The Sami

An indigenous people

samiskt
informationscentrum

The Sami have been a part of northern Scandinavia for more than 10 000 years, following the retreat of the inland glaciers. Settlements, graves, capture pit systems, ceramics, rock paintings and offer sites are all evidence of our ancestors living here.

Small groups migrated and settled along the coasts, surviving as skilled hunters, gatherers and fishers.

The first written documents about the Sami date back to 98 AC, when a Roman historian writes tales of a hunting people to the north who dress in furs and live in harmony with nature.

Where do the Sami come from? No one knows. We have always been here.

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Cover photo: Carl-Johan Utsi

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The Sami - an indigenous people

An indigenous people has lived in the same area throughout history, before colonization and the defining of countries. They have their own culture, own language and own customs that are quite different from the surrounding society.

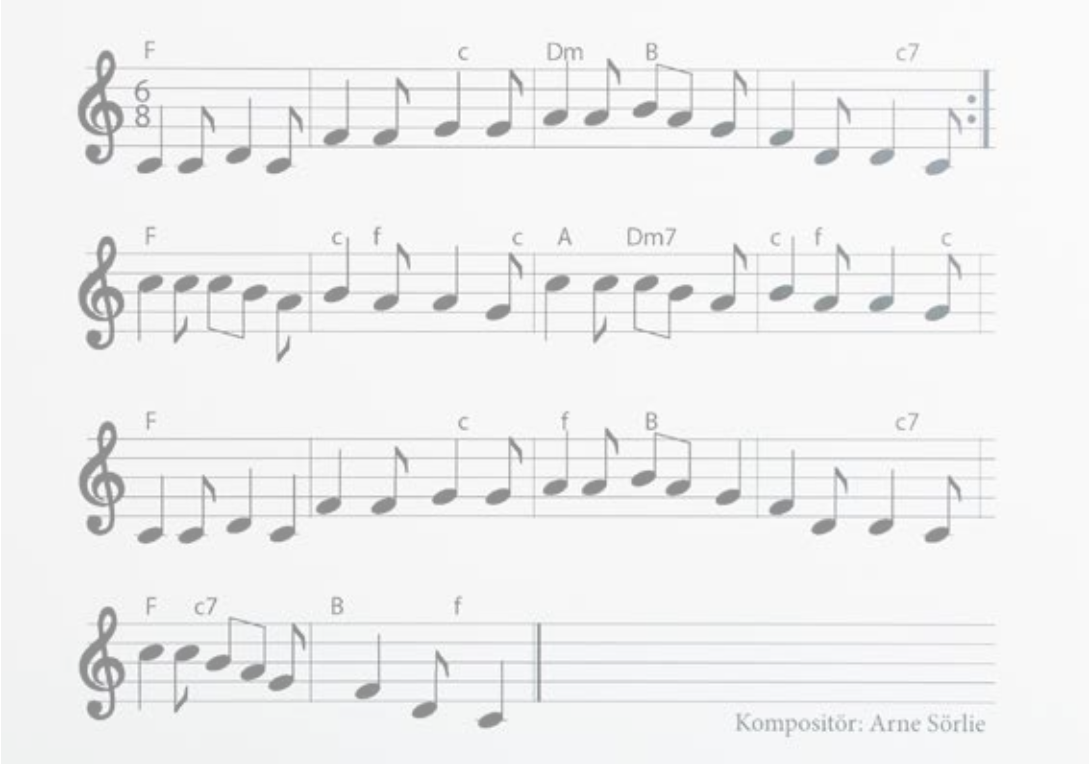
Indigenous peoples enjoy international legal protection through for example international conventions the UN and European Council have adopted, and Sweden has acceded to. Indigenous peoples own the right to preserve their culture and languages, but peoples also have political rights. The Swedish constitution now recognizes the Sami both as an indigenous people and a people.

Sápmi is the original living area of the Sami people, stretching from the Norwegian coast to the Kola Peninsula in Russia, with Sweden and Finland in between. An estimated 100,000 Sami live in Sápmi, but since Scandinavia does not conduct ethnic census polls it is difficult to know who consider themselves as Sami. The numbers below are mere estimates:

- 20 000-40 000 in Sweden
- 50 000-65 000 in Norway
- About 8 000 in Finland
- About 2 000 in Russia

The Sami National Day is celebrated on 6 February across Sápmi ever since 1993. The date was chosen to honour the memory of the first Sami national meeting that was held in Trondheim, Norway, on 6 February 1917. For the first time, hundreds of Sami from north to south over national borders gathered to discuss joint issues. The South Sami woman Elsa Laula Renberg was one of those who took the initiative for the meeting. The second national meeting was held in Östersund, Sweden, in February 1918. 100-year anniversaries were held in 2017 in Trondheim and 2018 in Östersund, in memory of these first Sami pioneers.

The Sami people of all nationalities share the same flag. It was adopted by the Sami Council's 13th Conference in Åre in 1986. Our flag was designed by Astrid Båhl from Skibotn, Norway. The circle symbolizes both the sun and the moon. The sun is red, the moon is blue and the combined other colours are adopted from the traditional Sami costume.



During the same conference, the song *Sámi soga lávlla* (The Sami People's Song) was adopted as the Sami national anthem. The lyrics are by Isak Saba (1875-1921), who was born in the northern Norwegian village of Nesseby, and was the first Sami elected into the Norwegian parliament. The melody is composed by Arne Sörlie. The lyrics reflect the national romantic age from which it was born.

Verse 1

Far up North 'neath Ursa Major
Gently rises Samiland
Mountain upon mountain
Lake upon lake
Peaks, ridges and plateaus
Rising up to the skies
Gurgling rivers, sighing forests
Iron capes pointing sharp
Out towards the stormy sea

Would you like to know more?

