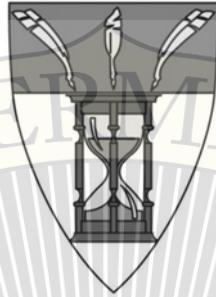


Les travaux personnels du Lycée Ermesinde Mersch



The Sami-People - a forgotten culture?

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THE SAMI-PEOPLE

A FORGOTTEN CULTURE?



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Sami people call the most northern parts of Sweden, Finland, Norway and Russia their home and have done so for the last 7000 years. Long before the Vikings came to Scandinavia, the Sami inhabited the Scandinavian Peninsula. The background of the Sami tells the story of a people with incredibly rich and fascinating culture and history, and yet so few know about the secrets of this indigenous population. How come the Sami culture is kept from attention? Is it a forgotten, perhaps even oppressed culture that is buried under years of changes? Why do people know more about the Scandinavian Vikings than the Sami?

In this paper, I want to shine light on the rich culture of the Sami that has been forced to change and adapt its culture and lifestyle to modern society. What does it mean to be a Sami today, what did it mean in the past and what will it mean in the future?



2.HISTORY

Just like other indigenous people's history, the Sami-People have one that is filled with fights for their rights, the right for that land and that water they have lived in and with which they have survived for year thousands.



Just a few years ago, the Sami-People were practically invisible in the history of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. No school would teach their students the Sami language, nor would they teach the history.

2.1 Sweden

In the 17th century, the Sami-People the colonization of the Sami land started. 1634 a Sami man discovered treasure in Nasafjäll, which now lies in northern Sweden. With this discovery, the state Sweden tried to take over the territory more and more. The Sami-People were forced to work for the state and if they refused, they were pulled under the ice. About 74 Sami and 600 reindeers worked in the mine to gain more and more treasure.

The state started to attract Swedish settlers up to the north, to mark the Swedish territory with the so called "Lappmarksplakatet" that came out in the year 1673. This meant that for those who settled in Lapland got fifteen years tax exemption and didn't have to join the army. But the settlers that



did come were not allowed to intrigue the Sami rights for, amongst other, hunting and fishing. Many Sami resettled to Norway after the slavery in the mines and the state had to make sure that not more Sami could flee, since their money contribution to the state was very important. Therefore, the new settlers were not allowed

to disturb the Sami-people too much.

But there were always new provisions coming that shut out the Sami culture more and more. The settlers were allowed to grow crops more and started to fish in Sami fishing waters.

Sweden mostly wanted the economical profit, but little by little the Sami were forced into Swedish norms and the social structure.

But at this point in history, the Sami-People were still respected as a people from the state of Sweden's point of view.

In the middle of the 18th century, the border between Sweden and Norway (then Denmark) was drawn. The Sami-People were asked where the border should go and there was a significant addition for the Sami, the so called "Lappkodicillen". This document would guarantee the Sami rights even if the countries would happen to declare war with each other.

At the end of the 18th century, new thoughts crossed the minds of the Swedish state. Now it was not all about the economical profits.

The social Darwinism broke through bringing new threats to the Sami community. This ideology was built up on the concept that the strongest would survive, resulting towards a trend of higher forms of society. The Sami-People were seen as childish and lower standing nature people who could not take care of themselves nor take own decisions.

Because the state looked upon the culture as incapable of controlling their lives, it started to regulate everything: Who could or could not be reindeer herders, how many reindeers one needed to get by, how many one was not allowed to have to become too rich, which areas one was allowed to use and so on.

In 1932, Herman Lundborg, from the racial Biology Institute, published "The Race Biology of the Swedish Laps". In this script, he wrote that the Sami-People were inferior people whose only possibility of surviving was to blend in with the Swedes.

Finally the so called "lapp-skall-vara-lapp" (from Swedish: lapp-shall-be-lapp") policy had its breakthrough. This policy inferred that the Sami culture should be preserved. The Sami-



People should engage the reindeer herding and nothing else. They were not allowed to live in houses with brick chimneys and they should not get too used to the modernity.

Probably the worst part of the policy was not the racism nor the oppression, but the fact that a big group of Sami were bared of the Sami community, because all the people who had not owned reindeers should stop calling themselves Sami and just blend in in the Swedish community instead.

From have clearly been the majority in their own land, the Sami-People were now gradually a minority.

