



Small groups of hunters and gatherers migrated and settled in northern Scandinavia when the inland ice began its retreat more than 12 000 years ago. Our ancestors left behind asbestos ceramics and reindeer bones in settlements from 1 500 BC, according to archaeologists. The first written documents mentioning the Sami people are from the year 98 AD, when the Roman historian Tacitus described a hunting people of the North who dress in furs and live in harmony with nature. Where did the Sami people come from? Nobody knows - we have always been here.

Sápmi

The Sami are one of the world's indigenous peoples. We have a distinct culture, own languages and practice customs that differ from the rest of society. Our traditional area of settlement is Sápmi and covers an area stretching from the Kola Peninsula in Russia, across Finland and over the northern regions of Sweden and Norway. There are no exact numbers on how many we are, probably between 80 – 100,000 whereof about 30,000 live in Sweden.

Language

The Sami language belongs to the Finno-Ugrian language group and consists of three different main languages: Eastern Sami, Central Sami and Southern Sami. In Sweden, we speak several subgroups to these, among others Northern Sami, Lule Sami, Southern Sami, Ume Sami and Pite Sami. Today, more than half of the Sami in Sweden lack knowledge of Sami language. The oppression of our language during the 1900's left deep scars, but there is a steadily growing interest in recapturing our spoken heritage. The Minority Language Act has improved the situation for Sweden's national minorities.



Religion

The ancient Sami religion was a nature religion, where the world was divided into three spheres: the underground, the earthly and the heavenly. Each world had its own gods and entities. The Christian missionary work began early in the 11th century with Catholic monasteries setting up along the coast of the Arctic Ocean. By the 17th century, churches and marketplaces were established in northern Sweden. The Church and State collaborated, took command of the regions and forced the Sami to abandon their own religion. The Sami adopted the Christian faith and today only bits and pieces of the old religion remain.

Culture

The concept of Sami culture is very broad, covering everything from music, literature and theatre to handicrafts, food, customs and livelihoods. Our own traditional dress is called a kolt. The design varies depending on your origins and family, but all share the characteristic colours red, green, yellow and blue. The kolt is worn mostly at times of celebration, such as on our own national holiday, *Samefolkets dag*, on 6 February, when we proudly raise our own flag.

Livelihoods

Hunting wild reindeer eventually shifted to small-scale reindeer husbandry. The nomadic Sami culture evolved from the natural reindeer migrations between different grazing grounds. Researchers believe that large-scale reindeer husbandry has been around since the 16th century, and is still a vital Sami livelihood and a carrier of cultural heritage. The Sami people hold the sole right to pursue reindeer husbandry in Sweden. In order to practice this right, one must be a member of a sameby, which is a form of organisation, an administrative unit as well as a geographical area for reindeer herding. Other traditional livelihoods are hunting, fishing and handicraft. Tourism, media, art and music are examples of businesses within the Sami community that have developed during modern times.

Politics

The organisational history of the Sami people stretches back 100 years. Today's Sami-political parties were founded together with the establishment of the Sami Parliament in 1993. The Sami Parliament is both a state agency and a publically elected parliament where elections are held every fourth year. Learn more about the Sami Parliament at www.sametinget.se/english

Self-determination

International law states that indigenous peoples own the right to self-determination of their political status, as well as social, cultural and economic development. We want to be able to self-decide on issues that concern us, such as language, education, media, traditional knowledge and culture. We want to exercise influence over our land areas and natural resources. We want the right to shape and preserve our identity as a distinct people. In addition, the included right to be consulted as a people, on all issues that concern us.

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