You can listen to the song and will find the complete lyrics in English at:
www.samer.se/nationalsang

Sápmi/Sábme/Sábmie/Saepmie

Sápmi is defined as the traditional geographic area where the Sami have always lived, as well as the people themselves. The word “Sami” is derived from Sápmi. Sápmi is a nation without national borders. The original settlement area stretches from the south around the lake Femunden in Norway and Idre in Dalarna in Sweden, up north to the Arctic Sea and then eastwards to the Kola Peninsula in Russia. The Sami culture and community exhibits a broad cultural diversity based on regional differences. Along the Norwegian coast, fishing is the economic base while reindeer husbandry is important in other areas.

The map of Sápmi is divided into language areas that stretch over national borders in an east-west direction. This is also how the nomadic Sami moved, and to a certain extent still today, when the reindeer migrate between different grazing areas. The geographical area of the Sami settlement areas is not clear, and especially difficult is defining the southern border of distribution. There are artifacts from Sami activities further south than what is marked on the map, even in the Swedish counties of Värmland and Västergötland.

Want to learn more?

Go to the following site to learn about life in Sápmi thousands of years ago: www.samer.se/history

Photo: Carl-Johan Utsi

Who Is Sami?

The Sami Parliament Act includes a definition of who is considered Sami. To be eligible to vote for the Sami Parliament, the Act expresses the importance of the Sami language in the family, as well as whether you consider yourself Sami. You or your parents or grandparents shall have spoken the Sami language at home.

In earlier regulations, the Swedish State said that only reindeer-herding Sami were true Sami. With the establishment of the Sami parliament, language is now the identifying mark.

The question of personal identity is complex but can be broken down to three main parts: your origin, your early life and your individual choices. If your parents are Sami, but you don't consider yourself Sami or simply don't want to be Sami, then you are not Sami. You can also have double identities: you can be both Sami and Swedish and switch between cultural codes in different situations.

Old expressions such as "half Sami" and "quarter Sami" should not be used, they are remnants from the time when Sweden tried to categorize the Swedish population based on different races.

Clothing Traditions

Are you curious about the beautiful traditional Sami garment, often called ”kolt”? It is an important ethnic symbol, very personal. It shows who you are, where you are from and is an important cohesive symbol. The design varies between different regions and families and can tell you about the wearer’s origin, gender and marital status. The codes lie in the decorations, details and careful sequence of colours.

From the beginning, garments were made using materials from reindeer and other animals. Fur, skin and sinew were transformed into clothing, mittens, shoes and sewing thread. Later on, materials such as wadmal (thick woven wool), wool fabric and wool yarn were bought from traders. In the summer, a kolt of soft reindeer leather or floral cotton fabric was used. Wintertime required a warmer garment of wool or reindeer skin with fur.

Today, a modern kolt is made of broadcloth, silk, velvet or a mix of fabrics. The main colour can vary and is influenced by current fashion trends, especially the festive ones. A women’s dress can be long or knee-length, with a belt, shoes, woven laces and a shawl or breast piece that covers the chest and neck. The final touches are broaches, silver pins, jewelry, gloves, leather pants and a variety of hats.

The South Sami kolt is called *gapta*. The details and length are different for men and women, but both wear a breast piece embroidered with pearls or pewter thread. The men’s kolt is usually open in front and the edging and collar are decorated with broadcloth. The women’s kolt has a v-neck. Both have belts with pewter and pearl embroidery, and on special occasions, a silver belt is an extra touch.

The Luleå Sami kolt is called *gábdde*. It is a little tighter and has a v-neck. The men’s kolt has a collar and is shorter than the women’s. A breast piece is used under the v-neck and is decorated with different colours of broadcloth, white reindeer leather and sometimes pewter embroidery. A woven belt holds it all together.

The North Sami kolt is called *gákti.* It is decorated with red and yellow broadcloth and occasionally decorated with intricately woven bands. The men’s kolt has a collar, is shorter and usually has a belt of black leather and silver buttons. The women wear silk scarves held with silver broaches and their belt is either woven or sewn of leather or broadcloth.

Photo: Carl-Johan Utsi

Learn more

www.samer.se/costume
www.samer.se/handicraft

Duodji - Sami Handicraft

The Sami have always made household items such as knives, storage containers and garments crafted from the natural materials of roots, birch bark, leather, sinew, horn and more. When the nomadic Sami of the past migrated with their reindeer, there wasn't room for unnecessary items. Everything brought along had a function and the design was adapted to the mobile lifestyle. These cherished objects reflect the esthetics of nature.

Duodji, Sami handicraft, is a vital part of the Sami culture, as an income, hobby, a bearer of culture and for anchoring an identity. Duodji is everything from everyday objects to artwork. The significance of and need for duodji has shifted in the Sami community alongside the changes in the majority society. Duodji changes over time, even if the products are the same, since the Sami have been open to the impressions from meeting other people. These interactions had an impact on duodji, while still preserving the traditional handicrafts.

The Sami Education Centre (Samernas Utbildningscentrum) located in Jokkmokk offers courses in duodji, as does the Sami University of Applies Sciences in Kautokeino, Norway. Both are part of the cooperative education network *University of the Arctic*.

Food Culture

Food is a key part of every culture. Traditional Sami food is based on reindeer, moose, fish, herbs and berries. Everything from the reindeer was useful, knowledge that is very much alive today, where the head, hooves, bone marrow and blood are still used. Even the entrails and four stomachs are cleaned and used for making sausage. Whitefish, charr, greyling and trout are eaten fresh, salted, dried and smoked.

In the past, most Sami also owned mountain cows and goats, but even reindeer were milked. Cheese was made at home in shallow forms, while flour and salt were bought. Herbs and berries spiced up the dishes during the summer. Examples of tasty plants used today are wild celery (Angelica archangelica), alpine sow-thistle (Lactuca alpine) and alpine sorrel (Oxyria digyna). Cloudberries, lingonberries and blueberries are still a natural part of daily diet.

