

Report: Sverker Astrom Foundation

The topic: The Sami people in Sweden: their position in the society, the realization of their rights, current problems and achievements.

The author: Kristina Avagian, the scholar of 2021



Before I start my report, I would like to thank all members of Sverker Astrom Foundation for giving me the opportunity to study interesting topic and explore such wonderful country as Sweden. It is the best opportunity for researchers and students. I have MA in Human Rights and Democratization. My last research was about ingenious peoples of the North, Far East and Siberia in Russia. Sami people are ingenious population of the the Northern Sweden, Russia, Finland and Norway. Sami people are Fino-Ugrik-speaking people of region Sampi (Lapland). I have been always interested in their history and life conditions as well. They live in four different countries but still communicate with each other and work on same projects.

The topic was accepted by Sverker Astrom Foundation and I started to search the Sami organization that could accept me as internal researcher. The head of Ajtte Museum agreed to accept me for the internship. I was welcome. Ájtte is the Swedish Museum of the Mountains and Sami. It is a cultural and natural history museum in Jokkmokk in Lapland, Sweden. Ájtte is a museum that specializes in the culture and nature of the mountainous region of Northern Sweden. In addition, it is the main museum and archive of Swedish Sami culture.

On the 8th of the September 2021 I came to Stockholm. Disa Hastad invited me to stay at her place. Next morning I flew to Lulea. It is closest city to Jokkmokk. Kajsa Kuoljok was my supervisor during my internship. She was very kind to me and met me in Lulea. We took a bus to Jokkmokk together. Next day I spent in Ajtte Museum. I was introduced to all staff. I had my own working space. In addition, I had an access to information regarding indigenous rights in region. It is worth to note that there are three Sami organizations in the one building including Sami Parliament and Ajtte Museum. The third organization is more about political issues regarding Sami community and their connections with the Government.



Jokkmokk is a beautiful place with amazing nature around it. Sami people love their nature very much. The representatives of Sami community granted with special rights for reindeer husbandry. I was lucky to see some moments of reindeer husbandry. Most of representatives of Sami community take vacation during the autumn because it is time of hunting. The hunting mooses is popular in the Northern part of Sweden.

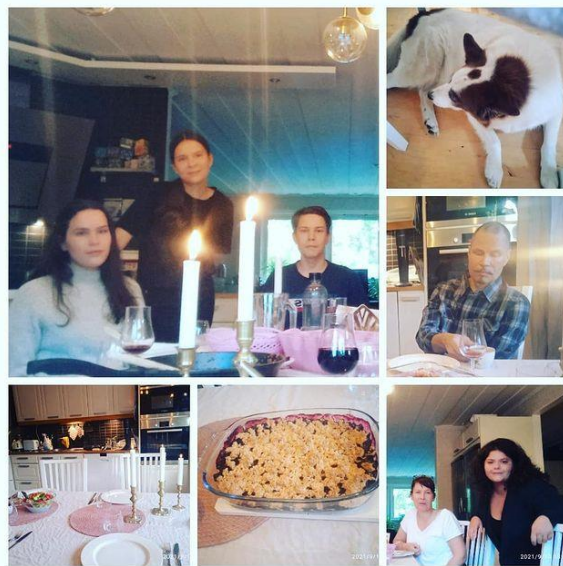


I visited many exhibitions in Jokkmokk, but there is the one that I liked very much. It's name is "Mygration" by Stina Folkebrandt and Thomas Colbengtson. During the exhibition I had a chance to interview Thomas Colbengtson. He was telling me that the foundation for his art is real photo collection that was created during the migration of Sami people to Canada. I was impressed by such kind of art in the glass. In addition, we were talking about the preservation of Sami language. Here, the photo of me and Thomas Colbengtson.

