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Sámi and Sápmi – Addressing the issues of indigenous people and natural resources in the northernmost parts of Europe

Results from 'Mapping and Analysing Saami Space' –project.
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Photo: Karin Beate Nøsterud/norden.org



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The Sámi are the only designated indigenous people in the European Union. They retain their own languages and traditions as well as their resource-based livelihoods based on i.e. to reindeer herding. Through a series of maps, this paper presents the four main aspects of the Sámi and Sápmi, the traditional living areas of the Sámi people, namely:

- Traditional living areas and the current, official, status of the Sámi and Sámi languages
- Demographic change in Sápmi
- Natural resources in Sápmi
- Reindeer herding districts

The Sámi are a small population who traditionally live in the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. One of the primary problems associated with estimating the size of the Sámi population is that few common criteria exist in relation to what "being a Sámi" actually entails. In the Nordic Countries the definition of what it is to be a Sámi is laid down in the Act on the national Sámi Parliaments and is based mainly on self-identification and primary usage of the Sámi language. According to these national definitions, a Sámi is a person who considers him- or herself to be a Sámi, provided that this person has learned Sámi as their first language or has at least one parent or grandparent whose first language is Sámi. Other identity markers are kinship, the geographical region of Sápmi where their family came from, and/or other connections to certain aspects of Sami culture, like livelihoods or handcrafts.

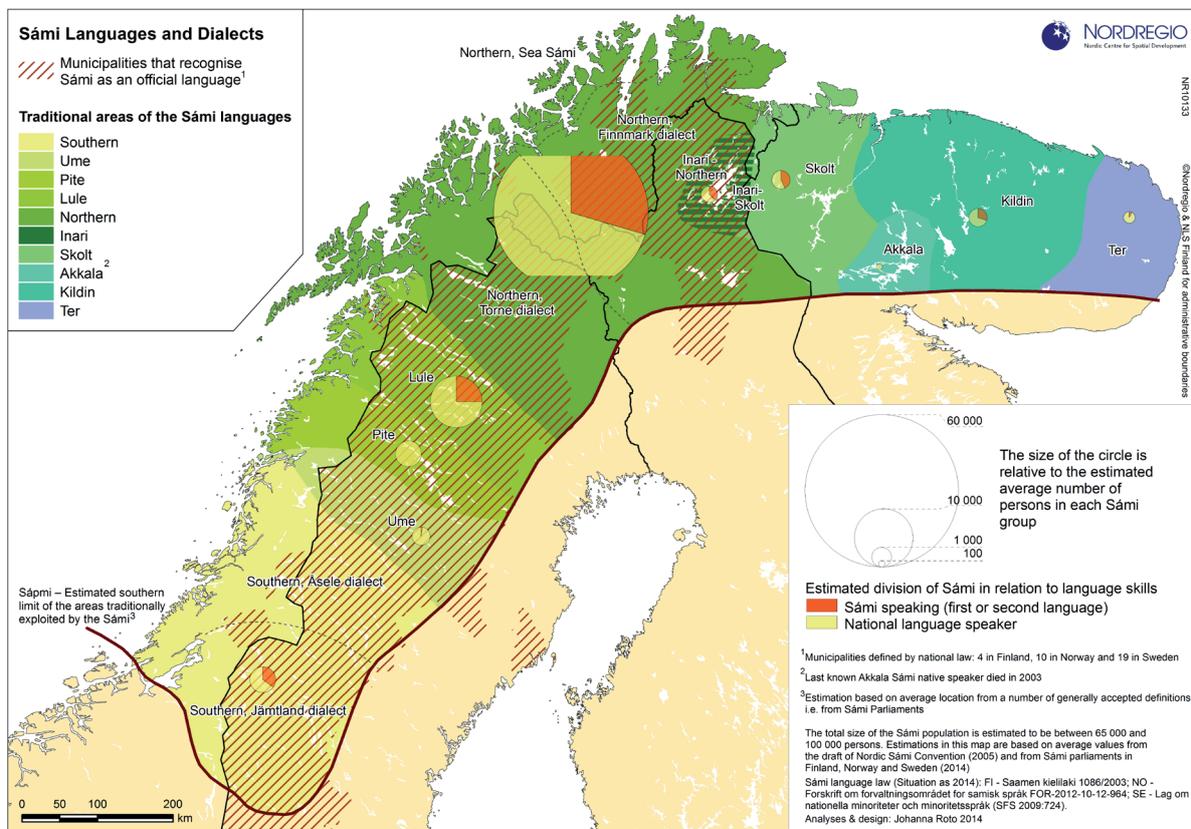
The living areas of the Sámi people can be defined in different ways. Traditionally, the living area of the Sámi people, Sápmi, was seen to cover a large land area from Mid-Norway through mid-Sweden across Finnish Lapland and into the Kola Peninsula in Russia, in total almost 400 000 km². Currently however the areas actually inhabited by the Sámi are much harder to define as a significant number of the Sámi people now live in the larger cities of the respective countries, especially in the capital regions and in the various regional centres within the traditional living areas.



