

## Negotiating with the Public - Ethnographic Museums and Ethnopolitics

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### Abstract

Indigenous peoples, like the Sami of Fenno-Scandinavia, continue to be the object of museum display in ethnographic museums. Most of these exhibits focus predominantly on culture history via objects that reveal the quality and richness of indigenous cultures, with less emphasis on the political struggles that indigenous peoples are involved in. This paper is a reflection on the experiences in making a museum representation of a modern indigenous movement – the struggle of Sami in Norway for recognition and rights as an indigenous people. The project was meant not just to present a new way to represent indigenous peoples, but also to be designed as an argument in the ongoing ethnopolitical discourse on equity and difference in Sami-Norwegian relations.

**Key words:** indigenous, Sami, representation, museum, public



*Fig 1. The Sami Culture exhibition (1973) of Tromsø Museum: entrance view.  
Photo: June Åsheim, Tromsø Museum.*

### A project at Tromsø Museum – theme and analytical approach

In 2000, Tromsø Museum, Northern Norway, opened a new Sami exhibition called *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*, describing the cultural and political awakening among Sami after World War II up to the present. *Sápmi* is an old Sami term derived from the term 'Sámi' meaning the Sami people, a notion, which in its modern usage connotes the Sami world of land and waters, people and culture. Referring to the territorial, social and cultural community of the Sami in the northern parts of Fenno-Scandia, the concept *Sápmi* indicates a nation without national borders

and statehood. It has become a central concept in the development of the modern Sami ethnopolitical movement.

As initiators and curators for this project we will in this paper present a review of the project, discussing our underlying aims and perspectives and how these have been met in terms of the responses from the public.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the project was two-fold. Firstly, by making a presentation of a modern indigenous movement, we wanted to present an alternative to how most ethnographic museums have tended to represent the life of indigenous peoples, where cultural history and material objects tend to dominate displays and exhibitions. Secondly, we also wanted the project to provide a basis for an analytical discussion on how museums and the public communicate by monitoring the reactions of visitors.<sup>2</sup>



*Fig 2. The Sami Culture exhibition: one of three life-size dioramas illustrating scenes of traditional (non-mechanized) reindeer herding. Photo: Adnan Icgic, Tromsø Museum.*

The central challenge of the project was to create a convincing and meaningful expression of the unique character of how Sami – through their cultural and political mobilization during the latter part of the twentieth century – initiate and develop an ethnopolitical movement and emerge as a nation (Minde 2003). This cultural movement has been generated in a broad and many-sided discourse with a complex and aggregating character in time and space, which may be described as nation building. It has a local basis in families and local communities, in the pan-Sami field, and in nation states where Sami are citizens (Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway), as well as participating in a larger and open transnational indigenous discourse (Minde 1996).

The *Sápmi* project is an attempt to translate the analytical perspective developed by Clifford (1988) for 'writing ethnography' to that of using the museum as means to communicate with a broad and diverse public. Tromsø Museum – including those of us who participated in the project – is located in a multiplex and ethnopolitical discourse where there is no room for neutral positions. As actors in this discourse, we are situated in a field of discursive positioning through shifting matrixes of I/you and we/other relations (Clifford 1988: 44).

When designing the presentation of the so-called 'Sami movement', we wanted to organize the elements of the displays to enable visitors to read our presentation as if it were a narrative. This way of approach has its basis in a well-established theoretical distinction between (a) to present a narrative, and (b) to read a narrative – and the relation between these dimensions (Ricoeur 1979; Tompkins 1980; Bauman 1986). We therefore assumed that the audience would create individual narrative-like impressions on the basis of the way the sign



*Fig 3. The Sami Culture exhibition: scene from diorama showing traditional winter camp of herders. Photo: Svein Antonsen, Tromsø Museum.*

material was selected and presented. By means of interviews, written comments and other responses from visitors and from the wider environment of the museum, we also wanted to assess what the audience had picked up of the narrative. We then wanted to use these remarks and reactions as data to discuss the character of the 'dialogue', particularly how audiences communicate with the narrative and how the narrative is communicated to audience.

In planning the presentation, we did not intend to produce a historically representative account of the Sami movement. It was meant to be a 'comment' or 'argument' from the museum – an institution with a long history in the Sami-Norwegian discourse – on the wider discursive field; not just to be experienced in the presentation in the museum, but also as a comment that visitors could take with them back into their respective social worlds. We hoped that it could be possible to design the presentation, not as a representation of 'facts', but an impression that could activate the experiences and the imaginative skills of visitors. By inviting the audience to an organized multitude of expressions, contrasts and interconnections, we assumed this could enable visitors to organize and experience what we see as the emergence of Sami nationhood. Thus, the aim of the project was both a matter of conceptual design as well as a basis for doing research on how a museum exhibit communicate and negotiate with the public.

In other words, in the encounters with the audience, we hoped that the audience could envisage a new and unconventional theme as well as a new mode of presentation focusing on the present, persons, symbols, action and process. As the latter was not made explicit to audience, we hoped at least that visitors would experience something new, mirroring our intention for a shift of paradigm in museum presentations about culture. Our primary target was the common visitor to the museum – people from Tromsø and Northern Norway. This is a multi-cultural audience who can be seen to have certain knowledge about Sami-Norwegian relations as well as being more or less familiar with the Sami-Norwegian discourse – and consequently the very reason for why we wanted to communicate with them to explore the museum's role as a 'contact zone' (Clifford 1997).



*Fig 4. The Sami Culture exhibition: a display termed 'residence' illustrating traditional culture of 'Coast Sami', 'Inland Sami' and 'East-Skolt Sami'. Photo: June Åsheim, Tromsø Museum.*

### The narrators

The idea of the project was developed in discussions among the academic staff of the department of Sami Ethnography in the museum. Some of the staff have relatively long careers as university anthropologists; others have their main experience from anthropological museum work.<sup>3</sup> However, we share common experiences on the Sami-Norwegian discourse achieved through various forms of research, impact studies, committee reports, exhibitions and cultural inheritance projects in the field of Sami studies. We have all done fieldwork in Sami-Norwegian



*Fig 5. The Sápmi exhibition (2000) of Tromsø Museum: view from the 'introduction room' of the entrance to exhibit (map) and into the displays of the three rooms of the exhibition. Photo: Adnan Icgagic, Tromsø Museum.*

communities, lectured and produced films and published academic and popular writings. One of us came from a Sami reindeer herding family and with a long-standing participation in Sami ethnopolitical work. This has provided us with a common fund of experiences from the field of the Sami-Norwegian discourse, covering a long time span, all the way back to the first decades after WWII. Thus, the museum project became a form of editing of our various experiences from research and museum work in order to make a museum presentation, which aimed to describe as well as to address a public discourse on ethnicity and ethnopolitics in which we also see ourselves as participants.