Still, the probably biggest smash against the Sami-People was when the individual right to land and water was legislated away in the year 1886. Instead the Sami community received a mutual, so called, usage right.

That land that the Sami had paid taxes for, for hundreds of years, was suddenly only allowed to use together with other people. Sweden had decided that if one owns land, one has to cultivate it.

Many Sami-People, who were not reindeer herders, had lost the right to use their ancestors land to hunt and fish on. Like this, they also lost their Sami identity and so, the only possibility to stay, was to become Swedish.



After the union resolution between Sweden and Norway, a convention was adopted. This convention made about two hundred Sami families lose their summer land and they were forced to move southward.

There was a culture crash and the structure of the Swedish reindeer herding changed radically.

The Sami woman's position in society became worse as well, when the Swedish law decided that she should lose her reindeers and her membership in the Sami community if she married a non-Sami man. If a Sami man married a Swedish woman, she would have the right to be a reindeer herder.

This discrimination disappeared in the year 1971.

When the industrialisation began in earnest, the demand for natural resources and other things, such as expansion of hydropower, is one of the push factors that the Sami land has been reduced.

First in 1980, the Sami-People were seen as a group again. Suddenly one wanted to keep and protect the culture that was nearly eradicated.



3.THE SAMI-PEOPLE

The Sami-People are one of the world's indigenous. They have their own culture, language and their own practices that separate them from society around them.

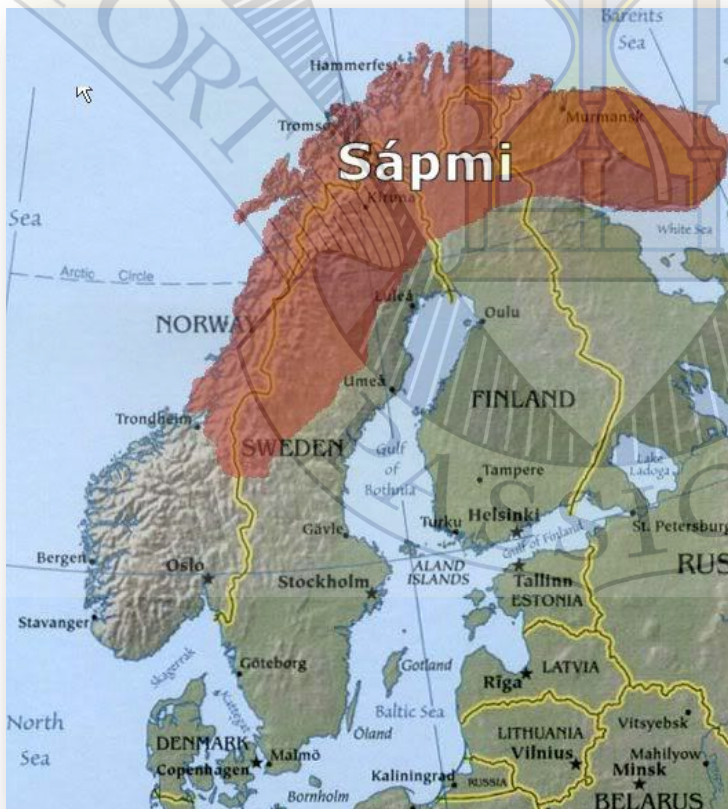
The Sami-People is one of the very few nations who have managed to stay on the same place through the cycle of history. Despite wars and colonisation of their territory, these people have lived on in the same area.

In the English language, the Sami-People are also known as Lapps or Laplanders, but these words are rather known as insulting and rude.

Their currencies are Swedish kronor, Norwegian kronor, Euro and Russian ruble.



3.1 Their territory - Sàpmi



Sàpmi is the cultural region, that is traditionally inhabited by the Sami-People.

Sàpmi spreads over the most northern part of Europe; northern Scandinavian. The region stretches over four countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

The largest part of Sàpmi stretches over Sweden and Norway. The part of Sàpmi falling on the Swedish

side of the border is characterized by great rivers running from the northwest to the southeast. And the part falling on the Norwegian side of the border is known for a low plateau that contains many marshes and lakes.

Most of the Sami People live in Norway, about 50 000. Then comes Sweden with a Sami population from 20 000. 6000 Sami People live in Finland and about 2000 in Russia.

3.2 Language

The Sami language has many names, like Saame and Saamic as well as the terms Lappish and Lappic. The last two along with the word Lapp, are often considered offensive.

