



National Museums in Sápmi

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Summary

A case of high complexity, when discussed in a national museum perspective, is *Sápmi*, the accepted name of the multi-state area of the 'Sámi nation' of Northern Europe. In the Sápmi case, museum history should be told in a retrospective manner. It is quite a recent phenomenon that the Sámi population in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia – after centuries of political suppression and decades of systematic assimilation strategies from the governments – is regarded as a nation and with Sápmi – the transnational area where the Sámi population has its traditional centre – as its geographical location. In this case, 'the nation' is conceived as a cultural and social entity with strong political ambitions both within and across established national borders in the region. Hence, there are no old national museums and no politically acknowledged Sámi state but explicit ideas on 'national identity'. On the one hand, the Sámi population and the Sámi culture to a certain extent were included in the national narratives of Norway, Sweden and Finland in the nineteenth century, then mostly as an exotic element of the nation and exemplifying 'primitive cultures' of the north. On the other hand, the Sámi nation is a cultural construction of recent origin, albeit with some political institutions within and across established states.

The Sámi museums chosen to be presented in this report are museums that, in most cases, have a past as ethnic-local or ethnic-regional museums but in the last decades have been established with some sort of representative status on behalf of the Sámi culture or nation within the National States of the north or as museums with national responsibility for Sámi culture.

In most cases, Sámi organisations or local communities dominated by the Sámi people started to collect objects and immaterial culture. The oldest initiatives were around World War II when many Sámi settlements shared the war tragedies of this region. The most important wave of Sámi museum founding was, however, the 1970s and 1980s, when the Sámi people mobilised a great deal of political, symbolic and cultural strength in order to establish an indigenous identity across old national borders. Especially in Norway, with the largest Sámi population in Northern Scandinavia, many local and regional museums were established. As a consequence of the growing formal and cultural obligations of the Norwegian state towards its Sámi indigenous population, the first Sámi museum with national responsibility for Sámi culture and history was appointed in 1996 (museum 1). Yet there is no single Sámi museum institution designated to the role of leading national museum of Sápmi. Since 2002, the Norwegian Sámi Parliament has declared *all* Sámi museums national Sámi museums and organised them into regional clusters. In *Finland and Sweden*, the initiatives behind Sámi museums (museums 9-10) have also been private, local and/or regional. The State in all three countries acted more actively in the Sámi museum field in the 1980s and 1990s and dominantly for the same reason, i.e. growing obligations towards the Sámi populations as either national minorities (Finland, Sweden) or indigenous people (Norway).

Nation-building aspirations of the Sámi museums were not explicit from the very beginning, but developed from local or regional statuses into some form of national or nationally representative status. Apart from that, the Sámi case is an interesting example of the close relationship between political struggle for cultural recognition, judicial rights and reformation of historical narratives.

Summary table, Sápmi

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actor	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
The Sámi Collection	1972	1930's	Private initiative	Private foundation, State foundation	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Norwegian folk museum's exhibition complex in modern style, plus outdoor Sámi site on Bygdøy (close to Oslo).
The South Sámi Collections, <i>Saemien Sijte</i>	1979	1964	Private initiative	Private foundation	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Awaiting new building in 2013 in Sámi style, located in Snåsa, Norway.
Kautokeino Folk Museum	1979	1979	Municipal authorities	Municipality	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Style of 1987 building: Sámi Open door museum, Kautokeino, Norway. Regional cluster, Finnmark.
Tana Local Museum	1980	1980	Municipal authorities	Municipality	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Log house from 1790, oldest building in Tana. Regional cluster in Finnmark.
Varanger Sámi Museum	1983	1983	Municipal authorities	Municipality	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Sámi inspired timber construction (1995), Varangerbotn, Norway. Regional cluster, Finnmark.
Kokelv Coastal Sámi Museum	1991	1983	Private initiative	Private foundation	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Wooden house (rebuilt WWII), in Kokelv, Norway. Regional cluster, Finnmark.

