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Current Situation of the Sami  
in Finnmark, Norway  
(Abstract)

Edited by Toru ONAI



# Current Situation of the Sami in Finnmark, Norway

(Abstract)

## Table of Contents

### Introduction: Task and viewpoint

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### Part 1: Current situation regarding education in primary and lower secondary school

#### Section 1: The consciousness of students in lower secondary school

Yoshiki NOZAKI

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#### Section 2: Educational and ethnic consciousness among parents of children at primary and lower secondary school

Hiromi SHINAGAWA

Professor

Sapporo International University Junior College

#### Section 3: Lower secondary school teachers: educational practices and ways of thinking about education

Rika ONODERA

Professor

Faculty of Health and Welfare, Nayoro City University

### Part 2: Current situation regarding education in Sami upper secondary school

#### Section 1: The lives and the consciousness of students

Kojiro UHEYAMA

Fellow Researcher

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Chinatsu SASAKI

Research Associate

Asahikawa University Junior College

Section 2: Educational practices and teachers' ways of thinking

Rika ONODERA

Section 3: Arranging findings

Kojiro UYAMA

Auxiliary section: Parents of Sami upper secondary school students: their  
lifestyles and consciousness

Chinatsu SASAKI

Part 3: The Sami media and its use in Norway

Junko ONAI

Professor/Dean

Faculty of Social Information, Sapporo Gakuin University

Part 4: Land management in Finnmark

Kunisuke HAMADA

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## Current Situation of the Sami in Finnmark, Norway (Abstract)

### **Introduction: Task and viewpoint**

Since the 1970s, as a result of initiatives by international organisations, such as the UN and ILO, the movement of indigenous peoples has increased internationally. The international movement of indigenous peoples together with such initiatives have allowed the situation for such peoples to improve. This development has also influenced some areas of research within the social sciences.

Resultantly, some key questions have been highlighted in academia. First, how can ‘indigenous peoples’ be defined? Second, how can the personalities of members of indigenous peoples be recognised and described? Third, what rights should be given to indigenous peoples? Finally, what should the relationship between indigenous peoples and the majority be within a nation state?

The current situation for indigenous peoples is very complicated. The points can be examined theoretically but it is crucial to grasp the living conditions and tasks of indigenous peoples and to examine their futures.

Based on the problem of consciousness, a comparative research project commenced in 2012, which sought to clarify the present situations of the Sami people in Scandinavia and the Ainu people in Japan. In this project, both the organisation systems that the indigenous peoples have created and their labour-life worlds (i.e. reality and consciousness in an individuals’ labour and daily life) are considered to be important. In other words, the positions of their own organisations and institutions in relation to larger and national organisations and institutions are being examined, and the characteristics of their work and personal lives, as well as their relationship with the rest of the population, are being clarified.

This is the fourth report from this project and the second report to focus on research on the Sami people. The first Sami research report was published in Japanese in 2013, following a research trip to Norway and Sweden in 2012. In this second report, the results of the survey that took place in the county of Finnmark, Norway, in 2013 are summarised.

In Part 1, the results of the questionnaire survey and interviews with students, parents and teachers at basic school (i.e. primary school and lower secondary school) in Kautokeino are summarised, while Part 2 gives the results of those involved in Sami upper secondary school in Karasjok. In Part 3, the results of interviews with some Sami media outlets (Sami TV, radio, newspapers and magazines) are analysed alongside data about the use of Sami media. Finally, Part 4 reports on the current situation and tasks of the Finnmark Estate Agency (FeFo), which manages and controls land use in Finnmark County as an official agency, looking at a presentation by the director and the results of an interview with him.

### **Part 1: Current situation regarding education in primary and lower secondary school**

#### **Section 1: The consciousness of students in lower secondary school**

A survey was administered to lower secondary school students in Kautokeino, an area primarily inhabited by the Sami people, to examine their knowledge and awareness of the Sami people, language and culture. The survey was conducted in December 2013; 100 questionnaires were distributed, with a response rate of 84%.