*Fig 6. Sápmi: the 'Introduction Room'. Marianne Giæver from the Extension Service of the museum teaching a school class. Photo: Adnan Icgagic, Tromsø Museum.*

### **A political agenda**

An experience which the narrators have in common and which motivated the project, was the wide gap between notions which prevails among Norwegians concerning the life of Sami and their actual position in national and international affairs, as well the creative cultural and ethnopolitical development which has taken place in the Sami world since the middle of the previous century. Reindeer herding is still a central and forceful symbol in the life of Sami, despite the fact that this has involved, and still does, only a small minority among the Sami. The notion of Sami as reindeer herders is reproduced by significant actors in the Sami-Norwegian discourse, maintaining how Sami are seen globally. This is circulated in travel literature, the tourist industry, film and TV-productions, in newspapers as well as in museums, and is maintained by a host of popular anecdotes and myths.<sup>4</sup>

How Sami are seen by others depend also on other circumstances. As the majority of Sami today have occupations similar to others, as many live in cities and some have little or no command of Sami language, these 'deviances' are often ignored in common notions of what is 'Saminess'. Thus, they tend to be downgraded as 'Norwegianized' in contrast to the Sami reindeer herders who are seen as more 'authentic'. This suggests that we are dealing with a

folklore of ignorance of the Sami which provides a basis for ridicule, discrimination and for rejecting what can be interpreted as a form of Sami nationalism that is considered inauthentic and even dangerous. This phenomenon, which we in the project described as the 'public narrative of Sami', seems to reflect a common discursive frustration in how this epoch-making phase in Sami and Norwegian history can be understood and integrated into a public narrative or knowledge, and how it is communicated (Olsen 2000c). Thus, any comment and opinion on this subject is easily interpreted as a view either for, or against, Saminess – or considered as a matter of no consequence.

By describing Sami modernity in terms of how a popular ethnopolitical process writes itself into a context, from private and local socio-cultural life via processes at the nation state and global levels, we sought to make a presentation which could lead the audience away from an objectifying conception of Sami as 'The Other', replacing it with a perspective of Sami as active and creating subjects.



*Fig 7. Sápmi: vandalized Sami-Norwegian road sign of Kåfjord municipality by paint and shotgun, in passage from 'the introduction room' to 'room 1'(1945-60). Photo: Adnan Içagic, Tromsø Museum.*

### **The Sami-Norwegian discourse**

Discourse has been a central concept in the framing of the *Sápmi* project by providing an analytical tool for describing a wide range of presentations, statements and actions relating to the distinctive character of Sami and their position in public space as well as in private encounters. This is a multi-dimensional discourse comprising a countless number of Sami and other actors, persons and institutions on all discursive levels. An important aspect of this discourse is the many different debates, past and present, about Sami issues. Many deal with

minority-majority relations and often emerge on the basis of political decisions and the state of Norwegian law as, for instance, with regard to the status of the Sami language. A crucial matter is the still unsolved and highly controversial issue of Sami land and sea rights.

We see the concept discourse as not limited to the level of verbal statements only. Changes in life styles, consumption, use of language and dress between different generations, and what is made themes of and not in public life, can also have a discursive character. In other words, there is a wide variety of expressions pertaining to Sami and their relations to the outside world like education, language, work, culture innovations, policies etc., which may be seen as statements on minority-majority relations. Likewise, statements and debates in and on government reports in Sami and Norwegian media, in Sami literature, research, art and cultural events like festivals can reveal significant features of the same discourse and manifest itself at different levels – from reflections which take place in the individual person to arenas which appear in more manifest ways, for example in interpersonal relations and in public life.

In the *Sápmi* project, this discourse and its unfolding character was seen to constitute the context for making a presentation of the situation of Sami in relation to the larger world. Elements in the presentation were selected in terms of expressing aspects of power in the relations of Sami, non-Sami and the State, and in the role of the Sami movement in making Sami pioneers on the level of international indigenous politics.

During the previous century, the position of Sami developed from a state where only some few and relatively taciturn voices attempted to express their collective interests into an escalating self-understanding in the post-war period making them an increasingly important cultural and political actor in public life in Norway. Since the 1960s, when the Sami-Norwegian discourse started to grow in scale and intensity, a series of debates emerged with regard to the position of Sami in Norwegian society and their status as one of the world's indigenous peoples. Already in 1974, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway had established a Sami research institute in Guovdageaidnu staffed by Sami researchers. On the basis of UN conventions on civil and political rights and by ratifying the ILO Convention 169 on the rights of indigenous peoples in 1990, the Norwegian state gave recognition of Sami in Norway as a segment of the Sami people and as an indigenous people.

During the same period, innovative and partly revolutionary changes took place in the relations between Sami and national authorities and for the development of Sami civil society: Sami language was recognized and given an equal status with Norwegian language, and education in Sami language and culture was introduced from primary to university levels. Radio and TV-broadcasting was developed and the State started funding a modern Sami health care as well as establishing a Sami teacher college. Particularly significant was the passing of the Norwegian Parliament in 1988 of the Sami Act, providing the basis for establishing the Sami Parliament in Norway in 1989, which like the other institutions is mainly staffed by Sami personnel. At the same time, voluntary institutions representing various fields of activities and professions for teachers, artists, authors, sport etc. popped up. On the international scene, the UN established the Permanent Forum for the handling of indigenous issues, with the Sami Ole Henrik Magga as its first chairperson. These events have contributed to strengthening the cooperation between Sami in the four relevant countries through the workings of the Sami Council.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it has provided a basis for a growing number of new and informed Sami voices in the field of the Sami discourse.

### **The ethnographic museum – an actor in the Sami-Norwegian discourse**

The museums of cultural history established during the nineteenth century in Scandinavia constituted a significant aspect of national knowledge building. This was particularly the case in Norway, which at the time was struggling for national independence.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of museums played an important role in this by giving substance and legitimacy to the development of a Norwegian national identity.

A description of the Sami-Norwegian discourse has to include Tromsø Museum as a cultural agent being of the same order as other agents creating and mediating information on the situation of the Sami. For centuries, Sami have been a target for all kinds of external interests, like academic research and state administration and their attempts to 'civilize' and assimilate the Sami, as well as a target for those who were seeking exotic wilderness in the



*Fig 8. Sápmi: room 1 – 1945-60. Overview of two of the four displays, illustrating the process of Sami involvement in the modern welfare state and the process of Norwegianization among Sami in the period 1945-60. Photo: June Åsheim, Tromsø Museum.*



*Fig 9. Sápmi: 'room 2' – 1960-80. The display 'Sami Politics' illustrating the emergence of Sami political associations, major themes and contrastive opinions in Sami politics, the first Sami flag (1973), and Emac with interactive video interviews. Photo: Adnan Icajic, Tromsø Museum.*

North. Tromsø Museum was established in 1872 to demonstrate that Northern Norway was also part of the national community. From early on, Sami artefacts were important in the collections and displays of the museum. At the time, this field of study was termed 'lappology' in Scandinavia with roots in European philology, ethnology, geography and ethnography. It came to dominate academic knowledge of Sami in the Nordic countries, documenting and giving descriptive and classificatory presentations of Sami culture. It was influenced by theories of diffusion and formed a basis of information for people who sought for knowledge about Sami in books and museums.