Porsanger Museum	1998	1969	Private initiative	Municipality	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Several exhibitions in Porsanger, Norway, Regional cluster, Finnmark.
Árran Lule Sámi Center	1994	1982	Private & public initiative	Public foundation	Cultural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Sámi tent-shaped wooden complex in Tysfjord, Norway. Region of Nordland.
Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum, <i>Ájtte</i>	1989	1966 1983	Private initiative	Public and private foundation.	Cultural history, Natural history	Regional, national	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Sámi material and interior and award winning architecture. In Jokkmokk, Sweden.
Inari Sámi Museum	1962	1959	Private initiative	Private foundation	Cultural history, Natural history	National special museum	Sami culture in general, time not specified.	Open air museum, Sámi dwellings, huts and houses in Inari, Finland.

Note. Museums 2-8 have status as National Sámi museums in Norway since 2002 and Museums 3, 5-7 were united as The Sámi Museum of North West Finmark in 2006

Introduction

Sápmi is not a state or a country but a cross-national or multi-state area where the Sámi population has its historical residence. All museums in this area dedicated to Sámi history and culture are of private and local/regional origin. In most cases, Sámi organisations or local communities dominated by the Sámi people started to collect objects and immaterial culture. The oldest initiatives were around World War II when many Sámi settlements shared the war tragedies in this region. The most important wave of Sámi museum foundings was, however, the 1970s and 1980s, when the Sámi people mobilised a great deal of political, symbolic and cultural strength in order to establish an indigenous identity across old national borders. Especially in Norway, with the largest Sámi population in the north of Scandinavia, many local and regional museums were established. The Norwegian Government's post-war norwegianization policy was altered with the new legislation of 1988 that enabled "the Sámi people to preserve and develop their language, culture and way of life" (<http://sapmi.uit.no/>). As a consequence of the growing formal and cultural obligations of the Norwegian state towards its Sámi indigenous population, the first Sámi museum with national responsibility for Sámi culture and history was appointed in 1996 (1). Since 2002, the Norwegian Sámi Parliament has declared all Sámi museums national Sámi museums and organised them in regional clusters. In Finland and Sweden, the initiatives behind Sámi museums (9-10) have also been private, local and/or regional. The State in both countries acted more actively in the Sámi museum field in the 1980s and 1990s, for the same reason as in Norway, i.e. growing obligations towards the Sámi populations.

The Sámi population is divided between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia and is internationally recognised as indigenous by the United Nations through ILO convention 169 (1989). Historically, the Sámi represent a nomadic culture widely distributed in Northern Scandinavia but about whose origin there are no definite historical or archaeological sources. Their long history in Northern Scandinavia also includes long traditions of communication and interaction with other population groups in the same area. Not until the eighteenth century were state borders finally negotiated in this part of Europe. The new borders also meant new strategies for registration, education and subordination duties of the Sámi, and, in the nineteenth century, it was commonly agreed that the best way of developing the social and cultural status of the Sámi was to "nationalise" them with regard to language, manners and religion. Missionary organisations had them as specific objects of their activities, and Laestadianism – a strict, Pietistic revival movement – gained wide support among the Sámi in all three Scandinavian countries from the middle of the century (Lehtola 2002. Meriot 2002).

In the twentieth century, a diminishing part of the Sámi have continued their nomadic ways of living and, especially after World War II, assimilation and modernisation processes were also dominant in the traditional Sámi areas. However, in the 1970's Sámi activists started to argue that the "nationalisation" of earlier generations had been unrighteous and not according to the historical, cultural and human rights of an indigenous population. These activists also played an important part in developing strategies for establishing a genuine Sámi identity, including the use of the Sámi languages, traditional myths and religion, handicrafts and garments. Many of them being reindeer herders, this livelihood became a symbol for the Sámi people in general (Tromsø museum 2000).

As mentioned, it is a quite recent phenomenon that the Sámi population in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia is regarded as a nation and with Sápmi – the transnational area where the Sámi population has its traditional centre – as its geographical location. In this case “the nation” is conceived as a cultural and social entity with strong political ambitions. It has, through its own transnational organisations and assemblies, established its own National Day (6 February, since 1992), its own National Flag and National Anthem (since 1986).