Of the respondents, three were non-Sami students; however, all the respondents were fluent in the Northern Sami language, an ability fostered in each household by actively creating opportunities to be in touch with the Sami language and culture. In addition, students themselves were also actively in touch with the Sami language and culture through magazines written in Sami or through radio broadcasts and TV programmes in Sami.

The participating lower secondary school students were attending a public school, and not a Sami school, which apart from having lessons in the Sami language, includes the teaching of other subjects in the Sami language. The educational content in such school has been prepared in accordance with education 'for the Sami'. The results indicated that evaluations based on this factor were significantly high. In addition, very few students responded that excessive Sami-oriented educational contents would estrange them from the language and culture of the majority, which is Norwegian. The only exception was that, with respect to the science subjects, more than half of the students responded that it would be better to learn them in the Norwegian language.

Many students hoped to progress academically after graduation, and half of them were considering entering a Sami upper secondary school. Moreover, many were considering reindeer breeding as a future profession. The number of students aiming to pursue reindeer breeding was greater among those who wished to enter a Sami upper secondary school than that of those who wished to enter other upper secondary schools. Moreover, among those seeking to enter a Sami upper secondary school, many had a strong preference for staying local.

The survey findings can be concluded as follows:

First, students have a high level of proficiency in the Sami language and are very active in learning.

Second, learning the Sami language and culture at school is highly valued, and the fear of being detached from the Norwegian language and culture does not exist.

Third, there is a strong correlation between the academic destinations, future professions and regions where the students wish to reside. However, as a result of attending a Sami upper secondary school, the students fear the possibility of having limited options in the future.

## **Section 2: Educational and ethnic consciousness among parents of children at primary and lower secondary school**

The following are the results of a survey on educational and ethnical consciousness among parents in primary and lower secondary school in Kautokeino.

Thoughts on education

1. They were mostly happy with the primary and lower secondary school.

Almost all of the parents were generally satisfied with respect to this school, the reason being that children learn about the Sami language and culture at the school.

2. Although the parents seem happy, they also see room for improvement.

They want the school to offer more education about Sami heritage than is currently on offer.

3. Parents have high expectations for their children's education.

Parents do not necessarily want to retain their children in the Sami education system. They want their children to learn Norwegian as well as English.

Thoughts on ethnic consciousness

1. Many of those surveyed want to live actively as Sami people. A large number had experienced discrimination due to their Sami backgrounds. Nonetheless, they continue to stress heavily that they are of Sami origin; it is important to them.
2. The parents and their families are fluent in Sami (although they speak only the Northern Sami variant of the language).
3. The respondents had significant experience and knowledge of Sami culture, which they have passed on to their children. Rather than allowing their children to learn from those experiences, they prefer to impart the knowledge through their position in life. However, in spite of being endowed with a highly productive natural environment, the culture of reindeer husbandry is rarely experienced.
4. Life satisfaction seems to be high. Although satisfaction in terms of income is low, satisfaction with the natural environment and life in general is shown.

**Section 3: Lower secondary school teachers: educational practices and ways of thinking about education**

This part of the study examines educational practices and teachers' ways of thinking.

The subjects are 15 lower secondary school teachers in Kautokeino. The ethnic identity of 13 out of the 15 teachers is Sami.

The results are as follows:

1. The teachers in lower secondary school are fluent in the Sami language, and they teach Sami language and culture to their students. Lessons are usually conducted in the Sami language and they often involve teaching about the lifestyle of the Sami people, including the relationship between Sami culture and nature. These teachers have self-confidence and take pride in their work. They are not satisfied, however, with the present teaching conditions. They think that the number of classes about Sami language and culture should be increased. Indeed, they believe that the first role of lower secondary school is to educate Sami children about their cultural heritage. Most of the teachers wish, therefore, that their school was specifically a Sami school.