Since reindeer graze freely, the meat is rich in important vitamins and minerals, and rather lean, with 3% Omega 3 fats. These benefits are even greater when the organ meats and blood are used. Reindeer blood is incorporated into potato dumplings, pancakes and blood sausages.

A favorite dish is reindeer stew, made from fresh short loin cuts simmered together with a piece of fresh liver, tongue, blood dumplings and blood sausage. This is then enjoyed with potatoes, chewy soft bread and washed down with bullion.

Dried reindeer meat is a delicacy. In early spring the meat is salted, smoked and then hung to air dry, although, in some regions the meat is simply salted. Smoked reindeer meat is called suovas, which is fried in thin strips.

While the traditional Sami fare have not changed, today's innovative Sami chefs work on developing new dishes. Sami gourmet food has become part of a new trend, naturally influenced by other culinary traditions. Take the opportunity to taste both traditional and innovative Sami dishes the next time you have the chance! Or why not try your hand at traditional Sami cooking?

Learn more

Slow Food Sápmi:
en.slowfoodsapmi.com/home.html

Taste of Sápmi – a book about Sami food with recipes, ISBN 978-91-981636-2-9

Photo: Mia Bornberger

Blood pancakes with bacon and sugared lingonberries

Makes about 30-40 small pancakes:

- *2 eggs*
- *4 dl reindeer blood*
- *2 dl water*
- *2 dl wheat flour*
- *0,5 tsp salt*
- *2 tsp syrup*

Beat the eggs and mix in the other ingredients to make a batter. Fry the pancakes in butter, preferably in a cast iron pan.

Serve with sugared lingonberries and crispy bacon. They are also delicious served cold with butter!

The Sami Languages

The Sami language can be divided into three main branches: South Sami, Central Sami and East Sami. Within these there are several varieties and dialects. Those spoken in Sweden are North Sami, Lule Sami, South Sami, Ume Sami and Pite Sami. On page 6 you can see the traditional language areas, but naturally today there are North Sami living in the south, and vice versa.

The Sami language is part of the Finno-Ugric language family. Finnish and Sami probably developed from a common language about 1000 years BC and have since developed separately.

Sami language was late to be used as a written language. Most older Sami have never learned to read or write in Sami. The school language was Swedish, and the Sami language wasn't even a school subject prior to 1962. Because of minority language oppression during the 1900's, many Sami cannot even speak their own language. During the 60's and 70's, many parents did not speak Sami with their children. Their negative experience of speaking Sami in the Swedish school system resulted in wanting to spare their children the pain they went through. They were deprived of their own language and many suffer from this still today and would like to have their language back.
Today's young Sami are proud of their background, with a growing number learning the language and using it daily. This of course contributes to its survival. There are no statistics on how many speak Sami, but an estimate is about 17 000 speak North Sami, 6 000 of which live in Sweden. About 800 speak Lule Sami, about 700 South Sami.

Ume Sami is between these last two, and almost died out before it was officially recognized as a written language in 2016. Pite Sami is still pending its status.

The minority reform has strengthened the status of the Sami languages. Children have greater opportunities to learn their language, and older Sami have the right to elderly care using their own language.

Learn more

www.samer.se/language
www.sametinget.se/languagepolicy

Photo: AnaMaria Fjällgren

The Written Word

Historically, quite a bit has been written about the Sami people, but very little by the Sami themselves. The first publications by Sami authors came out in the beginning of the 1900's. In 1910, Johan Turi (1854-1936) published *Muitalus sámiid birra* (The Story of the Lapps). Turi wanted the colonizing States to learn about Sami life in Sápmi, since they didn't seem to know anything about the Sami. The book came out in Swedish in 1917.

In 1937 came *Jåhttesáme viessom* (The Life of a Nomad), written by Anta Pirak (1873-1951), which describes the traditions and way of life of Jokkmokk Sami at that time.

The Sami artist Nils Nilsson Skum (1872-1951) produced more than 3,000 drawings and paintings depicting reindeer husbandry and Sami life. In 1938 his drawings were published with comments in the book *Sáme siida – samebyn*. A sameby is both a geographical and economic community for reindeer husbandry. The illustrated book *Valla renar* (Herding Reindeer) describes traditional reindeer husbandry. After that there was very little published for several decades.

The 1970's brought a new awakening and consciousness of the Sami inheritance and identity. There was a publishing

boom of both poetry and prose. A famous Sami Poet in Swedish is Paulus Utsi (1918 -1975). As a child, his family was affected by the forced displacement of Karesuando Sami in northern Sweden. They were forced to move almost 300 km south to new grazing grounds near Jokkmokk. As an adult he was forced to move when new hydropower dams were built along the Luleå River. Many of his poems express the Sami people's conflict and powerlessness, others declare a love for nature and the reindeer.

One of the most read Sami poets is the diverse artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, also called Áillohaš (1943-2001). Áillohaš lived in Finland and Norway and published eight works of poetry. In 1991 he received the Nordic Council's Literature Prize for his book Beaivi, áhžášan (The Sun, My Father). This book is available in English!

Ann-Helén Laestadius (1971-) is a Swedish-Sami author from Kiruna who began her carrier as a journalist. She wrote *SMS från Soppero* (SMS from Soppero) in 2006, which is about a young woman and her thoughts on what her Sami heritage means to her. This work was followed by the teenage novel *Tio över ett* (Ten past one AM) about the conflicts surrounding the Sami and the mining industry. For this she was awarded the Swedish literary prizes Augustpriset (2016) and Norrlands litteraturpris (2017).

Oral Tradition

In contrast to the written word, Sami oral traditions are ancient. Songs, myths and legends have been handed down from one generation to the next, about people, animals and spiritual beings as well as stories of creation and the stars in the heavens above. Some are about specific people or places, others of animals.

