

Giving voice to the Saami children themselves:

**How are the rights of Saami children realized in Finland,
Sweden and Norway**



LAPSIASIAVALTUUTETTU



Co-operation Project with Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish
Ombudsmen for Children

Presentation at ENOC meeting by Maria K. Aula 4.9.2008

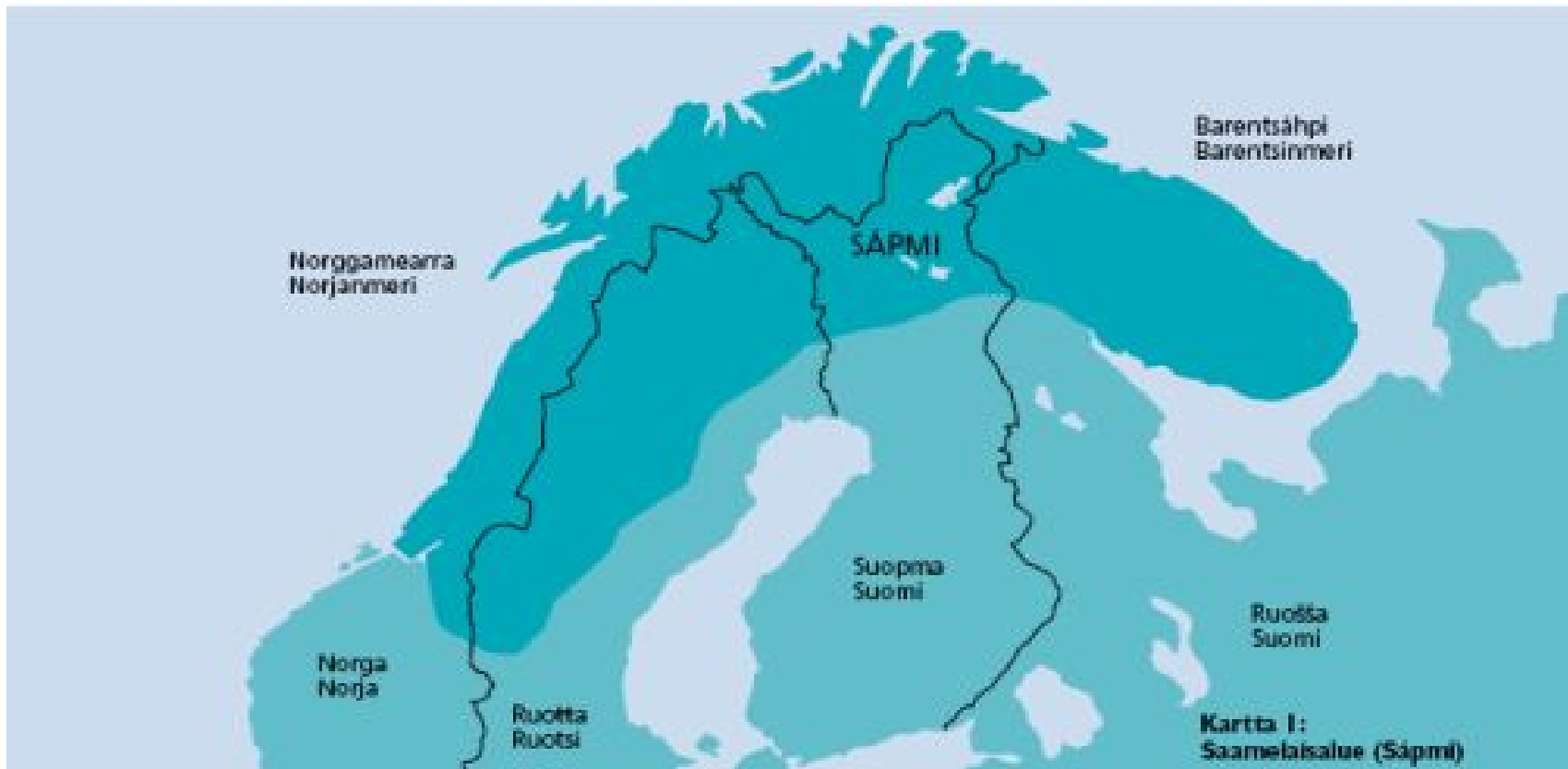


Some basic facts about Saami people

- The only ethnic group in the area of Europe classified as an indigenous people.
- Minority that lives on the northern parts of Norway (40-45 000), Sweden (15-25 000), Finland (9 300) and Russia
- Has several own languages and special culture
- Have some cultural and economic autonomy at their home area
- Traditional source of livelihood reindeer management
- Live in very ordinary houses – not in huts ;)



The Saami homeland area





The CRC and indigenous children

- Art 30 "A child who is indigenous has the right to his or her own culture, religion and language in his or her community"
- Other meaningful articles
 - All children are equal (art 2)
 - Right to participate and to be heard (art 12)
 - Education should cultivate respect for the child´s language and culture and tolerance (art 29)
 - State should promote children´s programming and books also at languages of indigenous children (art 17)
 - In foster care attention must be given to child´s ethnic and linguistic background (art 20)



What is the overall situation of the saami children? (1)

- There is education at saami language as a mother tongue and also possibilities to study all subjects in saami language (legislated rights)
- Their rights are best implemented on the home area up north but majority of saami children (70 %) live outside that area
- There are some saami language children programs in TV and saami news (broadest mediaservice in Norway)
- The committee for the rights of the child has encouraged to deliver more information about CRC for indigenous children in their own language





What is the overall situation of saami children?