However, not all of the teachers were of the same opinion. For example, some subjects are difficult to

teach in Sami. Teachers in charge of these subjects are significantly anxious about difficulties concerning improvements of basic academic abilities in students.

In addition, the teachers who also work in the reindeer industry show the most respect for Sami lifestyle, whereas the teachers not involved with reindeer are less vehemently protective of their Sami backgrounds. The circumstances of Sami teachers are diverse; therefore, their educational philosophy is also diverse.

2. The teachers speak the Northern Sami language. They cannot speak Lule Sami or Southern Sami. The consequence is that students who do not speak Northern Sami cannot understand the lessons, thus affecting their studies.

3. The teachers at lower secondary school see themselves as successful people. They receive higher education and their careers make them stable in economic terms.

They are excellent teachers and many of them are interested only in Sami society. However, the question is raised, should teachers focus just on Sami language and Sami culture? Some teachers insist on the need to learn English and Norwegian, and to improve basic academic skills. It is important to offer various choices to children learning at school.

4. Almost all the teachers believe that the school should be a Sami school. Indeed, this school operates just like a Sami school. This leads to the question, should the school become a Sami school from now on? What is most important is that a school offers the best education possible for Sami students.

5. Finally, I will point out two things that teachers must do:

- (1) Transmit the Sami language and culture to children so that they can form a Sami identity.
- (2) Offer an education that supports a variety of possibilities for students.

## **Part 2: Current situation regarding education in Sami upper secondary school**

Here, we offer clarification regarding the lives and the consciousness of students and teachers in Sami upper secondary school in Karasjok. By examining this topic, we will consider what kind of roles school plays in their lives, as well as investigating the current situation of education in Sami upper secondary school.

### **Section 1: The lives and the consciousness of students**

The information given in this section is based on a questionnaire about the lives and the consciousness of Sami upper secondary school students, which was answered by 71 students.

The results are as follows:

1. Most of the students were satisfied generally with Sami upper secondary school. This satisfaction is due to the fact that they can learn about the Sami language and culture at school. Even students who had started to learn the Sami language only recently held this view.

On the other hand, the students also stated that attending Sami upper secondary school was not a disadvantage in terms of learning about the Norwegian language and culture. This factor has contributed to the high satisfaction that the students have with their school.

There were mixed opinions, however, regarding the question of whether learning in the Sami language becomes a disadvantage when going to universities outside the Sami region.

2. Many of the students hope to go to university – in particular, to Tromsø University. They have various vocational aspirations. Some of them still hope, however, to remain in the Sami region as reindeer breeders. Many of them hope to live in Finnmark in the future. A number of students expressed a wish, however, to move out of Finnmark in the future.
3. It is hard to say whether the students' future considerations are defined by their gender. The data suggests that the females tend to hope to go to Tromsø University, whereas the males hope to become reindeer breeders. Statistical tests show, however, that the differences between the genders are not significant. However, it was found that the females were less likely to want to remain in their home town.
4. Most of the students had been learning the Sami language, as well as about Sami culture, before they were primary school students. They stated that from that time, they became aware of the Sami identity. In short, they began to experience the language, culture and identity of the Sami people at about the same time.
5. A high ability in the Sami language and the strength of the Sami identity were found to be closely related. The students who were able to converse easily in the Sami language tended always to feel that they were Sami. Given that they experienced the language, culture and identity of Sami at about the same time, both a high ability in the Sami language and a sense of Sami identity are associated with the richness of the Sami cultural experience.
6. Many of them stated that they hope to live actively as Sami in the future. The students with a strong sense of Sami identity tended to feel this way most strongly. Some of the students, however, hope to live without acquiring the consciousness of Sami ethnicity.
7. The students who hope to live actively as Sami in the future tended to want to live in Finnmark in the future. This finding suggests that community life has a great meaning in relation to Sami identity.