Museums have remained major mediators of this tradition up to the present and have contributed to the maintenance of a portrayal of Sami as an object in the Sami-Norwegian discourse. Also at Tromsø Museum, Sami were represented in terms of traditional forms of life styles and old material objects long after Sami individuals and interest associations had emerged as actors in a growing ethnopolitical discourse in the decades after WWII.

In 1973, a new Sami exhibition – *The Sami Culture* – opened at Tromsø Museum, an ambitious project for the purpose of presenting 'factual knowledge of Sami culture and society'. In contrast to the first exhibits a hundred years earlier presenting 'Lapp items' mainly of reindeer pastoralists, the new exhibition, inspired from displays of contemporary ethnographic museums in USA and Europe, described the range of Sami cultural traditions (in terms of technology, forms of subsistence, housing, handicraft etc.) as well as the depth of Sami cultural history back to prehistory by means of material objects, extensive texts and dioramas of scenes from traditional reindeer pastoralism.

At the time, *The Sami Culture* and the publication of the accompanying book with the same name, was a significant effort to present the public with the first extensive ethnographic overview of Sami cultural history and a view of Sami as a separate people with a common history and culture in Fenno-Scandinavia.<sup>7</sup> The exhibit, which is still standing, has for decades served as means for Sami to learn about and take pride in their cultural history. But it has also been a favourite subject for travel guides to show international tourists *Sami culture*, not least due to the prime role given to traditional reindeer herding in dioramas and displays. But whereas the exhibition may be seen to advocate the basic message of Sami as a native minority people of Fenno-Scandinavia, there were virtually no references in the displays to the ethnopolitical discourse that were taking place outside, as well as inside, the museum at the time.<sup>8</sup>

While some visitors would see the exhibition as an interesting presentation of Sami culture history, and for many Sami as a source of pride and cultural knowledge, for others it would confirm their conventional knowledge of Sami as a people living with reindeers and Sami culture as being a matter of cultural traditions and the past. While being a common attitude in museums at the time – that cultural and political issues should be separated and that museum should refrain from 'difficult' topics – the ethnographic exhibition was becoming an increasing dilemma for the museum and its staff. There was nothing in the exhibit that referred to the ongoing ethnopolitical debates outside the museum and, for most visitors, the exhibition seemed only to maintain their preconceived notions of Sami culture. Issues that were becoming increasingly significant in the Sami-Norwegian discourse, like the effects of colonization and policies of assimilation on Sami culture, language and identity and infringements into Sami lands by nation states, were not addressed at all in the displays.

However, in the discussions for a new Sami exhibit – the *Sápmi* project – instead of arguing for the replacement of the old ethnographic exhibition, the museum agreed to something that is rather unique in the exhibit policy of museums, namely to keep the old exhibition and to provide space and money for the new project. The reasons were twofold, it would give the museum displays of both Sami 'culture history' and 'modernity' and it would also provide a unique way of informing visitors as well as students of how museums can provide different interpretations as well as different modes of communication with the public. Thus, the two presentations were not only seen to be different, but also complementary, with a potential for making audience more aware and critical of the role of museums as mediators and creators of knowledge. This became an additional goal and motivation for the *Sápmi* project.

A long established task of the Sami ethnographic department at the Museum has been to provide general education about Sami culture, and the ethnographic exhibition was an important means for making Sami culture visible to the public. As such, the museum has for

generations constituted an authoritative academic voice in the Sami-Norwegian discourse. To focus on material culture and history as such is an important cultural task – particularly in minority and indigenous contexts – but it has also become a convention, which has restricted ethnographic museums from developing displays presenting the emergence of indigenous movements, nationhood, and modernity. As has been analysed by Olsen (2000a), many Sami museums also maintain this convention, presenting Sami culture as a matter of the past and with no references to the complex multi-ethnic context of today. In other words, this dilemma seems not to depend on the ethnic background of the curators, but probably reflects a paradigmatic way of interpreting ‘culture’ and curating exhibitions. Within the international field of museology, this is a well-known debate with strong footprints on the development of current exhibition work (Ames 1986; Haas 1996; Fitzhugh 1997; Stanley 2007).

### Designing a narrative



*Fig 10. Sápmi: ‘room 2’ ← guide with German tourists. In background, display illustrating the flowering of cultural expressions (theater, handicraft, music, literature etc) of this period. Photo: Mari Kalstad, Tromsø Museum.*

In terms of what they do and what they do not, museums in general have a long and a fairly common history as actors in the Sami-Norwegian discourse. Thus, we saw an important challenge in designing a presentation that could present a renewal in terms of theme as well as design, while holding on to what has long been the goal of the museum – to make Sami culture and society visible.

In the process of designing the display, the narrative approach has been a helpful concept for the selection and interweaving of sign material – photos, texts, objects, books, sound, films and video-material (Clough 1992; Maines 1993; Plummer 1995). The purpose for this was to select and organize significant formative events in modern Sami history in order to give audience an impression of two major tendencies which over time become merged: The development of (1) a collective Sami identity as the central part in (2) the reshaping of the relation of the Sami to the outside world. Applying narratives is not just a

form of communication, but also a strong form of associative experiencing (Bauman 1986). It is a form of mediation primarily associated with written and oral presentations and where what is said and written about is presented as if it was reality (Maines and Umer 1993). The incentives for imagining a reality, embedded in the genus of the narrative and which may activate the imaginative potentials of visitors, represented for us an enticing challenge to translate this form of mediation into a museum language.