Birds could warn of death, so there are stories of survival after hearing or meeting them. The spirit world is full of different characters, such as Ähpár, the spirits of children who were killed by their mother. They cry and scream and long for a name. Rávga are the shadows of drowned people who live in the water. They are feared for trying to pull the living into the depths. Stallo is large, strong and stupid. He captures Sami children to eat! But the children always succeed in tricking him and flee.

Ulda or gadniha (in South Sami saajve) are underground spirits that look like people and migrate with their reindeer, just as the Sami do. They could switch their own children for the Sami's. This is why it is so important to baptize babies as quickly as possible and place a psalm book or silver object in the crib.

Tjuder are bandits that devested the Sami by looting, burning and killing, but the Sami always trick them and get away.

The Sami music tradition is called jojk, which is the Sami word for “song”, pronounced “yoik”. It is considered the oldest form of music in Europe. The jojk is a tradition of memories, where we do not jojk about something, but rather jojk something – we become a part of that which we jojk. It is a coherent mix of sounds and words, creating an emotional connection between people, animals and nature. We jojk relatives who have passed away, forgotten places and dramatic events to ensure they live on in the common archive of memories. Personal jojks are about people, and thus that person owns the jojk.

There are three main jojk dialects.

- The South Sami jojk is called vuollie
- The North Sami jojk is called luohti
- The eastern Skolt Sami (Finland and Russia) is called leu´dd.

During a long period of cultural oppression, the jojk was scorned, considered a shameful expression and few dared to practice publicly. During the 1970’s, with the new awakening of Sami awareness, the jojk was resurrected as a form of music. Today’s young Sami musicians weave these jojk traditions into their modern music. Music tips: Search for Sofia Jannok, Jon-Henrik Fjallgren, Mari Boine to mention a few.

Sami Religon

Little is written about the old Sami religion and how they perceived the world. Archeological artifacts and language research give clues on how the Sami were influenced by other Nordic peoples, on both practical and spiritual planes. The original Sami nature religion was modified by interactions with Nordic peoples and their religions, both Old Norse and Christianity, mainly Catholic. Living side by side meant both were influenced by one another.

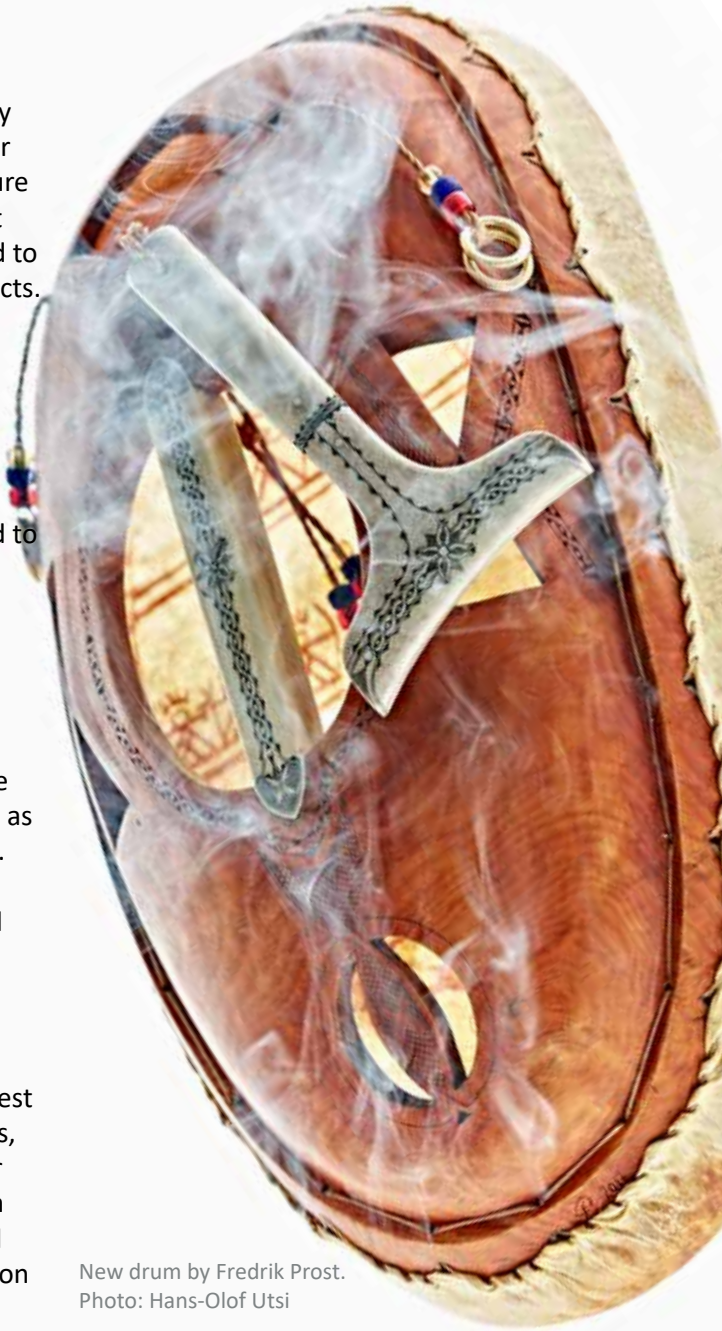
Myths and memories that were written down tell quite a bit about common features throughout Sápmi. We know about the role of the spiritual leader, the medicine man in Sami religion, of holy places in nature and of animal ceremonies. There are names of gods and goddesses, each with vital functions. The oldest written sources come from a Norwegian historical work from the 1100’s. The passage tells the tale of how a *noaidde* with help of his drum goes into a trance to save someone who is sick. Even the symbols on the drum are described. From the end of the 1600’s there are more detailed stories about the Sami religion, written by priests.