The language belongs to the Finno-Ugric language group. It's closest related to Estonian and Finnish.

There are many dialects in the Sami language and the Sami People who speak one dialect don't necessarily understand the other. East Sami, central Sami and south Sami are three of these many individual accents. East Sami is spoken on the Kola Peninsula in Russia whilst central Sami is spoken in Norway and Finland. South Sami is spoken in Norway and Sweden.

In Sweden most Sami-People speak northern Sami.

3.3 Religion

Just like their early history, most of their religion is covered in dark. What you do observe is that their traditional religion is closely related to many other native beliefs, like for example different Indian groups or Inuit.

Their religion and their belief changed with time. Especially through the influence of the Scandinavians and their religion. Living with one another for many years, has influenced both nations.

Before the Christianity was brought to the Sami land, they had their own belief. The sun, moon, thunder and the wind were divine. They also sacrificed during different rituals. They had many reasons to sacrifice, for example that the reindeers went well, good hunt and fish, to cure diseases and that the childbearing would go well.

The Sami People believed that all living things in nature had a soul and therefore it was very important to be in a good relationship with nature. To uphold this relationship, they practised their rituals.

Religiously, they divided earth into three different parts: the underground, the earthly and the heavenly part. The three 'worlds' had their own Gods and creatures. In the underground lived the dead, on the earth surface lived the humans and the animals. Heaven was the kingdom of the Gods and Goddesses, the rulers of the world.

In the Sami belief, the bear was a holy animal, they had great respect for it and their friendship was very important to them.

At religious ceremonies the Sami People had a medicine Man who was a doctor, a seer and a herbal expert. With help of a special drum, he could pick up contact with the world of the Gods and the Goddesses. He could experience and see things, which he would later explain to the people who couldn't see anything. This drum was a shaman drum.

If one found a different stone, in the forest, or something else with an unusual shape which one noticed, this place would become holy. The Sami People sacrificed animals, especially reindeers at these places.

At the later part of the 16th century, they were forced to become Christians. The Swedish Christians sent out Crusaders who were supposed to destroy the tradition and the culture of the Sami People, to later on introduce Christianity.

3.3.1 Jojk

The Jojk is the traditional song of the Sami People. It comes from the Shamanism. These people have been singing jojk for decades.

When the Christianity came to their land, jojk was forbidden like other religious traditions. The Christians thought that this song was a sin and thus it was forbidden. First in the late 20th century, it flourished again. Nowadays, one can hear jojk everywhere in the Sami territory.

The jojk creates an emotional connection between human, animal and nature. "We don't jojk about something, like when you sing a song.



We say that we jojk something. Then we become a part of what we jojk. ”

One can jojk about anything. Usually the Sami People jojk about their reindeers.

3.4 Politics

The Sami People have their own parliament, the Sami Parliament. It was first introduced in 1993 of the Swedish Parliament. With help of this organisation, the Sami People had it a little easier to have their voices heard.

The Sami Parliament decides over the own culture, the language and their schools. There are 31 representatives. The people vote for a new Parliament every four years.



Sametinget
Sámediggi Sámedigge Saemiedigkie

4. REINDEER-HERDING SAMI

The reindeer culture among the Sami-People has changed with time. This culture is different today, than it was centuries ago.

4.1 What does one understand under the term “reindeer-herding”?

For many people, this term is still unclear. Some understand it as usual pets and other as in holding the animals prisoner. But actually, it is neither.

The reindeer-herding culture is driven by the reindeers' grazing. These animals are nomadic, as in to wander to a different grazing space, as the seasons pass by. For the Sami-People the reindeers were necessary for clothes, food and transport, so their life was very influenced by the reindeers and their nomadic habits.



The traditional culture is based on intensive farming. The reindeer herder had control over the herd at all times.

With this way of living, the families could take care of themselves, and money was not as important, because they had food, clothes and transport with this animal.

4.2 Past and Present

In the last 50 years, the reindeer-herding culture has changed a lot.

When the snowmobile began to be a helpful conveyance for the Sami-People in the 60ies, the use of the reindeer as a transport vanished completely. Also, the families became more and more stationary in the winter season as well as the summer season.

Today, it is mostly only the reindeer herder that moves with the herd and this most of the time with a snowmobile.

The technology that humanity puts at disposal today has helped the Sami-People as well. (f. ex.: radio telephone ...)