We wanted to design a presentation of a modern indigenous movement to give visitors room for associations based on their previous experiences and the associations our presentation could give them. From this we hoped that they would be able to make their own understanding of the process of 'becoming a nation'. In other words, what we wanted was not an authoritative presentation of 'facts', but to design an audio-visual presentation sufficiently open so that visitors could be able to make their 'own' accounts on the basis of 'our' story. In this way we could open up the audience's own impressions, interpretations, and associations, both conscious and unconscious. But by designing the presentation primarily for a North-Norwegian audience with a minimum of descriptive texts, we also could make it more difficult for visitors with little or no previous knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Our goal was an approach to communicate with the audience, replacing the traditional monological role of museums mediating knowledge to the public with a form of presentation that would be visual and metaphorical, thus appealing to the audience's own conscious and, not least, unconscious impressions and reactions. Such a perspective on communicating with audiences is in line with recent perspectives in philosophy on human reason and thought: 'Reason is not completely conscious, but mostly unconscious. Reason is not purely literal, but largely metaphorical and imaginative. Reason is not dispassionate, but emotionally engaged' (Lakoff and Johnson 1994: 4).<sup>10</sup> We, therefore, chose a way of presentation that could steer the thoughts and associations of visitors away from seeing Sami as exotic and different – as a case of anthropological 'othering' – to a view of Sami as a people seeking selfhood and equity in transnational and global space. If people were to learn something new about Sami modernity, we wanted our narrative to enable people themselves to make their own reflections and conclusions concerning these aspects. As has been exemplified by Clifford (1991), this ambition is a common challenge for many ethnographic museums and has been realized in quite different ways (Greenberg *et al* 1996; Henderson and Kaeppler 1997; Simpson 2006).

Naturally, visitors have a wide range of notions and experiences with regard to the main theme of the presentation. Some have personal and deep experiences from participation in the Sami-Norwegian discourse, ranging from active support for Sami affairs to indifference and even hostility. For some, Sami issues may be of little or no significance, others would subscribe to conventional stereotypes of Sami and Sami-related issues. Most, however, would share common expectations of 'museum' and 'exhibition' as a site for displays of objects, and of ethnographic museums as a place to see displays of things of 'primitive' and 'exotic' peoples, different from 'modern peoples'. By presenting a new and unexpected theme to museum visitors, we intended to create curiosity and hopefully interest for something we knew most people had not only little knowledge of, but also highly different views and opinions about.

The purpose of our multimedia presentation was to give a convincing and engaging representation of the cultural and political development in Sápmi since WWII to the present, an era characterized by the Sami movement and what it has entailed in terms of political visions, debates on identity and indigenoussness, cultural and political innovations and the making of institutions as well as the incorporation of Sami in the modern welfare state. This is a development whereby Sami, like many other indigenous peoples and populations in marginal regions, became involved in a global production and circulation of knowledge, conventions of symbols, patterns of consumption and life styles. It is an involvement where Sami also became active agents in the circulation, particularly by means of their politics of self-representation as an indigenous people, their organizational innovations and manifold forms of cultural innovations (Eidheim 1971; 1997; Gaski 1997; Stordahl 2008).

This global process of incorporation of marginal regions, including indigenous peoples, and referred to as 'globalization', 'cosmopolitization' and inclusion into the 'global ecumene' (Hannerz 1990; Appadurai 1991) implies increasing opportunities for local enterprises, life horizons and orientations towards an outside world which is both open and attractive, as well

as accessible. Appadurai uses the concept of 'de-territorialization' for this process, describing it as 'a force'. However, indigenous peoples like the Sami are also active agents positioning themselves in global space by finding and collectivizing expressions for their selfhood. These expressions open up for responses, which can confirm both ethnic uniqueness and a sense of nationhood comparable to other national identities. In the presentation of the museum, we aimed to show that the growing Sami concern for renewing their language and its usage as well as the interest in their history and folklore, are expressions of cultural creativity and a territorial and ethnopolitical based form of selfhood. These trends are subsumed into and shape the cosmopolitical developments that point towards the twenty-first century in what Featherstone (1990: 10-11) describes as the emergence of 'the sense that the world is a single place which entails the proliferation of new cultural forms for encounters'.

### The exhibition

In *Sápmi*, the displays are organized in four interconnected rooms of approximately 200 square metres altogether. In the first, visitors encounter a display of 11 large portraits of individual Sami representing the broad range of socio-cultural roles and professions that Sami today occupy.<sup>11</sup> By this, we mean that the presentation is about Sami persons with a variety of occupations, life careers, opinions and conflicts, which gives shape to the dynamic relationship of Sami to the larger world during the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>



*Fig 11. Sápmi: 'room 2' – display 'Return from oblivion' of the movement for researching and taking into use old (and lost) dress traditions, and the issue of Sami place names (including a local protest against their use on road signs). Photo: Adnan Icajic, Tromsø Museum.*

The introduction was designed to provide visitors with a contrasting view to their often preconceived notions of Sami, and to serve as a contrast to the other ethnographic Sami exhibition of 1973 on the same floor. This exhibition can now be seen in a new context; as an expression of the Sami past comparable to a new phase in the life of Sami – to the emergence of Sápmi as a concept describing the territorial, historical, social and cultural community of Sami. Thus, we hoped to give the older exhibition a new and additional meaning, enhancing its value as a portrayal of Sami cultural history. In this way, the opening of *Sápmi* could provide surprises enticing visitors to speculation of contexts and expectations (Gumpertz and Cook-Gumpertz 1983), which they may carry with them into the remaining parts of the presentation.

The following rooms were organized to give a convincing representation of a time axis and a dynamic, which can give the audience associations to a narrative. The two consecutive rooms – covering the period of 1945–60 and 1960–80 – highlight crucial events and tendencies of each phase, expressing the creation and realization of political visions, as well as the entailed conflicts and establishment of institutions shaping the particular character of the cultural and ethnopolitical development. Central issues in these displays are the evolvement of Sami language and territorial rights. The third and last room covers the phase from 1980 to the present, and seeks to draw the attention of the visitor to the growing manifold of cultural and political forms of expression, generated by this cumulative process and pointing towards the future.

On the individual level, growing up and living with multiple identities, has given rise to a multitude of different experiences and opinions. This is displayed in terms of a series of interactive video interviews, representing major issues for each phase and downloadable on computers in each room. Here visitors can encounter different Sami voices, expressing major features in how individuals relate to and conceptualize the overall development, which is the theme of the narrative we present. By this, we intended to express that we are dealing with a process where the local and the transnational are interweaved into social and cultural activities and forms of expressions, as well as in the experiences of selfhood and life careers.

In contrast to the ethnographic exhibition – where each display of objects is accompanied with long explanatory texts – *Sápmi* was designed not to tell visitors what they were to see and learn. Alternative to communicating with an authoritative voice, written information (in Sami, English and Norwegian) was kept to a minimum in the form of short background texts for each display. The only instructive text appears in the introductory room under a vandalized bilingual Sami-Norwegian road sign, explaining the purpose of the presentation: 'This is an exhibition about Norwegian Sami efforts to strengthen Sami national identity and solidarity since World War II'. Of some 60 displayed objects, only two were provided with short written texts. None of the approximately 85 photos and illustrations was provided with informative or explanatory texts; their meanings were implied by their position within the context of individual displays and that of the whole presentation.

Thus, the presentation was designed as a multi-media narrative to let the audience experience a process – with a beginning and a course of development with an accelerating and cumulative character – but without any conclusions, neither in terms of history, nor in terms of narrative. This aspect is left to the individual visitor to reflect upon.

