

EIAs and the Sami people's cultural heritage in Sweden: are we still on square one?

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The Sami people's cultural heritage and point-of-view is seldom analyzed in depth in environmental impact assessments of sites located within the Sápmi region. They are an indigenous people of Northern Europe who live today in a cultural region which stretches across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (see Fig. 1) and choose to call the Sámi traditional homeland "Sápmi" (Gaski 1993, p. 115; Kailo & Helander 1998, p. 17). In Sweden, Sápmi covers between 35% and 50% of the total land area (Sametinget 2004; Svonni 2011).



Figure 1. Map of Sápmi

Little is known about the Sami people's history before the old Swedish name *Lappmarken*, the Northern part of the old Kingdom of Sweden, mentioned in a letter by King Magnus Eriksson in 1340. The document issued provisions through which all those of Christian faith could have land and property in *Lappmarken* provided they paid taxes to the king. At the end of the 16th century the Sami shifted from wild reindeer hunting to domesticated reindeer herding (Svonni 1976, p. 9) but the true colonization of Sápmi first began in the 17th century (Michael 2014, p. 3). The results of this colonization had irreversible effects on the Sami's culture.

Worldviews and concepts

The Sami structure their worldview around the elements and phenomena of their natural environment. The Sami believe that all living things and other elements which other cultures may not even consider alive such as rocks and mountains are connected to one another.

In a scene from a recent Sami short film *Áile ja Áhkku* (*Áile and her Grandmother*), the grandmother asks Áile to take water from a stream and says: "You must not do it against the stream. You must follow nature's own ways" (Somby 2015). The film deals with the encounter between different Sami generations and augments the importance of Sami traditional knowledge.

In EIAs we often use terms such as "landscape" but there is no equivalent term in the core vocabulary of the Sami. Osgood Dana points out that the concept "landscape" is foreign to the Sami worldview (2003, p. 96). The most similar term is the North Sami *ænadat* closer to "terrain" than landscape (Korhonen 1973, p. 155).

Other terms such as "wilderness", where the concept refers to virgin nature still untouched by humans is also foreign to the Sami's worldview. Traditionally, they do not make a distinction between man and nature, wilderness and cultivated land. Instead, all of these are seen as a part of a whole (Moreno 2004).

Early EIAs within Sápmi

When the first environmental impact assessments in the Sápmi region were being drafted in the late 1990's cultural heritage had to be given as much attention as natural features. An example from 2009 is an assessment of Björkhöjden in the historical province of Ångermanland for the possible location of wind turbines (Vindkraft Norr 2009, p. 10). In the final results, the only recommendation about cultural heritage was: "Areas with prehistoric remains should be avoided" (Ibid, p. 20). In the area there are four Sami villages or samebys. A detailed study of the reindeer herding activities was considered, but there was no direct contact with the Sami that make use of the area.

The same year the Sami Parliament of Sweden (Sametinget) adopted the program *Eallinbiras*, focused on their living environment. The document underlines that the Sami have a deep relationship with nature which is hard to capture with words. They have a living approach to Sápmi. The environment is sensitive; they believe that "if they - or someone else - destroys nature, it will also harm their culture" (*Eallinbiras* 2009, p. 5). The program presents the objectives for a sustainable, resilient Sami living environment. It is a document by the Sami, for the Sami people, and it presents important facts about the Samis' view of nature as a soulful living entirety, opposed to the Western view.

The Sami land use and EIA guidelines 2010

A sameby is both an economic association and a specific geographical area. Its members are entitled to engage in reindeer husbandry in this area. In certain parts, they also have fishing and hunting rights. The rules are regulated in the Reindeer Husbandry Act (Sapmi 2015b).

In 2010, the SSR with the Sametinget presented guidelines (SSR 2011) regarding *Sami Land Use and EIA* (*Samisk markanvändning och MKB*). It is a document by the Sami which explained a problematical planning process and defines important aspects of Sami cultural heritage such as intangible heritage and traditional knowledge.

The main purpose of the SSR's guidelines was to raise Sami interests in urban planning and to find possible instruments to support and help the samebys in their effort to manage urban planning issues. It raised several dimensions which are often overlooked in the process of producing an EIA linked to developments within Sápmi. In the introduction, Ragnhild Svonni explains that the Sami consider themselves to be a part of a whole: their habitat which consists of the surrounding landscape, history, the reindeer, the Sami language, their nature resources and their own place within this entirety (SSR 2011, p. 5). This is the basis for the Sami's culture and entire existence. This holistic worldview differs from the traditional Swedish view of nature and nature conservation in which nature is an untouched essence without human impact. Thus, it becomes difficult for the Sami to identify themselves with the general and technical descriptions in EIAs. Moreover, the guidelines clarify in detail what Sami cultural heritage embraces. "It is to be seen as an entirety consisting of three components, where all of these components have to be present for the picture to be complete" (SSR 2011, p. 27). These are: 1. Tangible cultural heritage; 2. Intangible cultural heritage and 3. Biological cultural heritage.