Attempts to convert the Sami to Christianity were tightly bound to the endeavor to conquer the northern regions. Religion was used as a powerful

political resource, in quite the same way as in other places around the globe. For a couple of centuries, the old Sami nature religion co-existed with Christianity, but during the 1700's, the Sami were forced to abandon their rituals and religious objects. The Church considered the traditional singing of jojk to be witchcraft and hundreds of ceremonial drums were gathered and burned. Children were encouraged to betray their parents and relatives. Spiritual leaders were threated into silence or sentenced to death to discourage the Sami and force them into compliance.

By the 1800's, most Sami probably baptized their children, were married and buried according the rituals of the Lutheran Church. From this time on, the Sami considered the traditional religion as something belonging to their ancestors. Even though they had been converted to Christianity, some still used the ritual drum secretly for guidance.

Many rituals, myths and knowledge were lost forever. Others endured, in a repackaged form to be accepted, and best conserved are daily rituals and thoughts, things everyone knew about. Just as for many other indigenous peoples, certain mountains and places still hold spiritual meaning, which is evident from names on today's maps.



New drum by Fredrik Prost.
Photo: Hans-Olof Utsi

Historical Calendar

11 000–5 000 BC
Archeologists have found thousands of settlements along the coast of the Arctic Sea and inner Norrland - the oldest traces of people in Sápmi.

1 500 BC
The *sijdda* community system arose when hunting wild reindeer became the main livelihood and families worked together.

98 AD
The Roman historian Tacitus mentions the fenni people in his book Germania. They hunt, eat wild herbs, dress in hides and sleep on the ground. Fenni is another word for Sami (still used in Finnmark, Norway).

550 AD
The Byzantine historian Prokopius writes about different peoples in Scandinavia, among them the Skridfinner who ski, dress in hides, and both men and women hunt.

890 AD
The Norwegian farmer Ottar tells the King of Wessex that he owns 600 tame reindeer that are tended by Sami.

900 AD
Icelandic Viking stories tell of hide-trading with the Sami and the relationship between Sami and other Nordic peoples.

1300
Swedish kings begin to assert their rights in areas along the Baltic Sea coast, encouraging colonization and the right to trade with the Sami.

1328
A fraternal group of nobles claims the right to trade and tax the Sami. Depending on how they moved, some Sami are taxed by several States – Danish Norway, Sweden and Russia.

1389
The Danish Queen Margret persuaded the Arche Bishop of Uppsala to send missionaries to Lapland, saying they needed a Christian faith.

1526
The king Gustav Vasa dictates a letter to legislate the right to hunting and fishing in Lapland.

1535
Gustav Vasa appoints vogts, territorial lords of sorts, to take over the taxation of the Sami.

1543
Gustav Vasa urges the people living in traditional Sami regions not to encroach on the Sami rights to hunting. Gustav Vasa acknowledges the Sami rights to property, hunting and fishing. The law is meant to regulate the relationship between farming and reindeer herding.

1606
The Swedish King Carl IX declares himself the King of the Lapps, which angered Sweden's then rival Denmark. He also decided to establish churches and marketplaces in Lapland.

1671-1673
An original map of the taxed areas of Lapland at that time shows that all land about 70 km inland from the coast and up to the mountains is divided into taxed Sami land.

1685 och 1693
King Carl IX orders the investigation of Sami religious practices in Lapland. This nature religion must be eradicated, the ceremonial drums burned, holy objects and sites defiled and demolished.

1723 och 1732
A decree states that Sami outside the regulated Lapland area are to immediately be sent back. Sami were driven from their homes in many southern counties.

1751
The border between Sweden and Norway is drawn. An amendment is added to regulate reindeer herding across the border. This Lapland border is meant to protect the Sami land areas from pioneers along the coast who hunt and fish on their land.

1809
When Sweden loses Finland to Russia in 1809, Russia closes the border between Finland and Norway, which of course affects the migrating Sami.

1853-1871
Many Sami affected in northern Norway move east to Karesuando in Sweden and become Swedish citizens - 69 families with 20 000 reindeer make the move between 1853-1871.

1873
During the 1860's, the Agriculture Border was proposed, intended to be the final protection for Sami who make their living from reindeer, hunting and fishing. It was adopted by Sweden's Riksdag in 1873.

1868
Anthropologist Gustaf von Düben and his wife Lotten documen their travels through Lapland, returning home with a number of Sami craniums and photos.

1886
The first Reindeer Grazing Act is introduced, and the areas previously considered "taxable mountain land", skattefjäll, are redefined as "reindeer grazing mountain land", renbetesfjäll. The individual right to land and water is transferred to a local Sami community as a collective right.

1904
The first Sami political organization is formed, Lapska centralförbundet, with Elsa Laula as chairwoman. Although it was short-lived, Elsa Laula had a significant part in the Sami fight for their rights.

1910 & 1923
The first hydropower station and dam dam built in Porjus in Jokkmokk County, resulted in the drowning of Sami communities and reindeer grazing grounds.

1913
The nomad school reform is introduced. Children of nomadic reindeer herders were forced to attend special nomad schools, so they would not be influenced by civilization. Sami children who were not nomadic, were forced to attend Swedish primary schools.

1919
The first Reindeer Grazing Convention regulates the Swedish Sami summer grazing grounds in Norway. The Kare-suando Sami lose most of their grazing land resulting in the forced displacement to Swedish Sami communities farther south.

1922
The Swedish Institute of Racial Biology is established in Uppsala, lead by Doctor Herman Lundborg. Sami are photographed, measured and assessed

Photo: Marie Enoksson

Photo: Carl-Johan Utsi

Film tips:

Kautokeino Rebellion (Kautokeinoupproret, 2007) by Nils Gaup

Sami Blood (Sameblod, 2016) by Amanda Kernell

in the name of science. Books and photographs are archived in Uppsala.