### Comments and responses

The traditional form of museum communication – the exhibition – is by and large a monologue. When the work on an exhibition has been done and it is opened for the public, the project is seen as completed. In recent years, the public role of museums as actor and forum for discourse has received increasing importance both in terms of museum practices as well as in museological literature (Karp *et al* 2006; Kratz and Rassool 2006; Svanberg 2010; Thelin 2010). What visitors may get out of the presentation is sometimes studied, mainly through questionnaires, but the results are seldom fed back into a professional discourse on the very process of the communication between museum and audience (McCarthy 2007: 183). When we launched the *Sápmi* project we wanted to use it also as means for gaining insight into how museum presentations can be seen as a dialogue – or negotiation – with audience and how we as mediators can make use of this (Drotner 1996; Roberts 1997).

Thus, in addition to hoping to have an impact on the Sami-Norwegian discourse, we also wanted to study the more implicit communicative aspects of the project. One aspect, which would be a matter of professional anthropology, concerned the application of an overall theoretical perspective of communication on museum-audience relations. The other concerned the designing of a museum presentation – how the idea of a narrative can be solved in terms of selection and organization of sign material in a museum room.

Exhibitions in museums are usually given introductory presentations in mass media, but (at least in Norway) exhibitions are rarely made the object of critical reviews along the same lines as films, concerts or theatre performances. However, *Sápmi* received several written comments during the first year after the opening in 2000 in newspapers and journals. Five of these were written as reviews by intellectuals and academics with Sami and Norwegian background and published in popular and academic journals. All give positive comments, like ‘...a challenging and a tightly edited exhibition, which deserves to be seen and discussed by many’, a ‘daring’ project which must ‘absolutely be applauded’ and a ‘colourful arrangement for debate’, but there were critical comments as well.



*Fig 12. Sápmi: 'room 3' – 1980-2000: display of the 'Alta conflict', illustrating the protest movement against the hydroelectric development of the Alta-Katutokeino River, involving flooding the community of Masi and reindeer pastures. The Sami protests (including hunger strikes) became a sea change for Norwegian Sami policies, leading to new laws, constitutional amendment establishment of the Sami Parliament (1989), and recognition of Sami as an indigenous people. Photo: June Åsheim, Tromsø Museum.*

A university lecturer in Sami history at the University of Tromsø presented the strongest criticism towards *Sápmi*, seeing it as an example of how 'scientists make themselves spokesmen for Sami nationalism' in a paper presented at a seminar for historians in Northern Norway (Berg 2002: 108). He also criticized the project's use of the term 'Sami nation'; if it meant to include all Sami in all Sami regions, it had no historical basis.<sup>13</sup> Instead, one should talk about local and regional Sami communities and identities. That a presentation of Sami nation building should be accused of advocating 'Sami nationalism' can be seen as a misunderstanding and a wrong interpretation. What was attempted was the communication of the decennium-long emergence

of concepts and organization among Sami, and which still is inclusive and innovative, locally, regionally and internationally. However, as such it is not an unexpected reaction on what has been, and still is, a controversial theme. In fact, the very use of 'nation' in the title of the project was chosen for this very reason to highlight that the presentation was not just an 'exhibition', but also an 'argument' in an ongoing discourse. The critique for using the museum to advocate 'Sami nationalism' illustrates how the museum became involved in a political debate. Berg, who in 2001 was head of the Sami-political advisory board of the Norwegian Labour Party, had voiced criticism against the President of the Sami Parliament and the Sami association he represented for the use of what he termed 'nationalistic' rhetoric.<sup>14</sup> Thus, by its representation of modern Sami history, the museum was interpreted not just as participating in a general Sami-Norwegian discourse, but also as advocating the ideology and interests of just one Sami association – the one that had been spearheading the Sami movement and which for many years had been in majority position in the Parliament. It also provides a clear illustration of how audiences make their own interpretations or 'accounts' on the basis of highly different assumptions and positions and how the *Sápmi* project was being made part of a contemporary Sami political debate.

A Sami author and journalist described *Sápmi* as a 'problematic exhibition', referring to many events and persons like Sami politicians and artists, who were not referred to (Gustavsen 2000). A professor in archaeology at the University of Tromsø, ask for a more varied description of the political development, and characterizes the presentation as being a 'bit too much of a success story' and for appearing as the 'tale of the victors' (Olsen 2000b). A professor in ethnology states that despite the intention of the project to give a 'narrative', the voice of the narrators is not clearly visible (Mathisen 2001; 2004). Also Berg brings up this even more forcefully, stating that despite how the project has been launched, it does not appear as an argument in a debate, but as the 'authoritative presentation' of this process. *Sápmi* thus becomes an argument in a controversial debate, without making this explicit (Berg 2002). This critique is important, showing that we as narrators have not managed to express sufficiently clear our main objective that the presentations should be read as an argument in the ongoing Sami-Norwegian discourse.

However, this perspective and its implications for understanding the implied message about the politics of museum representations, seems to pose problems for visitors. The most common negative comment from visitors refers to the need for additional historical and regional descriptions, like information about reindeer herding, the conditions of minority groups, like the Southern Sami, Sami in Russia and the other Nordic States, as well as references to significant artists and politicians. Some reviewers have also questioned the narrowing of the theme 'becoming a nation' to focus on developments in Norway. In a study of presentations of Sami in North-Norwegian museums, *Sápmi* is found to be 'de facto ganz ethnozentrisch norwegisch' and criticized for not describing the Lule and Southern Sami groups (Keil 2003).

However, the intention of the project was, as stated earlier, not to give a complete description of Sami history or an overview of Sami regions. The main purpose was to describe what we had come to see as the main dimensions on the development of the modern Sami movement in Norway, as expressed in terms of introductory texts as well as in the catalogue. The apparent problem in getting this understood by many visitors may be understood in two ways. Firstly, there is a tendency in all museum presentations about Sami, to tell 'everything about the Sami', and that visitors seem to expect that kind of presentation. Secondly, these comments seem to express a common view on the expected role of museums and exhibitions; that they should provide authoritative and historically correct presentations of facts, as well as giving regional and substantial overviews.<sup>15</sup> The fact that we did not make our role as narrators more explicit, may have contributed to this critique and misunderstanding of our aims.

It was our objective that the audience should encounter a new and unconventional theme as well as a new mode of presentation, and that this should suggest a shift of paradigm in terms of understanding of, and communication about, culture – implying a shift from a substantially oriented approach on material and traditional form of culture to one of the present, persons, symbols, action and process. However, even in terms of the comments of 'expert' reviewers, it seems that we may have overrated the opportunities we have given the audience to 'read' our presentation as a narrative, and to understand the significance of having two so

different and contrastive presentations of Sami culture on the same floor of the museum. One of the reviewers pointed to this by stating that the 'old and the 'new' Sami exhibitions did not appear as different and contrastive views on culture, but merely as representations of two stages in Sami history. The old ethnographic exhibition would be read as portraying the past as something static, based in forms of livelihoods, material and introverted, in contrast to *Sápmi*, representing modernity as dynamic, political, cognitive and expressive (Olsen 2000b: 23). There has been a virtual flora of student papers and guided lectures on museum representations of Sami culture, comparing the two presentations.