Sápmi is in regular use as the name of the transnational area where the Sámi population live. The status of the Sámi in the four mentioned countries, however, differs quite substantially. Norway (1988), Finland (1996) and Sweden (2010) have Constitutional amendments to ensure Sámi rights to have their language, culture and society protected and supported. All three countries also have separate Sámi Parliaments (Finland 1973, Norway 1989 and Sweden 1993), but the authorities of these institutions differ widely. In Finland and Sweden, the Sámi Parliaments have their widest authority within the field of culture and language, while the Norwegian Sámi Parliament has wide political and judicial authorities and a substantial administrative organisation. Most important is the fact that, in 1990, Norway ratified the ILO convention on indigenous peoples thus giving its Sámi population specific cultural, political and judicial rights, while Finland and Sweden have been reluctant to do so; with the explicit argument that the Sámi rights to geographical areas and natural resources have to be discussed further. Accordingly, the Sámi in Finland and Sweden have the status of one of several national minorities (www.sweden.gov.se).

We find that the national role of the Sámi people changed with the anti-colonial movements of the 1970s, from constituting an exotic element in Norway’s history, to representatives for a separate people with a cultural identity of their own. This process is very well demonstrated in Tromsø Museum’s exhibition from 2000: *Sápmi: Becoming a nation*. We find that Norwegian representatives of the Sámi people – being the most numerous group of the Sámi population – came forth early as strong political activists, using political icons of the time to express their opinion (e.g. Che Guevara) and drawing attention to their situation in international courts. The hydroelectric project constructed on the Alta-Kautokeino River in 1982 caused several years of prior court-contests and protest camps on the construction site. A *lávvu* – Sámi tent – was even put up in front of Stortinget (the Norwegian parliament) as part of the political demonstrations. Even if the case was lost, improved consciousness of Sámi rights to land and water in their traditional areas was won during the process, causing increased acceptance of and media publicity for Sámi people in general and reindeer herders in particular. Sámi characters entered the scene in popular TV-series and Sámi artists partook in the Eurovision song contest (1980). A parallel situation developed in Sweden during the same period as 15 years of struggle for Sámi rights to Skattefjäll (a mountain area) was lost in 1981, yet the political controversies never reached the same dimensions as in Norway (Tromsø museum 2000. Einarsbøl 2010).

Russian representatives of the Sámi people were totally excluded from these early Sámi movements due to the Soviet Regime, but established its first association in 1989 (Kola Saami Association) and were gradually included in transnational Sámi organizations after the fall of the Soviet Union. Not being the only indigenous people in Russia, representatives of the Sámi have now organized themselves together with other indigenous groups under the Euro-Arctic Council that has its office in Lovozero in Murmansk Oblast and is funded by the Norwegian Barents

Secretariat. The first Kola Sámi conference was held in Olenegorsk, Murmansk Oblast on December 14th, 2008, but a Sámi parliament in the Russian Federation has yet to be established (www.barentsindigenous.org/).

Today, approximately 50,000 Sámi are living in Norway, 20,000 in Sweden, 10,000 in Finland and 2,000 in Russia, but the estimation varies.

National museums in Sápmi

The old national museums of Norway, Sweden and Finland contain rich Sámi collections. For instance, and as already mentioned, the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Oslo had a rich Sámi collection now transferred to The Norwegian Folk Museum. An important Sámi collection has also been an integrated part of Tromsø Museum in Northern Norway, established in 1872. A separate department of Sámi ethnography was established in 1949 (Reymert 1991:18) following the older “Lapp section” organised at the founding of the museum and with its own curator, Dr. *Just Qvigstad* (1853 - 1957), from 1884 (-1934) (Tromsø Museum 1947:78ff. Mathisen 2000). An additional permanent Sámi exhibition opened in 2000, presenting modern Sámi history: Sápmi - becoming a nation.