The following year Svonni made a presentation entitled *Siellu min siste* (*The landscape within us*) at the Swedish National Heritage Board's annual conference. She spoke about the management of the landscape, used the Swedish concept for landscape, and underlined that the fragmentation of the landscape into separate objects creates an unsustainable future. For the Sami, each part within a landscape has a different function, depending on the reindeers' needs at a certain place and time (Svonni 2011). In contrast to the *Eallinbiras* program and the *Sami land use and EIA* guidelines, the information was presented by the Sami for a predominantly non-Sami public. Svonni's presentation can be summed up in one of her explanations which I find crucial to keep in mind. From a Sami point of view, it is not the physical remains but instead the knowledge connected to the place that is imperative.

Identifying cultural heritage for the EIA process

The linear methodology

When putting together a cultural historical/heritage assessment which will be used as a basis for an EIA, following a strict traditional Western linear methodology, we first try to identify what objects and cultural environments may be present at the site. Then we try to assess the value of these objects and environments. Finally, the third step is to try to judge what impact the new changes of a project may cause on these objects/environments and their value/s.

In order to understand the record of what is present at a particular site, through our linear worldview, we study databases of registered prehistorical and historical remains, old maps,

topographical and geological maps, databases with place-name records, church records, archaeological reports and scientific publications. With these, we build up a cultural environment assessment (*kulturmiljöutredning*) or a cultural heritage analysis (*kulturmiljöanalys*) which interprets what has been identified on the site and also predicts the chance of finding new remains. Values are based on the uniqueness of the remains in relation to a national, regional, and local perspective.

The Sami challenge

From a Sami point of view the traditional cultural heritage analysis of a site is mainly focused on finding object remains, which are of no particular interest to them. It is the story and the place's function that is important (Svonni 2011).

Working with the analysis of a site within Sápmi there are a number of objects which have been previously recorded in cultural heritage databases, such as hearths, locations of abandoned dwellings, and Sami place-names.

Analyzing a site in Sápmi there are other tools and resources to use: traditional knowledge (*árbediehtu*), local attire, legends and stories, and joiks (*luohti*). Where do we look for this information? Sami music is a good example. Among several singing styles, the most important is the joik. As a musical form, joik differs in several ways from traditional Western music; it doesn't follow our Western tone scales. According to Swedish Sami joik researcher Krister Stoor, joik is not singing, it is not telling a story, it's a larger part of a greater whole, an entirety that allows people to be connected to other people, nature and animals (Stoor 2002). Swedish Sami joik researcher Jörgen Stenberg writes that "With words one can describe how an area is. But words are only words. In the joik one gives them a deeper feeling. How a place is. Because the joik has been born from that place, basically, and has created those tones" (Skaltje 2015).

According to the Sami relational worldview everything added to a place disrupts the natural balance between people, nature, and the place. Norwegian-Sami reindeer herder Aslak Kemi Bals from Heammogieddi points out: "If one begins to choose that which is best for man, then it becomes quite senseless... The reindeer belong to nature. Therefore, you must also take into account the laws of nature. If you begin to work against nature, you will never succeed (Skaltje 2015)".

Sápmi and EIAs today

When working with a site that is located within Sápmi, we are dealing with a case of shared heritage. The site is as much Swedish as it is Sami heritage. Thus, if the analysis is carried out from the traditional Swedish view we fall short from arriving at an adequate understanding of the site's cultural heritage and its possible values.

A recent example from 2015 is an EIA by the Swedish Board of Transportation for a road plan in Kuouka – Messaure in Jokkmokk Municipality (Trafikverket 2015). The area was only considered to exclusively be used by the Sami in connection with hunting, reindeer herding, farming, forestry, laying out cable lines and the extraction of gravel and sand. Neither dialogue nor contact with the Sami that use the area is mentioned. Even though the survey area lies within an area of national interest for Sirges sameby's reindeer herding (Sametinget 2009), the EIA does not consider other social or cultural aspects besides reindeer herding. In sum, the dialogue with the Sami which Svonni advocates and similarly the recommendations from the Sami land use and EIA guidelines from 2010 seem not to have been taken into consideration.

Conclusive observations

One should keep in mind that the Sami have their own worldview. To them, everything has another type of value or importance since all things are considered to be a part of the whole, within a same symbiosis. Thanks to this, life functions. It is not a question of value but a question of balance and continuity. One thing does not work without the other.

I believe that we need to listen to what the Sami are trying to tell us. We are currently beholding the manifestation of a remarkable phenomenon. As an indigenous people, and thanks to modern social media, I believe that the Sami people have found their place in the world and are nowadays opening up and sharing their traditional knowledge, culture, and worldview with the rest of the world. It would be a shame to miss this opportunity.

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