It is noteworthy that even commentators who know the 'story' ask for a more 'complete' historical and regional description. Apparently, academics also seem to have specific views on what exhibitions are and ought to be. This is why in our communication about the project we have tried to avoid the concept of 'exhibition'. This has been a constant problem as the presentation is but one of several 'exhibitions' within the museum. The problem is compounded by the fact that the concept is used in the introduction text to *Sápmi* and that there are no text informing that *Sápmi* is not an 'exhibition' in the common sense of the term.

It is, therefore, interesting that some visitors do appear to take notice of the difference between the two Sami representations in the museum as expressed by comments in the visitor books. Many foreign visitors also note the difference between *Sápmi* and other museums' emphasis on essentialist descriptions of indigenous peoples and cultures. This seems to be confirmed by comments by visitors to guided tours and lectures in *Sápmi* by the staff of the museum's Extension Service as well as tourist guides themselves, that *Sápmi* is not only a 'new' theme, but also a new type of 'exhibition'.



*Fig 13. Sápmi: 'room 3' – 'A Nation Emerging'. End wall with photos illustrating the many-sided voices and roles Sami have gained in public space in this period. In middle, a pillar with photo from the Sami flag being used in the National Day celebration in Oslo and the constitutional amendment (1988) giving legal recognition of Sami in Norway as a separate people, and visitor writing comments. Photo: June Åsheim, Tromsø Museum.*

### *Sápmi* as an educational tool

What most people know about the Sami movement comes from information in mass media of separate events, and not as part of a larger historical development in Sami-Norwegian relations. With the introduction of new national plans for education in 1987, Sami issues were for the first time included in a host of different subjects from primary schools and up. This, and the general lack of teaching material in this field, has meant that the two Sami exhibitions at Tromsø Museum are now used as an educational resource for teaching Sami subjects from primary schools up to college. Whereas teachers at the primary level favour the older ethnographic exhibition, *Sápmi* is seen as more demanding, and thus used for pupils from the age of 14 years and more. After the opening of *Sápmi*, both exhibitions have become part of courses in the Teacher's College as well in various courses in the faculties of Social Science and Humanities at Tromsø University, both in terms of representation of Sami history, but also as a case of representation of Sami and indigenous cultures.

One of the most significant experiences since the opening of *Sápmi* is that audiences, whether they are tourists, pupils, college or university students, get the most out of our narrative by a guide, which can explain and comment on the various aspects of the presentation. This comes out clearly in the experience of teachers and that of the employee in the museum's school service.<sup>16</sup> To teach pupils about Sami culture history and modernity is a difficult task as most have little or no previous knowledge, even if coming from mixed Sami-Norwegian communities in the region; moreover, virtually nothing that *Sápmi* covers is mentioned in their schoolbooks (Lile 2011). In the museum, college students are given introductory lectures in Sami history before being given guided tours in *Sápmi*. According to one teacher, teachers use the various displays in *Sápmi* to focus on separate themes, as a basis for students to make their own interpretations of 'Saminess' and to see elements in displays in a larger context. The major experience of the museum's education officer is that *Sápmi* demands more from pupils and students than what is displayed; the challenge is to 'go behind' the various items and themes to open up for associations.

Thus, teaching Sami subjects to pupils in primary and secondary schools still constitutes a challenge to many Norwegian teachers. While some pupils and students may find it uninteresting, others may find it difficult and even painful to handle in terms of their own background. However, the experience of guides and teachers is that guiding and lecturing in *Sápmi* easily lead to questions, comments and discussion with pupils and students. In this way, *Sápmi* has achieved a function unlike most museum exhibitions. Teachers are now using *Sápmi* not only for guided tours, but also as a space and classroom, providing a setting for lecturing about and discussing current Sami issues, apparently more difficult to do in a regular classroom. Consequently, together with the older ethnographic exhibition, *Sápmi* has become more than an 'argument', but also a 'site' for teaching and debating issues that would have been far more difficult to do in a regular classroom.

Visitor responses have echoed the experience of teachers and guide work. An important expression of this is the comments to the 'Visitor Book' – a permanent part of *Sápmi* since 2001 – to the question: 'What did you get out of this presentation?' Besides reflecting the varied backgrounds of visitors to the museum, most reactions were in various ways positive. Particularly foreign visitors, several of whom stated their minority background from countries like Zambia, Wales, North Africa, and Spain, emphasized not just how the situation of Sami compared to indigenous people's struggles elsewhere, but also came with strong declarations of support – and congratulations – to what Sami had achieved.<sup>17</sup> Many also point to their Sami background, coming from the various parts of *Sápmi*, one of them stating: 'I think the exhibition is very good. Good for me which has part-Sami background, to feel belonging, see and experience the defiance of those who want THEIRS.'

An interesting visitor response to the *Sami Culture* and *Sápmi* is reported in a study of several of the Sami exhibitions in Norway (Kjellberg 2006). Here, visitors were questioned if they had learned something new by seeing the two exhibitions. Of those that had seen the *Sami Culture*, 86 per cent answered positively. For visitors to *Sápmi* – which one would assume would be seen as a 'new' theme – 67 per cent stated they had learned something new. This rather unexpected difference may be seen as reflecting that the same question may have different

connotations with regard to the two exhibitions. The displays in the *Sami Culture* contain a wide range of objects most people have little previous knowledge of or have never seen before. *Sápmi*, on the other hand, may appear more familiar as the displays refer to themes and events which have appeared in media for several decades – like the issues of land and sea rights and which most visitors, at least those from Northern Norway – will have opinions on whatever they may actually know about the issues.