1928
A new Reindeer Grazing Act eliminates the independency of individual Sami communities. Hunting and fishing rights are to be shared with the State and a system of vogts, territorial supervisors for Lapland, is instated.

1937
Up until 1937, about 80 Sami families with reindeer are forced to move to new areas further south, which has a significant impact on the Sami community. Many of the conflicts resulting from these displacements are still not resolved.

1966
Sami districts around Östersund claim ownership rights of the old Skattefjäll mountains in northern Jämtland County. This case is not resolved until 1981.

1971
New Reindeer Grazing Act results in Sami districts being converted to a form of economic associations. The Act maintains a separation between reindeer-herding Sami and non-reindeer-herding Sami, with differences in legal status.

1977
The Swedish Riksdag confirms that the Sami are an indigenous people in Sweden.

1981
The Swedish Supreme Court rules against the Sami demands for better rights to land and water in the Skattefjäll Case that began back in 1966. Despite the negative ruling, it says that a nomadic people can acquire ownership rights to land and water via long-term use, so-called prescription from time immemorial.

1986
The Tjernobyl nuclear power plant accident sends radioactive fallout over Sápmi. The following year 73 000 reindeer are discarded due to high levels of cesium. Fishing, waterways, berries, wildlife and mushrooms are deemed poisoned.

1992
Riksdag adopts the proposition of free small game hunting on Sami lands despite protest from Sami and conservation groups. The same day, Riksdag decides to establish the Sami Parliament, but it shall not be a body for self-government.

1993
The Swedish Sami Parliament is inaugurated by King Carl XVI Gustav in Kiruna. The Parliament's first decision is a declaration of no-confidence against the way the State has managed questions of hunting and fishing.

1997 & 2011
104 land owners in Nordmaling County, south of Umeå, file suit against several local Sami districts claiming the Sami do not have the right to winter grazing in the area. The Supreme Court's final ruling in 2011 grants the Sami districts' right to winter grazing.

2000
The first Sami Language Act. Sami are granted the right to use their language in contact with authorities, the right to Sami-language daycare and elderly care.

2007
The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is adopted by the UN General Assembly.

2010
The Act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages comes into force for five minorities in Sweden. The Act protects the rights to learn, develop and use their language as well as maintain and develop their culture in Sweden.

2009, 2016 & 2018
Girjas sameby submits a document instituting proceeding against the Swedish State with the motion that they own exclusive hunting and fishing rights on their year-round land. In 2016, the Gällivare Court awards Girjas exclusive rights to hunting and fishing on their land. In 2018, the Swedish High Court of Appeals agrees, but the decision is less clear. The case has been appealed to the Supreme Court.

Colonization of Sápmi

Colonization is the forced take-over of more than just land. It is about a skewed distribution of power where the colonizers dominate the people who live in the area. For the Sami, this traditional area was colonized by Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Russia.

The process of colonization that began in the 1300's was encouraged by the Swedish King Gustav Vasa and later other regents during the 1600's. Sweden was then constantly at war, especially with their Nordic neighbors and the taxation of the Sami increased. When silver was discovered in the Nasafjäll mountains (west of Jokkmokk) there was hope that Norrland would become Sweden's version of the West Indies, their very own colony that would provide new resources to a waring kingdom suffering from poor economy.

""I do not need a colony – I have Norrland!"

Chancellor of Sweden, Axel Oxenstierna (1583-1654)

Gävle is the first city to be founded in Norrland in 1446, a process that continued northward for centuries along the Swedish coast of the Baltic Sea up to Haparanda by the 1800's.

The Sami were forced both north and west. Conflicts ignited between pioneers and Sami about fishing rights and grazing land. During the 1700's the Sami won the conflicts, but the tables turned in the 1800's and the pioneers began to win as they settled and cultivated the land, which was considered more valuable. Now the colonization had won new strength. When populations grow and farmable land is scarce, new sources of income are needed. Technological advances and better infrastructure make it easier to exploit desirable natural resources such as silver, iron ore, hydropower and forests.

The colonial State legitimizes the procurement of land and natural resources by describing the Sami as primitive savages that are doomed to eradication. Scientific racism trends of the time considered the Sami an inferior race that needed to be taken care of and controlled by the majority society for their own good.

Herman Lundborg founded the State Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala in 1922 and wrote in 1919 :
"…it is obvious that the Swedes, as the conditions are today, can no longer responsibly allow Lapland to still be run almost completely by a few nomadic groups. Sweden's prosperity and security demand a better procurement of the natural riches in this part of the country.

These pure Swedish interests usually follow a completely different direction than those of the nomads. Thus, it is the latter's allotment to yield."

Today the conflict is about the Arctic regions. Many countries are interested in the natural resources under the ocean and mountain ranges. Foreign companies search for ore and are given permission to prospect in sensitive areas. This places great pressure on the Sami community and especially on those families that depend on reindeer husbandry and other traditional sources of income, they feel that their way of life is slipping away from underneath them.

Sweden is not considered a "risk country" as far as human rights and there are no ethical guidelines that stipulate special consideration to be taken for the indigenous Sami people. Neither have international agreements been incorporated in Swedish legislation to any greater extent.

It surprises many people that Sweden has a history of colonialism. The first step is being aware of what actually happened and learn more about the history of the Sami and Norrland.

The map to the right comes from a map drawn in 1594. Sweden's northern border is drawn along the Ume river.