Some students, however, wish to continue to live actively as Sami and also hope to live in Oslo or in other big cities, similar to the students who wish to abandon Sami ethnicity. Indeed, some students who use the Sami language as their everyday language hope to live further afield, similarly to students who use Norwegian as their everyday language.

## **Section 2: Educational practices and teachers' ways of thinking**

This section examines the responses of 12 teachers at a Sami upper secondary school in Karasjok to a questionnaire about the life of Sami teachers and their educational practices. In terms of ethnic identity, seven teachers out of the 12 identify as Sami. However, when viewed from the point of view of lineage, 10 of the teachers are Sami.

The results are as follows:

1. Most of the teachers at the Sami upper secondary school in Karasjok have worked there for less than 10 years. For this reason, they tend to have fewer close relationships with Sami people in the area, when compared with teachers at the lower secondary school in Kautokeino. Despite this, almost all of the teachers thought that the educational practices at the Sami upper secondary school were positive. They think that the Sami upper secondary school has a special role in Sami society.

2. Most of teachers can speak the Northern Sami language. Some of the teachers' command of the Sami language is poor. Even teachers who cannot speak Sami well can give lessons, however, because both Sami and Norwegian are used in class. This is characteristic of Sami upper secondary school. In contrast, at Swedish Sami schools and at the primary and lower secondary school in Kautokeino, classes are given in the Sami language only.

Why are classes carried out in two languages in this way? The most important purpose of primary and lower secondary school is to give Sami students a basic knowledge of Sami tradition and culture; teaching classes using the Sami language, therefore, is very important. Sami upper secondary school differs from primary and lower secondary school because learning in two languages gives students the skills to be able to study, live and work in either Sami society or Norwegian society in the future. At this Sami upper secondary school, some teachers believe that the number of classes given in the Sami language should be reduced. Opinions regarding the choice of language vary, depending on the stage of education.

3. Teachers at the Sami upper secondary school, like the teachers at the lower secondary school in Kautokeino and at Swedish Sami schools, can be considered successful people. They receive higher education and their profession provides them with a steady income.

Despite teaching at Sami upper secondary school, a number of the teachers in the study did not choose their career to help the Sami people. Rather, they are interested in their own career development. This does not necessarily mean, however, that these teachers are indifferent to Sami society. Indeed, some of the Sami teachers stated, 'I want to live actively as a Sami person'. These teachers are in a position from which they can view Sami society objectively.

In general, the teachers' wish is to give students both 'the power to live in Sami society' and 'the power to live outside Sami society'. They want to enable students to have a variety of choices in the future.

4. The teachers at the Sami upper secondary school want the students to live positive lives as Sami. This



school has two missions:

- (1) To transmit the Sami language and culture to students, allowing a Sami identity to be formed.
- (2) To offer an education that leads to a variety of future possibilities for the students.

These two missions are the same as the missions of the lower secondary school. The teachers at the Sami upper secondary school, however, are more aware of the responsibility to fulfil these missions (especially (2) above) than the lower secondary school teachers.

### **Section 3: Arranging findings**

In this final section, by arranging the findings, we are able to consider what kind of role the Sami upper secondary school plays in the community, as well as elaborating on the current situation of education at the Sami upper secondary school.

1. Sami upper secondary school provides an opportunity for students to become more aware of Sami identity by making students learn the Sami language and about Sami culture.
2. The students who hope to live actively as Sami in the future tend to want to live in Finnmark. This finding suggests that Sami upper secondary schools generate the future leaders of Sami community.
3. Some of the students who hope to live actively as Sami in the future envisage living in areas outside the Sami community. This includes some students who use the Sami language as their everyday language. These findings suggest that attending Sami upper secondary school also raises students' interest in wider society, beyond the Sami community.
4. The role of the Sami upper secondary school in students' lives is affected by the educational practices of teachers.