As *Sápmi* was intended as an argument in the Sami-Norwegian discourse, we expected that not all would agree to the presentation, that some even might find it provocative, and – hopefully – lead to a public debate. The reference to Sami nationhood in the title of the project was meant to serve this very purpose, and as we have seen above, some found this concept problematic and arguable. In Norwegian parlance the word ‘nationhood’ connotes with ‘state’, which has never been on the political agenda of the Sami. Our presentation was designed to portray the Sami as a people and a nation without statehood and with members of different nation states.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that a museum in Northern Norway has made a presentation of an indigenous movement as an internal project, without any kind of outside and formalized Sami representation, may appear strange or politically problematic in terms of the indigenous contexts of other countries. However, when the project got its first and substantial funding from the Norwegian Research Council (1997), the Sami Parliament of Norway had already received a copy of the project description and sent the museum a letter of approval to include with the application for funding. As outlined in the proposal, the project was to be carried out solely by the museum. There was no question at that point, nor later, for an external steering committee, or consultative group of Sami representatives. Except for recruiting a professional museum designer, assistance



Fig 14. *Sápmi* web site, in Sami, English and Norwegian versions, including a virtual version of the exhibition, a list of illustrated texts and interactive video interviews with subtitles (English, Sami and Norwegian).

for IT-production and involving a professional Sami photographer for the portrait gallery, the whole project was planned and carried out made by members of the museum.<sup>19</sup> Such a situation may be seen to reflect quite different power relations in Sami-Norwegian affairs in Northern Norway from countries like Australia, Canada or USA, where indigenous representation in museums seems to be much more controversial.<sup>20</sup> Through the last decades, quite a few Sami have acquired university education and are working in the north – together with Norwegian colleagues – within museums, university and the Sami Parliament. The very existence of common academic references and a certain amount of mutual trust seems to create a situation, which weakens the quest for formal ethnopolitical control. In our case for instance, one of the five members of the project group was a Sami.

Another circumstance was that this was the first time ever that the Sami movement was narrated in a museum presentation. As expressed in some of the reviews, this was seen as a positive addition to how museums were presenting Sami culture. For some *Sápmi* was not at all 'controversial', one of the reviewers described it as the very opposite – as a 'safe exhibition' (Gustavsen 2000). By providing audiences with the opportunity to associate (Ragazzi 2008) in contrast to an authoritative description of 'facts', visitors have been given the means to draw their own conclusions on a narrative of the most sensitive and controversial matter in Sami-Norwegian relations. This may be another reason why the presentation has generated very few negative comments from Sami academics and politicians compared to the many positive comments from Sami in the visitor books.

On the other hand, many of the comments in the visitor's books suggest that the presentation in the museum continues to engage a wide variety of visitors – from persons with Sami background to tourists from Latin America or Asia – both in terms of cognitive understanding, as well as emotional engagement, interest and identity construction (Insulander & Selander 2010).

## Conclusion

Despite being criticized for taking sides, or presenting some as 'victors', some as 'villains', as well as questioning the very concept of a Sami movement and who it may involve (Olsen 2000b), other visitors experience the displays as presentation of variation and differences of opinion in Sami cultural and political life. Some foreign visitors with experience of indigenous issues at home have taken special notice of how displays portray major differences of opinion in the internal Sami political debate, a matter seldom or never presented in museum presentation of indigenous peoples. We are thus tempted to conclude that the reason *Sápmi* has not generated more critique and debate may reflect the very design of the presentation; in terms of its degree of 'openness' by not presenting any rhetorical conclusions, and by not explicitly telling audiences what they should see and understand. That we have been allowed to make this representation of the emergence and growth of Sami selfhood and nationhood may also reflect a more general feature in Sami-Norwegian relations. Sami have, through the very process we have tried to describe, achieved a multiplicity of voices in public life, both nationally and at the international level. This may be one reason why our representation may not have been seen as a case of 'othering' – as an 'outsider' and 'expert' view of Sami visions, opinions and struggles.

The fact that Sami have, through their struggles obtained a public voice, in science, culture and politics, also opens up for others, like us, the opportunity to present descriptions and representations, being not just 'advocates', but more significantly 'colleagues' in the overall Sami-Norwegian discourse. Such a situation reflects a rather different ethnopolitical context for museum work in Norway as compared to, for instance, the US. As for the latter, exhibition projects relating to indigenous topics, can hardly be realized without participation or a formal endorsement from indigenous representatives or organizations (Smith 2005).

The *Sápmi* project was, at the time and as far we could ascertain, the very first attempt by a museum to represent the rise and development of a modern indigenous movement. By presenting a theme that was, and still is, both little known and controversial, we also wanted to use the project as an opportunity to apply a theoretical frame to how museums and audience interact. After the opening of *Sápmi*, we started transforming the project into an educational web

site, which was finished in Sami and Norwegian versions in 2007, and an extended English version in 2008.<sup>21</sup> The web site soon became a rather important reference for schools and media whenever there was a need for information regarding Sami ethnopolitics in Norway. In trying to monitor the use of these references – which was not easy at all – it became clear that *Sápmi* in its virtual version was used in a lexical sense. It was regarded as a source of established knowledge rather than an open input in an ongoing debate. It had become a source of authorization when teachers or journalists needed references.

However, an important lesson is that conventional notions of museums and exhibitions appear to represent a far stronger guidance and condition for experience and learning than we had foreseen. Our attempt to make a presentation as an appeal to audiences, as a challenge to create their own imagination of something immaterial – to get a grasp of a vision of selfhood and equity as a driving force behind a process – may thus appear a bit farfetched and optimistic. It is, perhaps, in this attempt to make a contrasting exposition that our expectations and intentions have not been fully met.

This acknowledgement also points to our possibly premature ambition to monitor the response from the audience. We wanted to identify whether the exhibition had any repercussions on the Sami-Norwegian discourse or the transnational indigenous discourse in general. The lesson learned – based upon written responses and oral feedback – was in accordance with the observations stated above, namely that museum exhibitions are likely to be perceived as authoritative presentations. The ambition of creating an exhibition in the form of a narrative that could establish a dialogue with the audience was overshadowed by the institutional conventions embedded in the museum practice as such. In fact, this problem became expressed at the very start of the project when the designer, having read the project manuscript, exclaimed: 'this cannot be made into an exhibition! You must make a book instead!' Eventually, the same designer became crucial for transforming our long written descriptions of what we wanted to present into visual designs, demonstrating the gap between our narrative ambitions and the challenges (as well as our short-comings) in making 'process' and 'story' into an 'exhibition'.

Despite these and other problems, *Sápmi* has been a project that has served a purpose. It has – despite the limitation in having to present a complex process of development within the space of 200 square meters – presented a new theme to the public as well as an alternative way to what has been current in museum representations of Sami and indigenous culture and society. The narrative was not meant to be final and a 'correct' version. The story *Sápmi* tells can be told in many different ways, and like any story and museum exhibition, it also contains a story of why it was made and the context it was made in. This is not made explicit in the *Sápmi* presentation, but the fact the Tromsø Museum has two Sami exhibits, made for different purposes and in different times and contexts, which can communicate what most museums do not tend to emphasize, that exhibitions are not just 'facts', but representations by narrators with their respective views on what was most significant, and what was to be ignored.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Rossella Ragazzi for many and important comments on the draft version of this paper.
- <sup>2</sup> The project also produced a separate catalogue (Bjørklund 2000) in English, German, Japanese, Sami and Norwegian versions and a collection of papers in the museum's journal (*Ottar* 2000). In 2007, the Museum opened a website with a virtual version of the *Sápmi* displays, video interviews etc as well as supplementary and illustrated texts in Sami, English and Norwegian (<http://sapmi.uit.no>).
- <sup>3</sup> In 1996, when discussions for a new Sami exhibition project was started at the department of Sami Ethnography at Tromsø Museum, the staff consisted of a staff of four curators (Ivar Bjørklund, Terje Brantenberg, Johan Albert Kalstad and Dikka Storm), in addition to senior anthropologist Harald Eidheim, recruited as a visiting professor the same year for a three-