Likewise, the Nordic Museum (*Nordiska Museet*) in Stockholm, established in 1873, had a permanent thematic Sámi exhibition from 1874 and collected substantially in the Sámi regions in Northern Scandinavia. Today, the museum has approximately 6,300 “entries” of Sámi origin (Silvén 2008:312f). In the new building of the Nordic Museum, finished in 1907, two separate rooms were called “The Lapp Department” and designed for the display of the Sámi collections. These collections had Dr. *Ernst Manker* (1893-1972) as their first curator from 1939. Manker did substantial fieldwork and culture documentation in the Sámi areas and he instigated a separate Lapp Archive at the Nordic Museum as well as designed a new permanent Sámi exhibition in 1947. This exhibition had a quite functionalistic approach, focussing on the relationship between arctic nature, the Sámi people and their way of living. Manker’s exhibition was replaced by another exhibition in 1981, called “The Sámi”. The preparation of this exhibition was accompanied by growing critical debates on representation and representativity originating from Sámi activists and Sámi organisations. The 1981 exhibition was closed in 2004 and a new one opened in 2007, this time called “Sápmi”, which explicitly referred both to the Sámi community and the Sámi area. The exhibition also presented post-colonial perspectives and tested the notion of hybrid cultures (Silvén 2008).

The Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo also collected Sámi items from the 1890s onwards, but not until 1951 did it have a separate Sámi Department with its own curator, Dr. *Asbjørn Nesheim* (1906-1989). At the same time, the Sámi collection of the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Oslo was transferred to The Norwegian Folk Museum. This collection is still one of the largest single Sámi collections in Norway (RiddoDuottarMuseat is larger but consists of four separate institutions), and its first exhibition was opened in 1958. By 2011, the collection consisted of approximately 4,300 objects (RiddoDuottarMuseat 8,500 objects). A new exhibition was presented in 2000 (Pareli 2000; <http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/en/Collections/The-Sami-Collections/>).

Important Sámi collections are also part of the *National Museum* in Helsinki, Finland. This museum has a collection of approximately 2,600 objects, most of them the result of collecting

between 1902 and 1939. The National Museum has a permanent exhibition room called “Life in the Land of the Sámi” (Harlin 2008:80f. www.nba.fi/en/nmf).

These facts taken into consideration, the Sámi history and culture was included in the national narratives already in the nineteenth century, yet mostly as exotic elements of the nations and after inspiration from the popular World exhibitions where exhibiting “primitive” cultures was of great interest (Bergstøl et al. 2004).

The national role of the Sámi people changed in accordance with the 1950s ideal of equality as they were included in the Norwegian welfare community and referred to as ‘Sámi-speaking Norwegians’. The transfer of the Ethnographic museum’s Sámi collection to the Norwegian Folk Museum was part of this policy as Sámi culture was to be displayed alongside Norwegian culture. Since the 1970s, earlier museum representations have been the object of strong critique not least from the cultural and political elite within the Sámi population.

Concurrent with the Sámi being given new legal rights within the nation states of Finland, Sweden and Norway, they have also claimed their own museums as separate from the old national museums. The strategy behind these claims has obviously been to use Sámi museums as vehicles for developing a stronger ethnic identity among the Sámi themselves. Yet internal strides emerged gradually as a marginal Sámi group – the reindeer herders (constituting only ten percent of the total population) – became the very symbol of Sámi culture, allowed to define what it meant to be Sámi (<http://sapmi.uit.no/>). Thus Sámi identity is still being renegotiated in new museums focusing on typical Sámi livelihood previously bypassed. Other aspects of Sámi life and history are yet to be included in the national Sámi narrative. The fact that most contemporary Sámi representatives – in both Norway and Sweden – now live in the capital cities (Oslo, Stockholm) is, for instance, not very well communicated in the Sámi museums presented in this report as the national Sámi narrative is closely related to the Sápmi area. Another aspect of Norwegian Sámi history being treated to a varied degree in the Sámi museums is *Laestadianism*, the previously mentioned Christian revivalist movement founded in the 1840s and widespread in the northern parts of Scandinavia from the middle of the 1800s and adopted by many Sámi communities (Lehtola 2002. Meriot 2002).