4.3 Eight seasons with the reindeers

In the “reindeer year” there are eight seasons. Every season has its own individuality and its own importance for both the reindeers and the Sami-People. It is not without a reason why one calls the reindeer herders the eight season’s people.

The reindeers have adapted to the variation of the northern Scandinavia, by moving around between the different grazing areas in the course with the seasons. In winter they move to the east and during the summer there in the western parts of the land.

The reindeer herder is always near his herd and follows them.

Spring

The reindeer herding year begins in spring, when the calves are born. The herd is moved to the place where the reindeer cows give birth. This land offers good pastures and shelter from the weather.

It is very important that the mother has her peace and quiet while she is taking care of her calf, otherwise she might abandon it and so, it will die. For this reason, the herders work together and watch the herd in smaller groups to prevent predators from disturbing the reindeers.



The calves are hard work for the herders. Nearly every cow gives birth to a calf in this period of time and it craves a lot of hard work to keep as many as possible alive.

Late spring – Early summer

In this time period, the calves grow and the herd is mostly left alone. In the beginning, the calves feed from their mother’s milk, but the switch to grass eventually.

The herders have time to fish and to repair broken fences or snowmobiles.

Summer

In the summer the calves of that year become marked. The reindeer herd gets driven to one spot, where a sort of tipi camp is built up. This usually takes place in the mountains, but doesn't necessarily. In Sweden, for example, there are Sami that are herding their reindeer herd in the forest the entire year. They are called the forest Sami.



The calf marking is very exciting for old and young, the whole Sami village helps.

Every reindeer has its owner as well as its own individual mark, which shows who it belongs to. The calf gets the same mark as its mother, so it belongs to the same owner.

Late summer – Early Autumn

After a hardworking summer, with calf markings, the herd is now left alone to graze. It is important that the reindeer is able to build a fat reserve before the winter.

As the weather becomes colder, the reindeer head east.

At this time of the year, like the reindeer, the Sami families begin to fish and collect different berries before the winter. They also start to prepare the Rudd slaughter.

Autumn

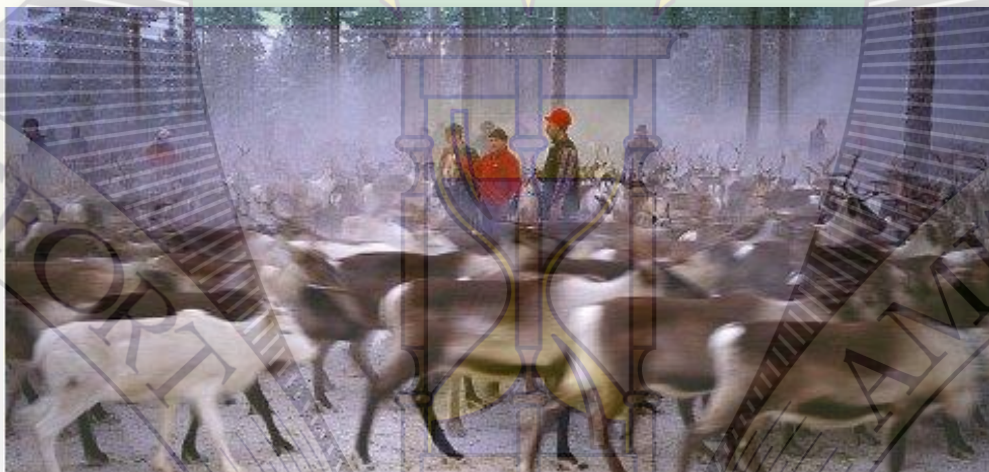
In September, the Rudd slaughter begins. The village gathers the reindeer herd.

The bulls have grown during summer and it's time to slaughter them, before the rut. The meat is not very good during the rut and the fat reserve is consumed by the reindeer itself.

The Rudd slaughter is very hard work. The entire herd is being controlled and the bulls have to be caught with lassos and after that pulled to the slaughter place.

The biggest part of the reindeer herders' income comes from the selling of reindeer meat. Part of the meat is used for the herders' family as nourishment.

After the slaughter, there is still a little time for hunting, mostly bear and elk.



Late autumn – Early winter

At this time of the year, the Sami-People have to gather the herd, because the pasture becomes more and more covered in snow.

As soon as there lays enough snow for the use of snowmobiles, the gathering begins. Snowstorms and less and less daylight, makes the work even harder. The move can take up to weeks.