This map with the locations of main cities and villages, lakes and rivers shows place names in local Sámi languages.

Sámi languages and dialects

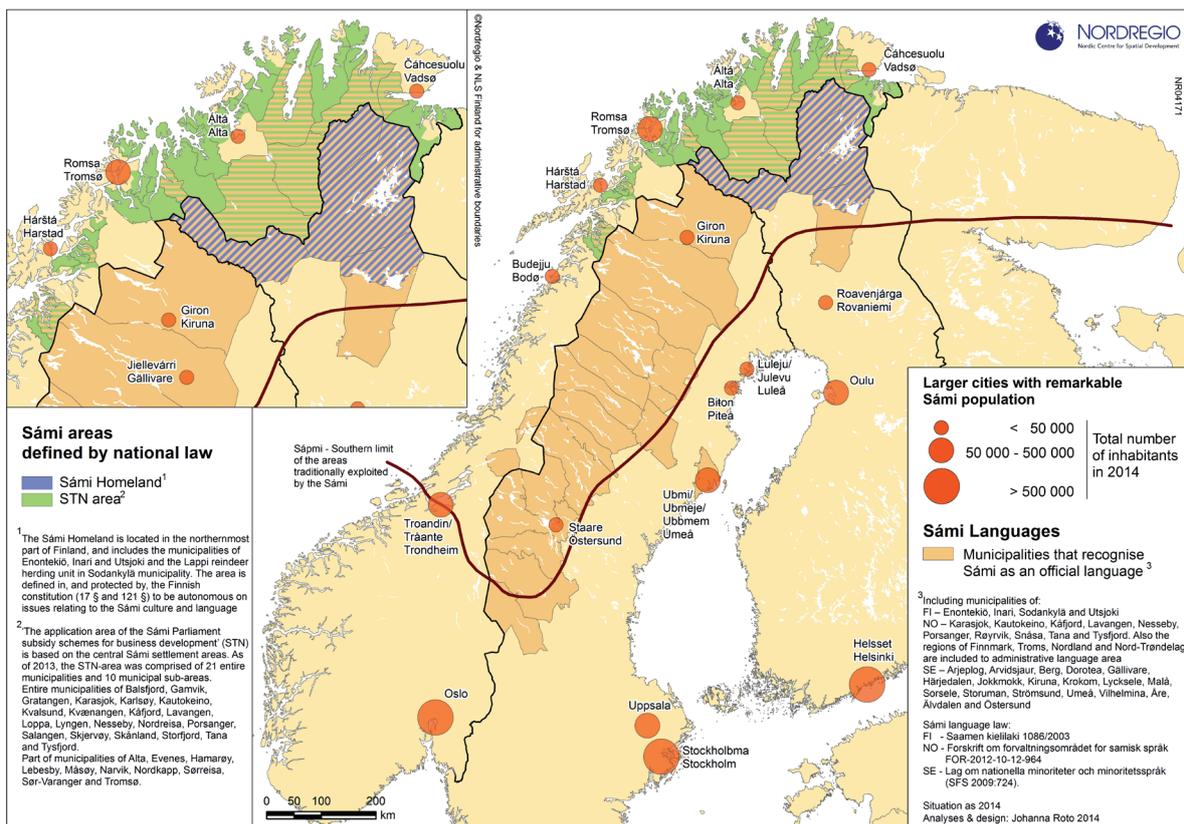
The total number of Sámi people can only be estimated as none of the Nordic Countries publish statistics in relation to ethnicity. Other potential sources relating for instance to language or to the voting lists for Sámi parliaments are not comprehensive. Generally it is estimated that there are some 40 000 Sámi in Norway, 15 000 – 25 000 in Sweden, 10 000 in Finland and 2 000 in Russia. The total Sámi population is estimated to be between 65 000 and 100 000 persons. There are ten Sámi languages. Map shows the traditional catchment areas of the various Sámi languages. The current language situation, defined by national law, is also included. Estimates of the number of Sámi people by language are further divided by language skills.