Sápmi, the Sámi Area is divided into cultural and language-based subdivisions (e.g. East, Central and South Sápmi) in which each respective Sámi group now dwells. Territorializing across state borders is limited to reindeer herders with separate conventions regulating activity across each border. Sámi politics and jurisdiction developed separately in each of the Nordic countries, but different Sámi organizations and associations work as pressure groups presenting general claims and strategies at a transnational level. Norwegian counties rather than transnational Sámi regions encompass the Sámi museum regions in Norway, except the Lule Sámi museum in Drag partly addressing a Swedish Sámi audience. The South Sámi Museum in Snåsa represents only the Norwegian part of the South Sámi region.

Both Norway and Finland have established what are called national museums for Sámi culture, while Sweden has a “principal museum of the Sámi culture”. In addition, a number of more local or regional Sámi museums have been established. No Russian museum institutions promote Sámi culture except for the Kola Sámi museum in Lovozero, and a temporal photo exhibition (2011) in Murmansk regional museum (www.barents.no 2011. www.murmantourism.ru).

An important element in the development of Sámi museums and collections in Norway has been the fact that, since 1975, permanent museums – not only the national, but also the regional and local ones – had their annual budgets paid mainly by the State and the County. In 1975 this financing system covered 175 Norwegian museums. Twenty years later, when the financing structure was reorganised, it covered 315 museums. During this period, there was substantial growth in the number and activities of Norwegian museums. This also had a deep impact on the formation of Sámi museums based on earlier private or organisational initiatives, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1980 and 1996, 5 Sámi museums were included in the State and County financing structure. In most cases these museums were parts of local or regional culture centres.

Case studies in chronological order

The earliest example of the development of Sámi museums in Norway seems to be the Saemien Sijte/*The South Sámi Collections*, founded as a private organisation in 1964 with the aim of establishing a separate Sámi museum. The Saemien Sijte was installed in a separate building in 1979-1980 that also served as a Sámi culture centre. Its location is Snåsa in North Trøndelag County, and it is still organised as a private foundation. The collection consists of photographs and objects related to South Sámi daily life and culture. The collection is closely linked with a systematic registration of Sámi cultural heritage in Nord-Trøndelag and the southern parts of Nordland Counties since 1984 (Haga 2004. <http://www.saemiensijte.no/>).

Another example is the Guovdageainnu gilišillju/*Kautokeino Folk Museum*, which started its work in 1979. This is a local open-air museum owned by the municipal authorities. A separate museum building was finished in 1987. The Tana Municipality opened the Deanu Musea/Tana Local Museum in 1980 and the Várjjat Sámi Musea/Varanger Samiske Museum was established in 1983 and owned by Nesseby Municipality.

Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat/*The Sámi Collections* opened in 1972 in Karasjok as the first Sámi museum in Norway with a separate building and an administrative staff. The first plans for this museum were formulated in the 1930s. This museum received, in 1996, the status of *a national museum for Sámi culture in Norway*. This status implied that the Norwegian Government funded it directly and totally, but it was organised as a private foundation with a majority of the Board elected by the State and the Sámi Parliament. The museum aims at covering the entire Sámi area in Norway with its collections, and its main purpose is to protect Sámi identity, language and cultural traditions, including the development of the Sámi language as an academic language. The collections, however, have their main base in Finnmark County. The collection consists mainly of Sámi handicraft, artefacts, textiles, trade and transport in addition to a large number of photographs. By 2005, the number of museum objects was ca. 4,500 in addition to 11 antiquarian buildings, 650 pieces of art and 11,300 photographs (Olli 2005).