When the herd finally arrives at their winter pasture, they are separated into different, smaller groups for the winter.

Winter

This part of the reindeer herding year, is the most critical part.

The reindeers dig up ground lichen under the snow, but if there is a lot of snow or a thick layer of ice, the reindeers have a hard time finding food. There are up to thirty minus degrees.

The herder drives around with a snowmobile to check up on his reindeers and if necessary he has to move them.

If it is a really rough year and there is hardly any food at all, supplementary feeding is necessary.

Late winter – Early spring

It is time to move the reindeers herd to the spring pastures. This takes about one to two weeks and the Sami-People use their dogs and snowmobiles.

The herd is weak after the winter and the females are carrying new calves.



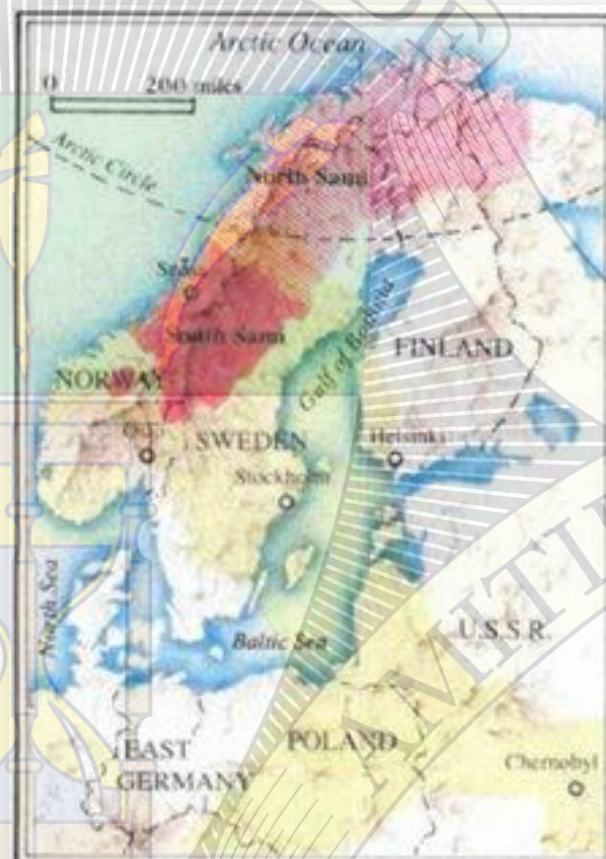
4.4 The Chernobyl disaster 1986

In April of the year 1986, the world's worst nuclear disaster occurred in Chernobyl. A few days after the accident, Swedish scientists discovered radioactivity in the air. Nuclear fallouts that had been carried by wind and rain now polluted large parts of Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Fresh products such as dairy products had to be destroyed in affected areas.

For the Sami-People, the disaster had multiple effects. The biggest one was that their reindeers, their primary food source, were contaminated with a radioactive isotope; Cs-137. This isotope had a so called half-life of 30 years. Half-life of radioactive matter is the time it takes for one-half of the atoms in a sample to decay. Lichen, which acts like a sponge to absorb nutrients from the air and rain, absorbed Cs-137 from the atmosphere. Lichen being the principal nurture for reindeers, infected the reindeers with Cs-137.

The first reports after the accident suggested the meat should not be eaten for 40 years, but luckily for the Sami-People, whose lives are based on reindeers, Cs-137 has fallen to more acceptable levels.

Monitoring people and reindeer is a constant reminder of the long-term consequences of Chernobyl.



Map showing heaviest radiation from Chernobyl falling in Sweden and Norway

5.COMPARISON OF PAST AND PRESENT

While writing the history part of my work, I noticed how much this culture had suffered. They had nearly been eradicated and the Swedish state showed it no respect, whatsoever. The people had been driven away from their land like cattle and had been enslaved for many years.

It was only about thirty five years ago, they were seen as a real people again. And at that time, one noticed that this culture must stay alive.

The Sami-People have fought their way through their past and are finally “alive” again. Today, their culture is strong and it blossoms. A lot of people protect it and they want to be part of it as well.



There is quite a big difference between the Sami-People's past and present. For one, in their past, they were not seen as a people and they barely had rights for their land and water. Today, they live freely and don't have to fear being thrown out of their country.

What I discovered during my interview is that the Sami-People used be more centred on the reindeers and the reindeer herding, and nowadays, there are always fewer reindeer herders.