Sámi areas defined by national law

In territorial terms the current living area of the Sámi people, which now encompasses only a part of their traditional living area, has been given a legal basis. In Finland and Norway these Sámi administrative living areas are specifically defined. The Sámi Homeland is located in the northernmost part of Lappi administrative region in Finland. The area is defined in, and protected by, the Finnish constitution (17 § and 121 §) to be autonomous on issues relating to the Sámi culture and language. The application area of the Sámi Parliament subsidy schemes for business development (STN) is based on the central Sámi settlement areas and accounts for around 50% of the area in Norway north of Saltsfjellet. In Sweden, like in Finland and Norway, the Sámi language has an official status in a number of municipalities.

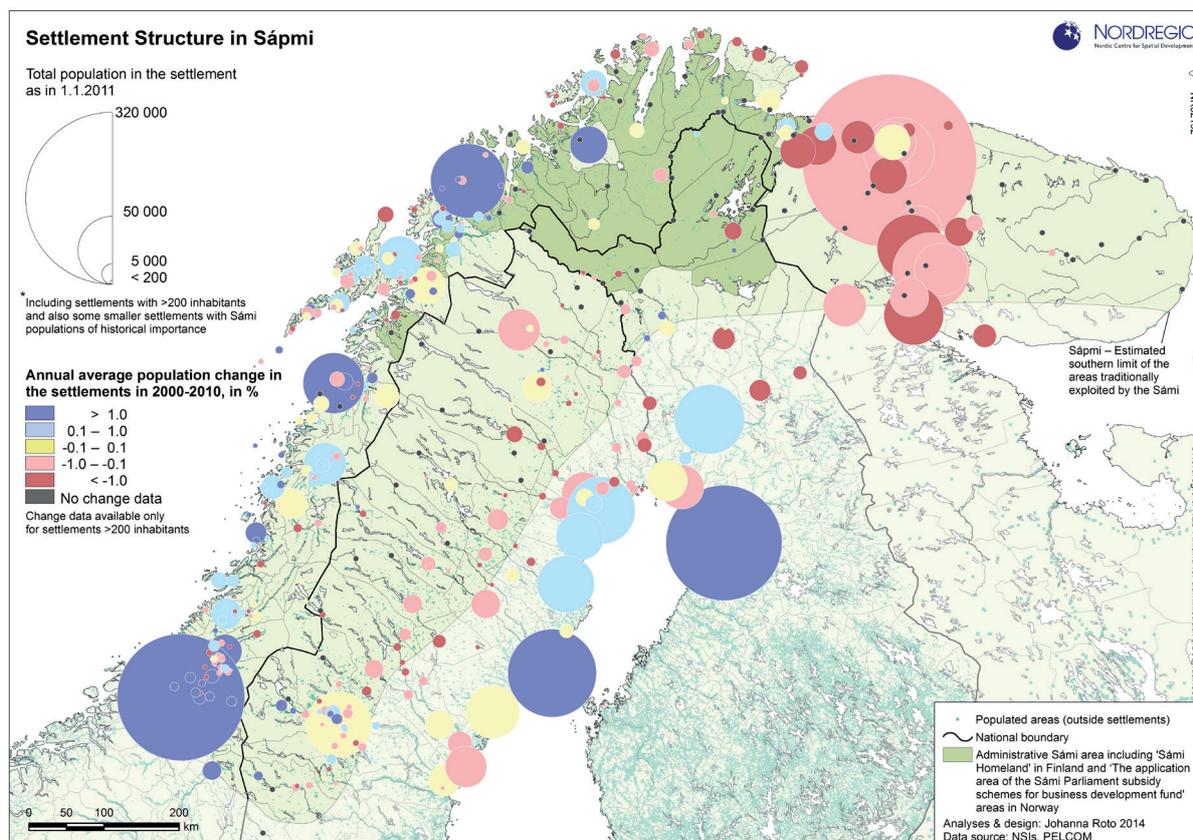
The Sámi people today do not however only live in the traditional areas. Based on various sources (such as voting lists for the Sámi Parliaments, language education and the location of Sámi institutions) a number of cities outside the traditional living area can be highlighted as new 'Sámi hubs.' These larger cities, together with the municipalities defined as 'Sámi municipalities' in national law are shown on map.