- There are very few studies about the wellbeing of Saami youth or their own opinions
- They do not live in an isolated community but are in constant interaction with their swedish, finnish and norwegian peers
- All children that identify themselves to be sami do not speak the language but speak finnish, swedish or norwegian





Ombudsmen acting together (2007-2008)

- gave Sámi children and youth possibility to tell their own opinions about their well being and implementation of their rights
 - 13 – 18 years old, at school environment or discussion groups – different methods in Fi, Swe, No
 - altogether 171 children were met/about 90 questionnaires or interviews in Finland
 - reports published during the last spring
- translated material about CRC to one of the sámi languages (north sámi)
www.lapsiasia.fi
 - CRC as a whole
 - readable fact sheet
 - Finnish ombudsman launched sámi language web pages
 - in Finland lessons about CRC in sámi and in finnish at 12 schools



Ombudsmen acting together

- conveyed the children´s opinion to local and national decision makers and their own community (Norway, Sweden, Finland)
 - press meetings and seminars up north
 - meetings with decision makers in capital area
 - sending material to decision makers
 - this work is still continuing
- got co-financing from the EU Regional Fund (Interreg)
- project took place during 1.5.2007 – 15.5.2008



Final reports in Swedish/Norwegian and Finnish 2008 - coming in sámi language at autumn



Rätten till delaktighet och inflytande för samiska barn och ungdomar.

The right to participate and influence for saami children and young people.

Ombudsmen for children in Finland, Norway and Sweden.





What did children say about their lives? (1)

- The majority regard being Sámi as a positive thing – they have a strong Saami identity
 - " It is cool to be a sámi"
 - " Being sámi is a gift"
 - Saami identity as a conscious choice
- However there were some who do not value their ethnic background ("it does not mean anything for me")
- Reported bullying or naming at school because of one's Saami identity exists but it varied a lot across countries
- Their parents' assimilation to the mainstream community has however some negative implications to children's identity building





(2) Education

- Children valued highly being thought in Saami language and were satisfied with that
- Biggest problems in education
 - 1) The lack of qualified teachers using Saami language
 - 2) The lack of Saami language teaching materials
 - 3) Unequalness among Saami youth (lack of continuity in Saami language instruction)
- Surprisingly the Saami children were not taught Saami history in schools (Finland)





(3) Media – too many stereotypes

- children would like to have more media services designed for them and in their language (radio, TV, web)
- children find that mass media continues to give a very stereotypical view of Saami people.
 - Depicted as drunks, always dressed in traditional Lapland costume and who know nothing of modern life
 - too little information about their contemporary life
- at least in Finland the Finnish children living in south know hardly anything about Saami culture, in Norway the situation is better



(4) Strong attachment to their northern environment

- children like to lead their lives up north – they feel comfortable with their surroundings

- "I like nature, reindeers, my relatives, my language"
- in the Finnish group 70 % would not like to live south of Rovaniemi (Polar Circle)
- many have to leave early for example to enter vocational studies (at 16-18 years)

- Children would like to have more versatile leisure activities especially in smaller villages

- Children would like to keep closer contacts with their saami peers across the home area (long distances!)





(5) Family issues

- In the Finnish interview material there were more opinions on the wellbeing at home
 - Mostly the youth praised their parents and relatives (extended family: cousins, grandparents, aunts)
 - Most had good financial circumstances (jobs)
 - Some felt lonely (not enough presence by parents, spend too much at work)
 - 9 % mentioned their parents heavy drinking
- More studies needed about the "Saami way" of upbringing the children and its implications
 - parents need support in their parenting role



(6) Participation

- The children felt that the Saamiparlamments (in Norway, Sweden and Finland) were distant from their lives
- At the level of their schools and municipalities there are varying possibilities to participate across countries





How to interpret the results?

- Some views of Sami children reflect also broader concerns of children in Finland, Norway and Sweden
 - who live in sparsely inhabited areas or
 - whose parents work too much or
 - whose parents drink too much
- It is not in every respect easy to differentiate between the problems of sami children and finnish/norwegian/swedish children in general



Some proposals for further action

- More co-operation between the governments of Norway, Finland and Sweden is needed to improve educational equality
- Saami parliaments should enter a closer dialogue with the saami children and youth in order to represent also their voices
- The municipalities at the area should better serve also the saami childrens recreational needs and ask their opinions
- The public broadcasting companies of Sweden, Finland and Norway should co-operate even closer in providing programming for children and young people in saami language
- More information about saami culture and contemporary life should be spread across the countries (not only up north)
 - Note! Response from the Saami community and national authorities to the project has been very positive and reports got a lot of publicity in media



Thank You!

A saami girl in her festive costume at the Saami youth annual cultural event in Enontekis, Hetta, Finland (March 2008).