They are allowed to live their religion and they are respected as a people again. A lot has changed for the Sami-People, mostly positive.

It will be interesting to see, what the future brings this culture and how the flow of time changes it.



6. ACTUALITY: UMEÅ - EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2014

One of Umeå's objectives of being the European Capital of Culture is to reinforce cultural life's international relations and dimensions.

Umeå 2014 goes by the motto of Curiosity and Passion — the art of co-creation. The vision of The Cultured City, the mission to Stay Cool, and the Open Source strategy form the main theme of the programme.



The Open Source strategy arouses the curiosity and involves people through for example dialogue. Furthermore, the project wants to further develop practical methods for co-creation. The Open Source concept involves the citizens of Umeå, the northern region of Europe and cultural players and institutions, like the university.

Umeå is Europe's most northerly Capital of Culture ever. Culture and Sport will be able to develop with Europe and the rest of the world, and the town will be more attractive to students and investors.

Moreover, Umeå will be the first Capital of Culture that will spotlight an indigenous people. The Sami-People are one of the county's diversities.

The Sami culture is visible in, amongst other, exhibitions and museums. The indigenous people will be highlighted in many different ways for example the eight seasons of the Sami calendar. In the programme of the European Capital of Culture 2014, forms of different cultural expressions like handicraft, language, music and children's culture.



7. INTERVIEW

A couple of years ago, I had an au-pair girl who comes from Jokkmokk, a village in the most northern part of Sweden. When I chose this topic for my work, I thought I might ask her, if she could help me with my research. She helped me to get in contact with a friend of hers, Anna-Teresia Fjällås, a Sami woman who has had contact with this culture since her childhood.

Anna-Teresia has helped me with my work and has commented the things I should overlook and maybe change. I am very grateful for her help and she has let me interview her.

How did you grow up? Did you have any influence by the Sami culture?

I had a rather strong influence by the Sami culture. My family worked as reindeer herders, especially my father worked with it full time. Nowadays, my brothers are working with the reindeers as well.

When I became a teenager, it wasn't "cool" to be a Sami, like it is today. I didn't try to hide my roots, because I lived in a small town where everybody knows everybody. But it often happened that I had to defend myself and my culture. The discussions about my people mostly ended in an argument. For example from mid-April to when the snow has melted, the Sami community often restricts an area where it is forbidden, for people who are not part of the reindeer herding community, to drive snowmobiles. The reindeer herders themselves and policemen were allowed to drive with them if necessary, but one tried to avoid this. These areas were used for the reindeers to give birth to their calves, and they shouldn't be disturbed at this time. So when classmates in school asked questions, they were mostly based on biases and like I said the discussions lead to an argument. They thought that the Sami community used these restricted areas for their own pleasure or to mock the other people, not from the Sami part of town.

Even today I find myself arguing with people who don't listen to what I say and base their arguments on biases and have already made up their mind about diverse issues. I avoid talking about the snow-mobile issue, because the topic is often about the need of support from the government when the nature causes trouble for the reindeers. Especially during very cold winters, when there is a thick layer ice under the snow and the reindeers have a hard time getting to their food the need of the governmental help and support is very important.

Do you speak Sami?

I don't speak the language fluently, but I can express myself in a way, that I should be understood. In my childhood, I needed to go to day care, where I needed to speak Swedish. I used to speak Sami with my grand-mother and my father, but when she passed away, I kind of lost the contact to the language.

How do you live today?

When I was little, I always liked to work with the reindeers and I even took days off from school to stay home and help. Today, I try to keep that contact upright, so I will bring my daughter to the reindeers when it's possible.

Regarding the language, I try to speak it at home, but it is mostly used at work. My parents almost always speak Sami with their grandchildren so that they can learn it.

My mother used to make "koltar"; these are traditional dresses for the Sami people. Besides these, she also made other traditional things. Right now I am also learning to sow and weave.

I think that the connection between human and culture changes in content with the current life situation. For example, I lived near Stockholm for two years and lived with a man who had no connection to the culture and I had no Sami friends who lived in the neighbourhood. In that time, the connection was low, even if I didn't lose the contact with my parents.

At the moment, I live up in the north again, where the culture is more present and alive and it is just a bigger part of me.

What do you think of the culture today? Is it still important to you?