Settlement structure in Sápmi

The Sápmi is home to some 2 million people, who, in a geographical sense, inhabit rather unevenly a large land area. The division of the population can be seen from three different perspectives or spatial dichotomies, between west and east, coastal and inland and urban and rural areas. The East – West divide results from the differences in settlement pattern between the Nordic Countries with relatively many small and medium size cities and the Kola Peninsula where almost one million people live in a small number large settlements. The coastal and inland division reflects traditional or, historical, settlement patterns where major settlements were located in coastal areas or along main rivers while inland areas were mainly uninhabited or populated only by a limited number of small, permanent, settlements. Finally, the urban-rural divide reflects rather more current population dynamics where more and more people are now living in the cities and the rural areas are struggling to combat outward migration. Currently some 65% of the population in Sápmi live in settlements with at least 10 000 inhabitants and in the Kola Peninsula the share of those living in such settlements is over 85%.

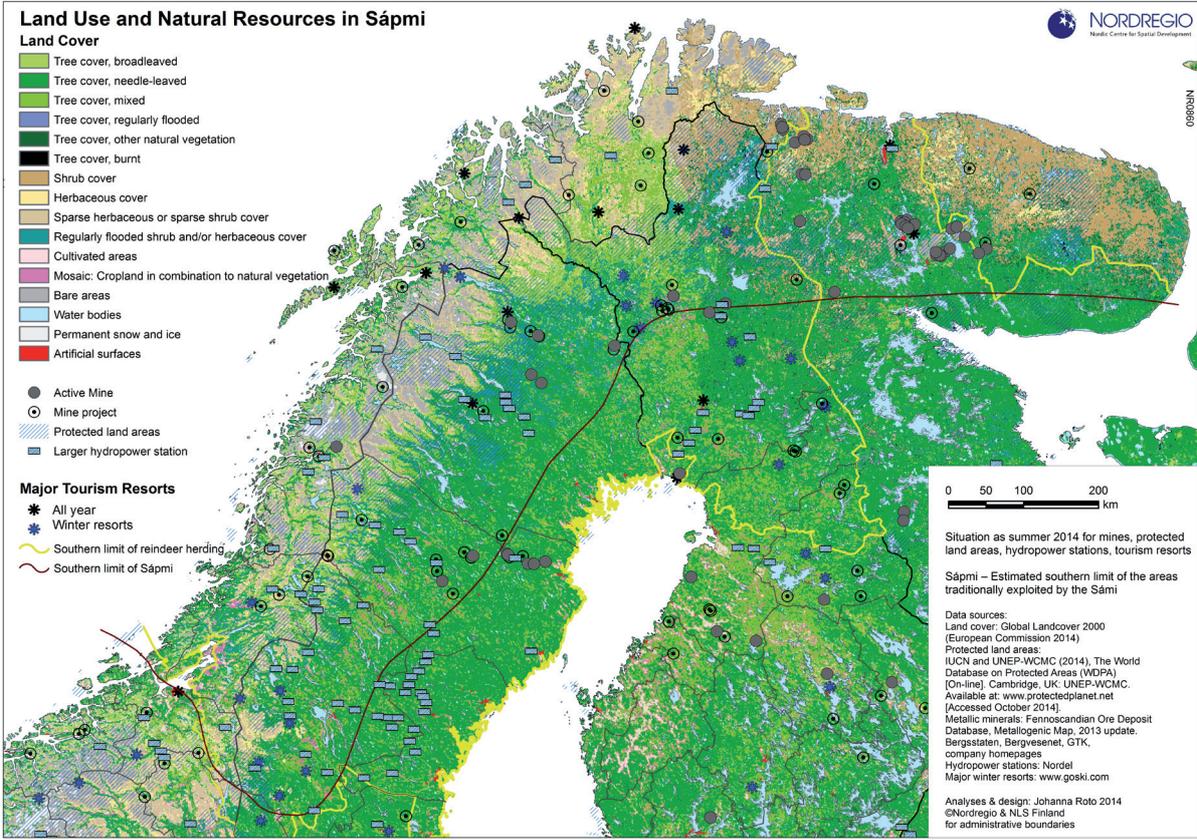
During the last 20 years the total population in Sápmi has decreased by 14%. This decrease has taken place primarily in the rural areas and in small settlements. Many of the larger cities and some smaller settlements have however experienced a population increase. In this context, the Norwegian cities of Tromsø, Bodø and Alta in particular, as well as some smaller settlements with good regional assets like tourism and fishing, have experienced positive demographic development.