In recent years (2006-2007), the museum has been reorganised and united with Sámi museums in Kokelv (Kokelv Coastal Sámi Museum in Kvalsund established 1991 and based upon plans developed by Kokelv Sámi Association from 1983), Kautokeino Folk Museum and Porsanger Museum (established in 1998 as a result of systematic collection of objects by Porsanger Historical association from 1969) under the name of RiddoDuottarMuseat/*The Sámi Museum of North West Finnmark*. This new museum is organised as a foundation whose founding members

are both municipalities and private museum organisations. Its administrative centre is in Karasjok (www.riddoduottarmuseat.no/).

Based on plans developed since 1982, Árran Julevsáme Dávvervuorkka/Árran lulesamiske senter/Árran Lule Sámi Center was established in 1994 in Drag/Tysfjord in Nordland County. It was defined as a national centre that aims at maintaining and developing Sámi language, culture and society in the Lule Sámi area, including Sweden. Since 1999, a scientific journal (Bårjås) has been published in Lule Sámi and Norwegian/Swedish by the institution. Part of the centre is a museum with collections and exhibitions showing the Sámi way of life in the district, including Sámi dress and handicrafts. The centre is organized as a foundation owned by the Norwegian State, Nordland County and Tysfjord Municipality. Both educational institutions – kindergarten, library and workshops – and Sámi administrative functions are located at the Árran Center (Gælok 1992. Berg et al. 1997. Láng 2005. <http://www.rran.no/>).

In the 1990s, the Norwegian Government planned for structural changes in the museum field. Taking the relatively large number of small museums in the country as a starting point, the Government decided to commence processes aiming at enhanced and strengthened cooperation and division of work between them. These processes, in the last decade, have also resulted in larger museums on a local and regional basis.

Parallel with this, the Sámi Parliament (*Sametinget*) in Norway expressed its claim on similar processes among the Sámi museums. In 1999, the President of the Sámi Parliament explicitly addressed this issue stating the necessity of the Sámi Parliament being in charge of the structural changes of the Sámi Museums in order to sustain these institutions as central actors in the continued establishment of Sámi identity and culture. In 2000, the Sámi Parliament openly criticized Norwegian museum policy for lacking clarification of ownership, conservation problems, coordination and political control with the Sámi museums. As a result, the Sámi Parliament in 2002 was given the administrative authority over all Sámi museums in Norway. The Sámi Parliament then decided that no single museum should have the status as the national Sámi museum. Accordingly, all museums currently under the administration of the Sámi Parliament share national responsibility for Sámi culture. This administrative authority consists of different elements: the Sámi Parliament distributes the national economical support to the museums but also decides the administrative, political and museological development of the Sámi museums in Norway. This means that these museums, even if organized as separate foundations and regional clusters of museums, still have important political functions as instruments for Sámi identity and cultural independence in Norway (Schanche 2000; Sametingsrådets melding 2004). As for the museum buildings, Sámi culture inspires choice of colour, form and material for those drawn by architects (Kautokeino Folk museum, Varanger Sámi Museum, Árran Lule Sámi Center, the future Saemien Sijte and Ájtte in Sweden).

The definition of a Sámi museum was developed during the 1980s on both a national and a Nordic level: Sámi culture as the main theme of the museum, autonomous Sámi control, Sámi administrative and academic employees, localization in a Sámi area and an explicit Sámi cultural policy. This definition has been modified and discussed during the later years, but in any case, the national museums of Norway, Sweden and Finland are not defined as Sámi museums. As a consequence, the museums defined as Sámi museums should be regarded as Sámi parallels to national museums – which also seem to be the intended consequence of the different definitions.

The Nordic Museum (Nordiska Museet) in Stockholm was, until 2009, defined as the ‘responsible museum’ for Sámi cultural history in Sweden, while Ájtte – the Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum – was defined as the ‘main museum’ for displaying Sámi culture. Ájtte is today defined as ‘principal museum of Sámi culture’, special museum for the mountain region and an information centre for mountain tourism. The museum originated in 1966 when the Jokkmokk Museum was established on the basis of a private collection of objects – mainly silver objects – from the area. In 1983, a foundation was established by the Swedish State, the Norrbotten County, Jokkmokk Municipality and two Sámi national associations. In 1989 it was formally inaugurated in Jokkmokk in Lapland under its present name and the museum is situated in a very central and historic Sámi area of Sweden. The museum has an ecological scope placing the region’s natural resources as a dominant factor for the cultural and social history of the Sámi population.