SAMEBYAR
Könkämä
Lainiovuoma
Vittangi
Saarivuoma
Talma
Gabna
Laevas
Girjas
Báste čearru
Unna Tjerusj
Sirges
Gällivare
Jåhkågaska tjïelldte
Slakka
Tuorpon
Luokta-Mávas
Semisjaur-Njarg
Stákke
Udtja
Östra Kikkejaure
Västra Kikkejaure
Maskaure
Mausjaur
Svaipa
Gran
Ran
Ubmeje tjïelddie
Malå
Vapsten
Vilhelmina norra
Vilhelmina södra
Voernese
Ohredahke
Raedtievaerie
Jijnjevaerie
Jovnevaerie
Njaarke
Kall
Handölsdalen
Tässåsen
Mittådalen
Ruvhten sijte
Idre

KONCESSIONS SAMEBYAR
Muonio
Sattajärvi
Tärendö
Korju
Pirttijärvi
Ängesö
Liehittäjä
Kalix

Reindeer Husbandry Areas

The land used for reindeer husbandry covers roughly half of Sweden, a total of six counties. Depending on grazing conditions, different areas are used during different years.

The 51 samebys (reindeer husbandry and economic districts) are divided into mountain, forest and concession samebys. Usually the mountain samebys move with their reindeer from the summertime grazing grounds in the mountains to the eastern forests for winter. The recent climate changes have made traditional migrations and access to good forage more difficult. The forest samebys stay in the forest regions year-round. In the Torne Valley between Sweden and Finland the samebys run concession reindeer husbandry which means they must apply for permission (concession) for their reindeer. The owner of a concession takes care of reindeer for those who own farming land in the area.

The map to the left shows the reindeer grazing areas. Blue is reindeer grazing both summer and winter. The winter pastures stretch all way to the coast. The white-lined area shows the approximate border between different samebys. Some areas can be used by several samebys.

Further south in Härjedalen, the samebys lost their right to winter foraging grounds in 2004, and any rights are negotiated individually with different land owners. Lappmarksgränsen, the “Lapland border” is marked in grey. It was established in 1751 together with the drawing of the border between Norway and Sweden to protect the Sami from the pioneers along the coast who hunted and fished on their land. The border agreement also included an amendment called the Lapp Codicil to guarantee Sami rights in traditional Sami areas.

Odlingsgränsen, the “agriculture border” is shown in green and was drawn in the 1800’s as a final protection for Sami living off of reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing since the Lapland border was not respected. No new settlements were allowed west of the agriculture border since the land was meant for reindeer husbandry. But this border was not respected either with the discovery and exploitation of iron ore and hydropower.

Counties further south such as Jämtland, Härjedalen and northern Dalarna were not included in the Lapland border, most likely because they contained natural resources vital to the State. There have been Sami also in more southern regions in Sweden, but they were forced to move north over time.

The Sameby – the Sami Collective

A sameby is a geographical area suitable for reindeer husbandry. A sameby is organized as an economic and administrative coalition with their own board. The area follows the natural migration of the reindeer from forestlands to mountains, or between different forest areas. The right to run reindeer husbandry in Sweden is owned by the Sami people, but to practice this right, one must be the member of a sameby. Of the entire Sami population in Sweden, about 10% are members of a sameby.

Reindeer herders are allowed to tend reindeer, fish and hunt within their district. They also own the right to build cabins and structures used for tending reindeer, resource wood for household use and handicrafts. The right to reindeer husbandry is anchored in customs for time immemorial, which means that the ownership rights have been acquired through having hunted, fished and used the reindeer grazing lands for a long time without anyone ever preventing them. Reindeer husbandry is regulated in the Reindeer Husbandry Act.

The sameby land areas are divided into year-round land and winter-grazing land. In Sweden, reindeer husbandry is run on both private land as well as land that the Swedish State claims to own.

Sami Outside the Sameby

When Sweden adopted the Reindeer Grazing Act at the end of the 1800's, they simultaneously defined who is Sami: nomadic people that keep reindeer. At the time, many Sami owned reindeer, but others lived off of hunting and fishing. When land was colonized, Sami could also settle and begin farming, thus becoming farmers. During the famine years at the beginning of the 1900's, disease and starvation impacted the reindeer herds. Some were forced to abandon reindeer husbandry and make a living otherwise, and in turn no longer legally considered as Sami.

Today, the Sami are recognized as their own people, whether or not they own reindeer. International legislation is based on a people, not on an industry. Indigenous peoples have the right to protect their culture. This is why the Sami Parliament wants all concerned Sami to be heard, for example in questions of exploitation, and not just those belonging to a sameby.

Many Sami feel strongly about their native home and their ancestral lands, even if they have grown up somewhere else.

Sami Enterprise

Sami traditions and knowledge are the foundation of today's Sami business and industry. The traditional livelihoods of reindeer herding, hunting, fishing and *duodji* (Sami handicraft) are now expanding with new branches such as tourism, media, food and design. The common thread is the close cooperation between enterprise, environment and culture – small-scale Sami livelihoods that are locally adapted. Of course, Sami also work in branches that are not necessarily based on the traditional livelihoods, such as transport, retail, IT and consultants, and many combine both new and traditional trades.

Reindeer husbandry is intimately connected to Sami culture that has developed over thousands of years, from hunting wild reindeer to reindeer herding. A reindeer herder today is not just a businessman but also a carrier and custodian of a cultural inheritance, supported by family, relatives and the Sami community.

The traditional handicraft, *duodji*, has a strong symbolic value for the Sami identity. The Sami culture has always been beautifully expressed in traditional duodji and is today rapidly expanding in the design of clothing lines, jewelry and interior design.

Tourism is actually nothing new for the Sami community, the region and its people have always attracted the curious. Today's growing number of tourism companies offer a wide range of activities year-round involving reindeer, visits to open-air museums and villages, hunting and fishing.

The growing popularity of traditional foods has put focus on the Sami kitchen as well. New products, cookbooks, websites and restaurants with a Sami profile are enjoying the success of this expanding trend.