- year period, and who launched the idea for a new exhibition, which was to become *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*. The staff became the core project group of the starting up of the project, developing a project proposal, applications for funding as well as a script for the exhibition, which also came to form the basis for the exhibition catalogue.
- 4 The most significant expression is to be found in Norwegian textbooks, where the only reference to Sami was their being a group of people living with reindeer in the North. It was only at the very end of the twentieth century, with new national plans for education, that Sami for the first time were described as an indigenous people.
  - 5 Representing the Sami in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.
  - 6 Norway left the union with Sweden in 1905.
  - 7 Vorren, Ø. og Manker, E. (1957) *Samekulturen*. Tromsø Museums Skrifter, vol. 5. The book was republished in 1976 as well as in German (1961), English (1962), Polish (1980) and Esperanto (1980).
  - 8 In addition to the Sami artist Iver Jåks (1932-2007) who made the drawings in the displays, other Sami assisted in the making of this exhibition, some of them becoming leading figures in the Sami movement and distinguished academics (for example, Keskitalo 1974 [1994]; Magga 1985; 2002).
  - 9 One instance of this is a bilingual (Sami and Norwegian) road sign from Kåfjord municipality, where the Sami place name is vandalized by paint and shot gun. This was one of several similar road signs put up after Sami language was given equal status with Norwegian in the municipality in 1992, a measure that triggered a heated local debate, expressed in media as well as a series of destroyed bilingual road signs, to the effect that road authorities stopped replacing them some years after. This is not explained by any informative text as virtually everybody from Northern Norway would know what this object is and what it represents in terms of a Sami-Norwegian conflict, but not persons unfamiliar with this and similar conflicts from other areas of Northern Norway.
  - 10 The same authors also maintain that unconscious thought not only constitutes about 95 per cent of all thought, but that unconscious thought forms and structures all consciousness: 'If the cognitive unconsciousness was not there doing this shaping, there would be no conscious thought' (Lakoff and Umer 1999: 13).
  - 11 The photos show a female student of journalism from Finnmark in Oslo, a male inshore-fisher from Finnmark, a female primary school pupil from Southern Troms, a male farmer from Northern Troms, a female reindeer owner from Finnmark, a female social assistance worker from Finnmark in Tromsø, a male retired farmer and salmon fisher from Finnmark, a female sculptor from Finnmark, a female teacher from Trøndelag, a male cultural worker from Finnmark and a male former sailor and odd job worker from Finnmark living in Oslo.
  - 12 For a description of the *Sápmi* exhibit and a discussion of the communicative aspects of the presentation and the displays, see Ragazzi 2008.
  - 13 This concept is presented only once and in the very entrance to the exhibition in a text to a large map of Sami lands in Fenno-Scandinavia: 'Sápmi is the Sami word for the Sami homeland and society. This is a nation with no national borders, but with a common language, and a shared history and culture. More than 50,000 Sami live in Sápmi'.
  - 14 'Nordlys' 29.08.2001 and 20.09.2001. In a conference organized by the National Research Council in 2004 at Tromsø Museum, Berg also claimed that *Sápmi - Becoming a Nation* was an 'attack on the Norwegian Labour Party' through the focus on governmental policies in the post-war period – a period with a Labour government. Berg's argument was seconded by a master thesis in history where the author found that *Sápmi* presented Sami merely as in

opposition to Norwegian matters and the Labor Party only in terms of anti-Sami policies (Kalsås 2011).

- <sup>15</sup> See for instance, Ames 1986 and Karp and Levine 1991 regarding the representation and interpretation of cultural diversity in museums.
- <sup>16</sup> From 2000 to 2008, Tromsø Museum provided teaching to a total of approximately 33,000 pupils, students and teachers in 1,300 groups covering all exhibitions and subjects. Three hundred and eighty-five groups were taught in one or both of the Sami exhibitions; 42 had a combined instruction in both, 213 were shown the *Sami Culture*, and 182 groups were taken to *Sápmi*. Of the approximate 4,500 pupils that were instructed and given guided tour in *Sápmi*, about 65 per cent were from grade 7 in primary school and up (covering age groups from 13-14 up to 19-20 years old). Thirty-five per cent were college and university students in addition to groups of teachers.
- <sup>17</sup> An Inuk from Nunavut, Canada: 'Your history interest me greatly as Inuit. We share the same vision!' From Spain: 'The Catalanian culture is also oppressed nation! Viva Catalonia! Viva Lapponica!' From USA: 'It is good to see that the Sami are no longer letting others define their reality'. Germany: 'Es grüßt ein Volk!' and 'Ich bin froh, diese Ausstellung gesehen zu haben – welche grosse kraft liege in diesem Volk!'. Chile: 'RESIST SAMIII!' Japan: 'Very much moved and impressed'. Norwegian visitors also pointed to other aspects: 'High time for such an exhibition!'; 'Important issues for all of us!', and 'Show the exhibition in Southern Norway!'
- <sup>18</sup> The adoption by the (Nordic) Sami Council of the Sami flag in 1984, and the ensuing debates about its use alongside the Norwegian flag on Norway's National Day is another expression of the ongoing discourse on the meaning of equity in Sami-Norwegian relations.
- <sup>19</sup> The museum designer was Göran Carlsson, former director of the Bildmuseet in Umeå, the interactive video-interviews were designed by a Swedish firm (Simon's Idéteknologi), and the portraits were photographed by Harry Johansen, Tana.
- <sup>20</sup> The same year as the *Sápmi* exhibition opened, the new National Museum of Australia was also opened. Its indigenous focus immediately resulted in a heated public debate, entailing among other things the removal of the director of the museum, Dawn Casey, an instance of a wider 'cultural war' about interpretations of Australian history and culture (Reed 2002; Casey 2003; Macintyre and Clark 2003; Marcus 2003; MacCarthy 2004). Compared to this conflict, the debate around *Sápmi* was trifling and never brought up the role of the museum in terms of its profile in Sami research and representations.
- <sup>21</sup> See <http://sapmi.uit.no>. The web site contains a detailed virtual tour through the rooms of the museum presentation which also includes interactive video interviews which are available to visitors in the museum, as well as supplementary and additional illustrated texts to the most relevant themes (many of them not presented in the museum), providing web users with the kind of information a museum guide would give visitors.

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