Land cover and natural resources in Sápmi

The largest part of Sápmi lies north of the Arctic Circle. The landscape varies from fjords, high mountains and deep valleys in the western part to Norway to forests and river valleys in Sweden to low plateau areas containing many marshes and lakes starting from Finnmark and the Torne Valley and continuing eastward. Part of the Kola Peninsula lies within the tundra region. This region is rich in natural resources, offering good opportunities for forestry, reindeer herding, tourism and, energy production etc., but is not always without conflicts between these various activities.

In the recent years rising prices and market liberalisation has made investment in the prospecting for and the production of minerals much more interesting. This is particularly visible on the Fennoscandian Shield, which is recognised as having a minerals potential of global importance. Just within the traditional Sápmi area, there are currently 40 functioning mines in the region and within a few years there could be as many as 84.



Reindeer herding area

Reindeer herding is seen as central to Sámi livelihoods and is viewed as a fundamental part of Sámi culture – even though only some 10-15% of the Sámi people are now actually involved in such practices. In some parts of the Nordic countries, only people designated as Sámi can practice reindeer herding.

The Reindeer herding area – from the highlands of Oppland to the east coast of the Kola Peninsula covers a land area of over 500 000 km². In each of the Nordic Countries this equates to approximately 30-40% of the total land area. In the Kola Peninsula the reindeer herding area is approximately 83 000 km².

In Finland the reindeer herding area is divided into the Special Reindeer Herding Area and the Reindeer Herding Area. In the special Reindeer Herding Area, reindeer herding should be prioritised and given special attention in issues related to encroachment. Reindeer husbandry is practiced through a system of reindeer herding districts (paliskunta – bálgosat). There are 54 districts. 13 of these districts are so called Sámi districts, located in the area of the Sámi homeland. In Finland anyone living permanently in the municipality to which the reindeer district belongs, and who is a citizen of the European Union, has the right to own reindeer. However the person must be approved as a member by a reindeer herding district.

Only Sámi people, who are members of a Sámi reindeer herding village (Sameby), have the right to pursue reindeer herding in Sweden. The reindeer herding area in Sweden is divided into 51 Sámi reindeer herding villages. In 33 mountain reindeer herding villages herding is characterised by long migratory routes between summer and winter pastures – partly also to Norwegian side. Since 1919, seasonal migrations over state boundaries have been regulated between Norway and Sweden in by various reindeer grazing conventions (renbeteskonventioner). In ten forest Sámi reindeer herding villages herding is more static and is conducted in forested areas. Eight of the herding villages in the Torne Valley are so called ‘concession’ Sámi reindeer herding villages. Concession villages engage in reindeer husbandry with special permission from the County Administrative Board (Länsstyrelsen). Compared to other reindeer herding villages the concession villages are populated also by non Sámi people who often also own the land on which their reindeer graze. However, according to the reindeer husbandry Act, the actual task of reindeer herding in a concession village must also be conducted by a person who is Sámi.