Even cultural expressions such as music, yojk, theater, literature, magazines, multi-media, photography, film, art and museums are important parts in strengthening the Sami identity. These aspects not only enrich the Sami community but also make the Sami culture more visible, and even more important - create more ways to make a living in the Sami community.

Learn more

www.samer.se/trades

The Fight for Justice

The Sami fight for justice has been going on for centuries. Individual Sami have filed suit against pioneers who encroached on their protected fishing waters and lands. The Sami have written to and lobbied kings to rally support for their rights.

Ever since 1966, different samebys (herding districts) have been involved in court cases for the right to land and water. They have also had suits filed against them from private land owners, resulting in costly court processes.

Sami activists are a considered a new phenomenon in Sápmi, but historically this is nothing new. Today's Sami artists, musicians, writers and film producers have now broken into mainstream media. This ignites hope in the Sami community for making their voices heard, especially among the young Sami.

The issues lifted are among others about the relationship to nature, resistance to exploitation and environmental degradation, oppression, discrimination and the right to self-determination. The loud protests against a new mine in Gállok outside Jokkmokk in northern Sweden focused worldwide attention on the centuries-old ongoing Sami fight for justice.

Sami of all ages protest against prospect drilling in Gállok in 2013.
Photo: Tor Lundberg Tuorda

The Sami Parliament in Sweden

In a democracy as in Sweden, the majority rules and minorities have little possibility to make themselves heard in general governmental assemblies. Positive action is then used to reduce any injustices. Even national minorities are to be given the possibility to preserve language, culture and traditions to the same degree as for the majority society.

The Sami Parliament in Sweden represents the Sami people. The objective of creating the Parliament was "to improve the Samis' possibilities to work for a living Sami culture". The Riksdag decided that the Parliament shall be similar to a state authority, but with a popularly-elected leadership. It is thus constructed as both a popularly-elected body and a state authority, which is unique in Sweden.

The Sami Parliament elections are held every fourth year. The elected body then meets for plenum three times each year. The Parliament employs about 50 people in four offices in Swedish Sápmi; Kiruna, Jokkmokk, Tärnaby and Östersund. The Sami Parliaments of Sweden, Norway and Finland work together in the Sami Parliamentary Council (Samiskt Parlamentariskt Råd, SPR).

The work of the Swedish Sami Parliament spans over a very wide spectrum of different areas such as Sami enterprise and reindeer husbandry, predator issues, rural development, community planning, environment and climate, Sami culture and cultural inheritance, traditional knowledge, literature, Sami languages, language revitalization, health issues and information about the Sami Parliament and the Sami people.

The Sami Parliament can be viewed as an expert authority on Sami issues, but is not (yet) a body for autonomy. The Sami Parliament is actually managed by the State through laws, regulations and appropriations.

Photo: Marie Birkl

Learn more

www.sametinget.se/english

Racism and Discrimination

There are different types of racism – cultural racism, exploitation racism and eradication racism. One can also separate racism and "racialism". Racialism is when for example comedians dressed as a Sami play on all the prejudices about the Sami, or when pictures of Sami and Sami traditions are used in a derogatory context. The people responsible perhaps didn't mean any harm, that it was all "just a joke", a bit of fun or a stupid question – but is deeply hurtful to those affected.

"You lappdjävel (derogatory term) just live off of subsidies and resist all modern developments – you belong in the Stone Ages!"

Sometimes this is called everyday racism, but racism you are confronted with every day is hardly something to be taken lightly!

"A teacher meant that my concentration problems are caused by being adapted to a life in the mountains."

Racism is when you attribute a person, with a different background than your own, certain stereotypical and prejudiced characteristics. The next step is de-humanization. If someone is not even a real person, the next step is not far off: to connect differences in power and privileges.

"I wore my kolt on graduation day. I threatened with murder."

Johan Galtung is a Norwegian professor who studies peace and conflicts. Galtungt's violence triangle is based on that there are three types of violence in society: direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence. Direct violence hurts people with physical acts of violence. These include land-grabbing, forced dis-placement, assimilation and genocide. Structural violence refers to social injustices and unequal relationships that are integrated in the social structure. As an example; schools that do not teach anything about the Sami or Sami history. Sami researchers are questioned because they are Sami and are accused of being partial, while Swedish researchers are considered impartial. Cultural violence is turning a blind eye to and justifying both direct and structural violence.

"In our village, we shoot the reindeer that walk into our yard."

The colonization of the Sami permeated schools, media, legislation, the church, research and politics.

The Nomad School Reform in 1913 and the Reindeer Grazing Act in 1928 separated the reindeer-herding Sami from those without reindeer. These laws even discriminated Sami women. The Sami culture is often considered a part of the Swedish culture. Our lands are called Europe's last wilderness, despite being occupied by the Sami for thousands of years. The colonization of Sápmi has been going on for so long that we even see ourselves and our culture through Swedish lenses.

"You can't be a Sami, because you don't have any reindeer."

Most Swedish journalists know very little about the Sami and reporting is thus shallow and exotified. Children are given the chance to study Sami language a couple of hours a week, but the remaining subjects are in Swedish. Sami news programs are sent fifteen minutes a day, while you can watch Swedish news around the clock.

A colonized people often discriminate themselves and all too easily take on the role as a victim. Which is why we must also decolonize ourselves!

Photo: Marie Enoksson

Do you want to learn more?

Many of the more in-depth books and research reports about the history and colonization of Sápmi, racism and the injustices of the past and today are in Swedish or other Nordic languages. The best English sources are the following websites:

The Swedish Sami Parliament:
www.sametinget.se/lang/english

More about the Sami culture:
www.samer.se/english

And the ever-present Wikipedia and included links:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sami_history

samiskt
informationscentrum

The Sami Information Centre is part of the Sami Parliament. We are a source of information; responsible for reporting factual, relevant and interesting information about the Sami people especially to the Swedish society with a special focus on children and youth.

www.samer.se