study of different layers of traditional knowledge within the larger Árbediehtu project.

Final thoughts

The Sami University College’s Árbediehtu project emphasises that local actors must decide what should be collected and how the collected material is to be analysed. The question then arises as to what can be collected and what
methods can be used to collect traditional knowledge, and what to do with the material collected.

We may have an idea of what ārbediehtu is, i.e. the knowledge passed down from one generation to the next which is considered by many in a community to be ārbediehtu. Ārbediehtu is also subject to change; each generation gives a new interpretation to the information handed down and passes it on according to its own interpretations and practices.

In the overall discussions about ārbediehtu and in drafting of future projects about traditional knowledge we face a challenge, namely to find methods which take into consideration both information (ˈdiedut) and experiences (ˈmáhtut) in such a way that the documentation of traditional knowledge benefits local communities. The local communities can participate in collecting and documentation of traditional knowledge, and I believe that this is an important measure in the capacity building within local communities.

References


**Film**