### **Auxiliary section: Parents of Sami upper secondary school students: their lifestyles and consciousness**

The purpose of this section is to examine parents' attitudes towards upper secondary school life and the futures of their children, their Sami lifestyles and their opinions about Norwegian society. However, as only three mother's cases were examined, this report considers only some cases among all parents of Sami upper secondary school students. All three mothers have Sami bloodlines and currently work as public officials. In addition, they all have fairly high level of satisfaction with the Sami upper secondary school. They also wish for their children to go to college or university and to stay living locally.

In the first case, the mother is a single mother. She can speak Sami very well. She wants to live actively as a Sami person and also hopes that her child will continue to do so in the future. She has taught the Sami culture to her child, including the language, cooking techniques, handicraft and how to handle reindeer. Although she is the most positive of the mothers in relation to her Sami identity, she thinks inequality exists



in Norwegian society along the lines of ethnicity. Her desire is to enhance policies to benefit the Sami people.

The second mother speaks the Sami language as well as the first mother. Her family consists of four people and Sami culture is rooted in her home. She graduated from Sami upper secondary school and seems to have been familiar with the Sami culture in her childhood. Her children have been taught to understand the culture. Characteristically, she has experienced bullying by non-Sami people; thus, she is friends with Sami people rather than non-Sami. She is of the opinion that special policies for Sami people may be necessary in Norwegian society and it is very important for her that discrimination against Sami society does not occur. She has a strong sense of Sami identity currently, but she did not talk about how one might live as a Sami person in the future.

The third mother married a non-Sami person and speaks in Norwegian at home. She wants to study the Sami language because she cannot read and write in Sami. She was not taught the Sami culture in her childhood, so she does not teach it to children. Her self-awareness as a Sami did not change due to becoming a parent. She has been friendly with non-Sami people since her childhood and she now has friendships with both Sami and non-Sami people. She feels that not much discrimination exists in Norway. Rather, she believes that Sami people should not receive preferential treatment, such as educational or economic support. In this sense, she perceives the Sami community quite objectively.

The above information suggests that differences in terms of Sami identity and opinions of Norwegian society exist due to varying ethnic mixes at home, past experiences of discrimination, current employment and educational background. In the future, it is necessary to investigate the lifestyle and consciousness of fathers in this regard.

### **Part 3: The Sami media and its use in Norway**

This part of the paper examines the current role of the Sami media in Norway. Norwegian Sami media is consumed across the Scandinavian countries, and NRK Sápmi has an important position in the world as a member of WITBN (World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network).

Norway's magazine Nuorttanaste and the daily newspapers Ságat and Ávvir are the main printed media available for Sami people. Nuorttanaste has been published in the Sami language since 1898. Ságat is published in the Sami language and Ávvir is published in Norwegian. Sweden and Finland do not have their own Sami newspapers. Generally speaking, to publish a newspaper, a national governmental subsidy is needed. Both the aforementioned newspaper companies are subsidised by the Norwegian Government. The ratio of the subsidies within the income of each company is high, i.e. 60% to 80%.

With regard to the broadcasting media available for Sami people, Sami Radio, Sami TV and Sami DAB (digital audio broadcasting) were incorporated into NRK Sápmi in 2010. NRK Sápmi is a section of the larger NRK public broadcasting network. The finance of NRK Sápmi is stable, being dependent on a subscription fee.

Thus, both the printed media and the broadcasting media are run via public funds. The amount of national governmental subsidies given to printed media tends to be influenced by the political party in power, and currently the government supports Sami media warmly. The newspapers, the magazine and the broadcasting

company are supported by stable funding, good facilities and abundant human resources. Their goals are to share information with the Sami society and to transmit relevant information to those outside Sami society. The former aim helps to foster an indigenous identity and the latter aim has importance in terms of introducing the opinions of the Sami people to the rest of the nation.