Through its exhibitions, Ájtte presents a combination of natural and economic history of the region and the history of the Swedish Sámi population. The first of the exhibitions was opened in 1992, concentrating on major themes in Sámi culture and migration and the Sámi uses and notions of nature. Other exhibitions focus on Sámi Pre-Christian religion, on the changes of the region following modern industrialisation and the importance of water as a means of transportation and a source of power.

The location of Ájtte is interesting: Jokkmokk is situated in an area where Swedish mining started in the seventeenth century, where the exploitation of water for the production of electricity was dominant ever since the nineteenth century, and where the timber and sawmill industries have had a stronghold. Since 1996, parts of the area in the Jokkmokk Municipality have been included in the UNESCO world heritage site Laponia – a substantial wildlife area with heavy references to Sámi culture. Consequently, Ájtte also comprises an exhibition on this world heritage site thus making the mountain nature and culture part of a common human heritage.

The museum has embedded its focus on the Sámi culture in the region in its threefold function as centre for the nature of the region and as informative entrance to mountain tourism in the area. At the same time, the museum has strong links to Sámi identity building, e.g. through its hosting of the annual “winter market” which features traditional Sámi food and drink, crafts, live performances, and reindeer races (www.ajtte.com/sprak/english/. Vem äger kulturarvet 2000. Larsson 2004. Magnusson 2006).

In Finland, the Inari Sámi Museum – later named the Sámi Museum Siida - was founded in 1959 by the organization Sámii Litto - Saamelaisten yhdistys ry/The Union of the Sámi and opened for the general public as an open-air museum in Inari in 1963. A very important background for this initiative was the fact that a large number of Sámi buildings and objects were destroyed as a result of the wars in Finland before 1945. Another motivation for the building of a Sámi collection was the modernisation processes in the Sámi areas of Finland in the post-war period, processes that e.g. lead to reduced interests in traditional Sámi culture and activities.

The museum is an open-air museum that collects Sámi buildings and artefacts and also comprises a photography collection and a reference library. The Sámi Museum Foundation/Sámi Museum - Saamelaismuseosäätiö was established in 1986 as the formal owner of the Museum. The foundation has its own board of which a minimum of half the members must be Finnish

citizens of Sámi origin. In 1998, a new museum building erected with funding from the European Union was inaugurated.

Since 1999, the Sámi Museum Siida has had an officially declared status as the national special museum for preserving the culture of the Finnish Sámi. It has two regional branches in addition to its centre in Inari – at the Skierri Exhibition Centre in Hetta in the municipality of Enontekiö there is an exhibition focusing on the reindeer herding Sámi in Finland, and in in Sevetijärvi in the municipality of Inari there is a Skolt Sámi Heritage House devoted to the cultural heritage of the Skolt Sámi population who settled in this area in the post-war period. The exhibitions at the museum combine presentations of the natural history of Lapland with displays of Sámi culture and history in Lapland and Northern Scandinavia. The exhibition also present what are regarded as the important elements in the development of a Sámi nation: organisations, religion, art and handicraft, politics and symbols.

According to its bylaws, the purpose of the Sámi Museum Siida is to document the spiritual and material culture of the Finnish Sámi and to contribute to the strengthening of the Sámi identity in Finland. By putting the “cultural ecosystem” of the Sámi people on display, the exhibition aims at “showing both traditional Sámi values and the changes due to the development of modern society thus strengthening the national identity of the indigenous population of northern Europe”, as the official museum brochure puts it in 1998. The museum is, for the most part, financed by Finland’s Ministry of Education and Culture. The municipality of Inari also grants the Museum discretionary funds every year (Pennanen 1993; Siida 1998; www.siida.fi/contents/Sámi-museum).

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