Yes, the culture, especially the reindeers, is very important to me. Whenever I can join my brother and father to take care of them, I try to do so. I often help when it's time to mark the calves. The reindeer herding is a central part of the culture for me, because I've grown up with it. Maybe if you ask someone with a different background than me, you will get another answer.

To me it seems as if the culture is more important to me now, than it was in the past, because I want my daughter to be part of it even if her father is not Sami.

Do you think the Sami culture is “sinking” in today’s society?

I wouldn’t really say that I’ve noticed that it is sinking. I think that it is very popular and modern to be part of the Sami culture, nowadays. Many people try to do researches to find out more about the culture and they try to discover different things of their past and their ancestors.

But I think it might change, because there are always fewer Sami herders and always less reindeer herding and maybe in the future, the reindeer won’t be the “wheel” of the culture anymore. Since I grew up with reindeer herding, I think it is in a central place of the culture. At the start of history, it was all about the reindeers and the culture was therefor built up around it. The way you lived, the food you were eating, everything had something to do with the reindeers. So from my point of view, if the reindeers disappear a big part of the history and culture also vanish.

As I said, this is from my point of view, because I grew up with reindeers. If you ask someone else, you will probably get another answer.



8. NORDISKA MUSEET, SWEDEN: SAMI-PEOPLE EXPOSITION

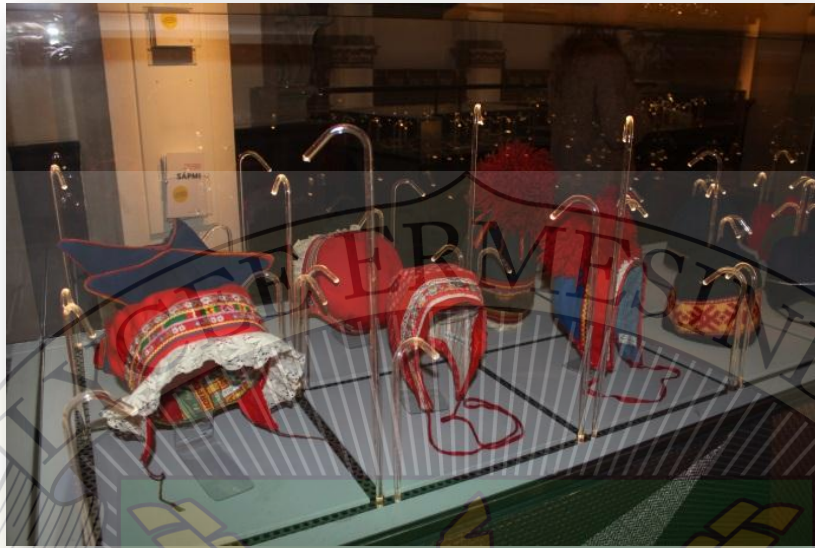
While I was in Sweden during the February break, I visited the “Nordiska museet”, the history museum of Stockholm, which was showing a Sami exposition.



They showed many tools the Sami-People used in their past and still use. One could read about their history and how they live now. The troubles they have been going through and have fought.

It was very interesting. This chapter is going to contain mostly pictures of the museum.





9.CONCLUSION

“When I became a teenager, it wasn’t “cool” to be a Sami, like it is today.” – Anna-Teresia Fjällås

I think this quote reflects my work quite well, actually. It illustrates how it was in the past and how it has changed until now.

The Sami-People have had a very rough and tough past, filled with fights for justice and a lot more. The people were not respected and they were often mocked. This culture came to a point where it nearly died away, but somehow it still managed to stay alive, and today it is as alive as never. People encourage this culture to blossom and the awareness of it has grown.

The European Capital of Culture 2014 is going to be Umeå. This is a great opportunity for the Sami-People and the Sami culture to show the world that they are alive and a strong culture today.

I remember doing my work about native Indians two years ago. In a lot of ways, the Sami-People and other native american cultures resemble each other. During this essay, I actually thought a lot about the native americans and their way of life and especially their history as well. Their histories are quite similar, but at one point, the Sami culture goes a completely different way; the way of still being a strong culture which lives freely nowadays. The native Indians have lost a lot of their traditions, religion and a big part of their culture with them. Sure, the Sami-People had lost these factors in their culture too, but they regained them in a later part of history. They have managed to fight through slavery, through the part where many people had to leave the country and are here today, strong and alive.



I really respect the strength and the spirit that this culture has and their biggest award for their fight is their freedom today.

It will be interesting to see what the future brings this culture, positively and negatively.



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