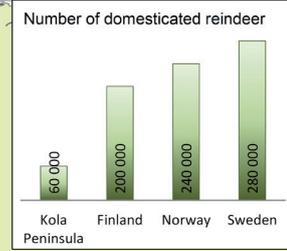
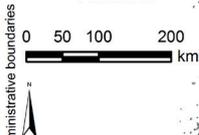
According to the Norwegian Reindeer Herding Act of 2007 only those who have the right to a reindeer earmark can conduct reindeer husbandry in the Sámi reindeer herding area. The right to a reindeer earmark requires that the person is a Sámi and themselves, their parents or their grandparents have or had reindeer herding as their primary occupation. In addition, there is a Concession Area in southern Norway, which consists of about 10 000 reindeer, where both Sámi and non-Sámi people are engaged in reindeer herding. The Sámi reindeer herding area is divided into six regional reindeer herding areas which are then further divided into 89 districts. Some of these districts are in seasonal use only though most practice an internal division into seasonal pastures, such as spring, summer, autumn and winter grazing. The Concession Area is divided into four semi domesticated reindeer herding districts (tamreinlag).

Reindeer Herding Area & Districts

- Reindeer herding area
- Concession reindeer herding area
- Boundary between reindeer herding districts

Total number of domesticated reindeer

- per reindeer herding district. One dot corresponds 50 reindeer



The total number of reindeer refers to situation as of 2013 in Finland and Finnmark and as of 2011 for the rest of Norway. In Sweden the number of reindeer shows the allowed maximum number of reindeer on winter herd in 2014. The number of reindeer in the Kola Peninsula is an estimate based on figures from the mid-2000s

Reindeer herding districts defined as: 'Reinbeitedistrikt' (NO), 86 units; 'Paliskunta' (FI), 54 units; 'Sameby' (SV), 51 units; Cooperative (RU), 5 units

©Nordregio & NLS Finland for administrative boundaries

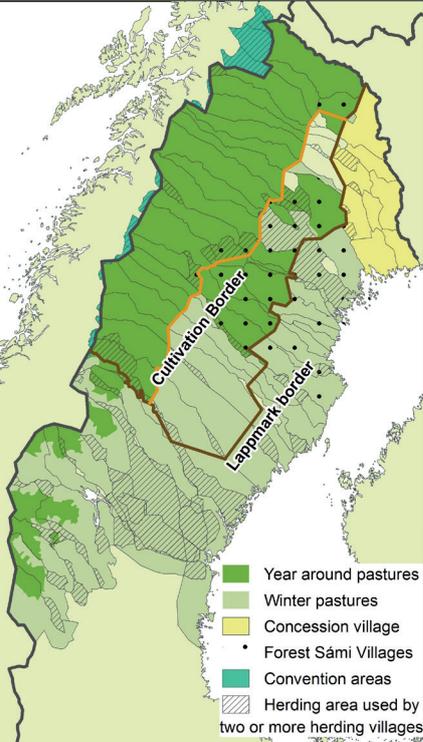
Source: Landbruksdirektoratet 2014, Paliskuntain yhdistys 2014, Sametinget 2014, Mustonen & Mustonen 2011, Analyse & Design: Johanna Roto 2014

- Boundary between reindeer herding areas
- Convention areas
- Reindeer herding districts

Seasonal pastures*

- Year around
- Summer pastures
- Winter pastures
- Concession village

The division between seasonal areas is generalised. In summer pastures herding can also take place during spring and/or autumn. In winter pastures herding can also take place in late autumn. Year round pasture areas, where herding takes place all year round, or seasonal pasture areas are so small that it is not possible to see the differences at this scale.



- Year around pastures
- Winter pastures
- Concession village
- Forest Sámi Villages
- Convention areas
- Herding area used by two or more herding villages