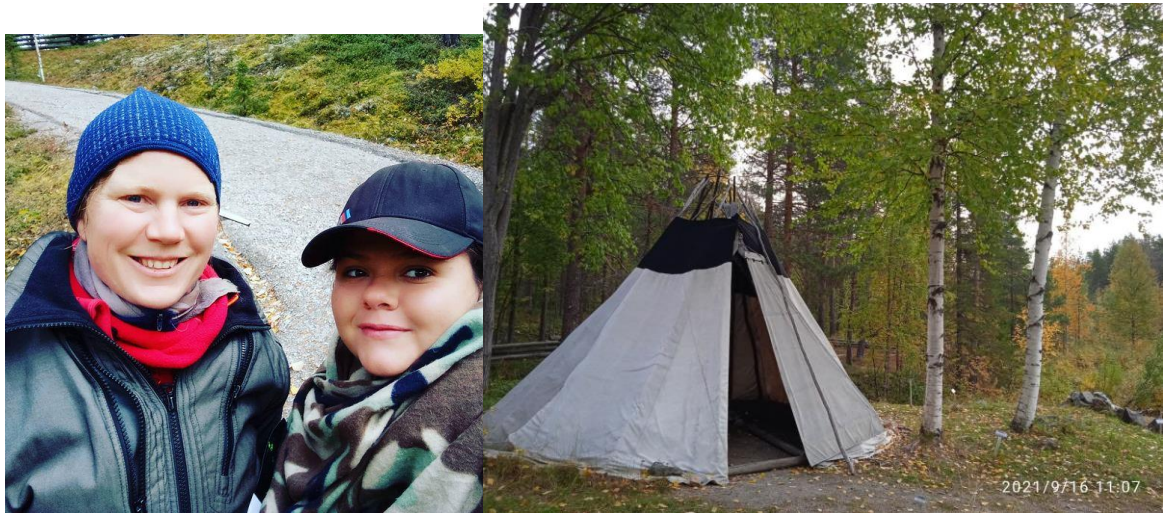


During the exhibition I met the local activist and politician Henrik Blind. He agreed to write the interview with me and answer several questions. His activism is not based on protests and meetings. The politician is sure that the main goal of the Sami community is to be heard and to find the best way for communication with the Government. In addition, I knew about the problem related to the name "Lapland". People are sure that this name is not acceptable. Moreover, they consider it offensive. Henrik is sure that it should be changed and now they are trying to be in a dialogue with the government. In addition, I knew that there were some problems with a British mining company that has been trying to start its work in the region but Sami people are keeping to protest against it. The land and its condition is very important for Sami people because "they belong to their land". Mining companies have a very bad influence on the ecology.

Sami people are very hospitable. Kajsa Kuoljok invited me for dinner in her place. I was very excited as far as I was going to visit a modern Sami family. The dinner with Kajsa's family was one of the most pleasant moments of my stay in Jokkmokk. Family members were telling me some stories about the Sami community and Sweden as well. During our meeting I realized that there are many differences between Sweden and Russia but at the same time there are things that look quite similar. Young people love their Sami culture. In addition, they are involved in all events and processes. I was sure that young people try to leave Jokkmokk but I was not right. Even after studying they want to come to work in Jokkmokk, be close to their community. Here are photos of one of our dinners.



I was keeping on visiting different nice places of Jokkmokk. One of them was the botanical garden Fjällbotanisk Trädgård, which is managed by the Ajjt Museum. There are many indigenous plants. The staff is very polite and in love with their job. Ingrid showed me everything in the garden. I had a very nice excursion. I am still impressed. Here is the photo of me and Ingrid.