In addition, it is also important that ‘freedom of edition’ is guaranteed rigidly in the domain of the media. It is written into Norwegian law that the national government, stockholders and managers must not commit editor’s right of ‘freedom of edition’, a law which has been adhered to. Even if any agent or agency gives funds, editors can assert their own opinions without reserve. This situation guarantees that relevant information is transmitted to the Sami people through the media.

In this study, people’s use of Sami media was examined. The subjects were 81 lower secondary school students, 71 Sami upper secondary school students, 11 lower secondary school teachers, seven Sami upper secondary school teachers, 64 parents of primary and lower secondary school children and four parents of Sami upper secondary school students. The total number of people was 246, all of whom were resident in Finnmark. They use Sami media frequently, listening to programs on NRK radio most often. They also watch programs on NRK TV, read *Ávvir* and youth culture magazine *Š*, listen to web radio and read *Ságat* (in descending order of popularity). The parents use these media particularly frequently, with the rates of use for NRK TV, NRK Sami radio and *Ávvir* reaching 80–90% among our participants. Females and those aged over 40 use these media channels more frequently than males and teenagers. Unexpectedly, Sami upper secondary school students do not use Sami media frequently; in fact, 30% of them do not access Sami media at all (lower secondary school students were more likely to use Sami media). These findings are very important, considering issues related to successive generations and the upholding of Sami culture.

68.1% of the respondents felt that transmission of information to non-Sami people was insufficient. The more frequently a subject uses Sami media, the more negatively s/he tends to evaluate the current situation in terms of information transmission to those outside the community. The sharing of information via Sami media within Sami society has been successful to some extent, but more work needs to be done on communicating with those beyond the Sami region.

Finally, Sami media in Norway is in a good financial position in comparison with Sami media in other countries. Cooperation with Sami media in other countries is apt to be difficult because of this financial advantage. Considering the current circumstances with regard to indigenous peoples around the world, however, it is important for Sami media outlets in Norway to contribute to other movements of indigenous peoples by actively using web technology to advance their position.

#### **Part 4: Land management in Finnmark**

Finnmark Estate Agency (FeFo) was established following the Finnmark Act (2005). Finnmark Estate Agency is the legal entity that owns land and natural resources in Finnmark County. A brief overview of the system of land and natural resource management in Finnmark will be given here, based upon an interview with the Director of Finnmark Estate Agency, Jan Olli.

Finnmark Estate Agency is not supported by public funding. Therefore, it must earn revenue to cover its

operating costs. Its major sources of income are licensing and leasing in the hunting and fishing industries, ground rent, compensation from wind power plants and water power plants, mining and forestry.

Finnmark Estate Agency has a board of six people that makes the final decisions about the company's operations. Three of the six members are appointed by the Sami Parliament and the other three members are appointed by Finnmark County Council. If the votes of the members of the board are split evenly in relation to any matter, then the chairman (elected from among the board members) holds the casting vote. Furthermore, a Control Committee is set up in isolation from the board to check that Finnmark Estate Agency is managed in compliance with the law. These mechanisms ensure that the functions of Finnmark Estate Agency are controlled.

Finnmark Estate Agency is ethnically neutral. Its revenue is used for the benefit of Finnmark and all its residents. However, the Finnmark Act took Sami culture and reindeer husbandry into special consideration. This is why three of the six members of the board of Finnmark Estate Agency must be appointed by the Sami Parliament (and at least one board member is designated to be a representative for reindeer husbandry).

Finnmark Estate Agency has difficulty in mediating the differences between its various interest groups. As it has been decreed that the organisation's decisions should be made with the goal of maximising the benefits to the residents of Finnmark in the long term, some of the decisions might be seen as detrimental to specific industries from a short-term perspective.

Here, the Finnmark Act and Finnmark Estate Agency have not yet been understood adequately by the residents of Finnmark County. Finnmark Estate Agency is making various efforts to improve its transparency and to promote a more accurate understanding of its functions, such as holding public meetings and debates.