In addition, I was involved in two interesting projects, Aida and Sami audiovisual collection. “In 2020 the collaboration between the Sámi Archive, the Ájtte Museum and the Sámi allaskuvla has continued as "AIDA II - Archives as Actors", enabled with Interreg Nord program's two-year funding. Archives are elevated in AIDA II as actors of the present, instead of simply collective memory and keepers of the past.” (The information from Ajtte museum official page). “The purpose of the project "Sami audiovisual collection" is to contribute to creating an infrastructure for the Sami audiovisual cultural heritage, as part of the Swedish cultural heritage. The project has four parts: (1) to carry out an inventory of films and television programs, (2) to ensure the quality of films and metadata, (3) to develop ethical guidelines from an indigenous perspective for such collections, (4) to prepare for making the material available after the project end within the Royal Library's (KB) regular activities. The project thus enables KB to establish a searchable digital collection, "Sápmi on film and TV", which after the end of the project will be made available to researchers via KB's search service Swedish Media Database (SMDB).” (the information from official page of Ajtte Museum)



I was traveling in the North to different cities(Lyckcele, Tarnaby, Umea, Kiruna) with team (Kajsa Kuoljok, Elina Kuhmunen, Katarina Spik Skum, Anna Westman Kuhmunen) of these two projects.



What did I learn during the fellowship? What conclusions have been drawn?

Education and language. All Sami communities have an access to education as all citizens of Sweden. Besides there are Sami schools in location of Sami residence. The majority of Sami parents prefer the Sami schools for their children. It is good opportunity to preserve the culture and the language.

Schools are developed. There are classes of traditional hand craft. Sami raise their kids in love with their culture. They learn their language at school but there are not many specialists of Sami language. In addition, there are a short term courses of Sami language in Jokkmokk for adults. It is worth to mention that there is Sami faculty in Umea University.

Indigenous right and it's realization.

Sweden **has not ratified ILO 169** on international level. It is the main problem for Saami community. They feel distrust from government's side. The fact is that some articles of ILO lead

to contradictions. There is need of the constructive dialogue between Sami people and authorities. Some scholars consider that government give enough rights and provide the realization and it's observation without ratification. Still this problem is actual for Swedish society.

Behind this contradiction there is another history which is not connected with ILO. During the time of the World War II Sweden was following the some "special" theory. According this theory there is a gradation of ethnic group and nations where Sami people are at "the bottom of the list". It means that there was a discrimination towards Sami people for long time. Today it is obvious that Sami claim about the ratification of ILO. It will give them more confidence in future.

NGOs and position of Sami people in Sweden. As I mention before NGOs related to the Sami life are developed in Sweden. There are Sami Parliament, Sami Media and representatives of Sami people in local government in Jokkmokk. They have very developed cultural and social life. There are many exhibitions, great artists and writers.

Sami people built the constructive relationship with the government achieving an equality in Swedish society. In addition they have a special rights for use of lands, reindeer husbandry. Today Sami people doing many projects to preserve their language and history attracting young people and talented person. Many Sami people doing their own business. The famous Sampi hand craft duodji is popular business project for many Sami in the region.

Ajtte Museum is very developed museum. I would recommend to visit it to everyone who come to Sweden. It tells the story of Sami people and their home. The nature of the Samiland is amazing.



In November I moved to Stockholm in order to enjoy the beauty of the city . I liked the Stockholm especially old parts. People are very polite and kind. I was felling myself at home

during all period of the fellowship. I am sure that Sweden can be example for many countries as state with democratic values and equality.

I would like to express my gratitude to Disa Hastad for giving me an opportunity to explore Sweden and study such an important topic for me. I want to thank Lotta Olsson for her help. During my fellowship I met wonderful people who became my friends. My special thanks go to Kajsa Kuoljok, the ethnologist of Ajtte Museum and manager of Sami audiovisual collection project. Kajsa was very kind and hospitable. She was my supervisor. In addition, she guided me and created the plan of my fellowship. I'd like to thank Elisa Pirak Kuoljok, the head of Ajtte Museum for cooperation. I am expressing my gratitude to Katarina Spik Skum, Anna Westman Kuhmunen, Elina Kuhmunen for their friendship and for letting me be the part of their team. We are looking forward to see each other next year in Sami winter market in Jokkmokk.