

## **Kola Sami language revitalization – opportunities and challenges**

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### **Summary**

Today, all four Kola Sami languages are seriously endangered by a language shift from Sami to Russian. However, a language revitalisation process has started. Particularly the Kildin Sami language community in Lovozero seems to have the necessary political, financial and practical conditions for being able to carry out an effective language revitalisation, also in terms of a reintroduction of Kildin Sami as an everyday language of communication. But there are also challenges and barriers that have a braking effect on the revitalisation process. Historical events and political measures like collectivization, repressions, World War II, enforced resettlements and the boarding school system have still today a considerably destructive effect on the Kola Sami community and the language and cultural development. Other negative factors are purism, the lack of effective language teaching methods, unused resources and the promotion of the North Sami language among the Kola Sami. An important issue of the article is a critical discussion of the cooperation between Russian (Eastern) and Nordic (Western) Sápmi and what consequences non-transparent and irresponsibly implemented Western aid and development projects can have for the Kola Sami community and for the language and cultural revitalisation.

## Kola Sami language revitalisation – opportunities and challenges

### Introduction

#### The Sami and the situation of the Sami languages in Russia

The approximately 2000 Sami who mainly live in the Murmansk region of the Kola Peninsula are one of many indigenous and minority peoples in Russia. After extensive colonization and labour immigration, reaching its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, more than 100 different ethnic groups today live on the Kola Peninsula. The Sami, the indigenous people of this region, have been displaced and assimilated in the last centuries. Today they are one of the smallest ethnic groups in the region (VPN 2002). As a result of enforced resettlements of several Sami groups from the whole Kola Peninsula by the Soviet government during the 1930s and 1970s, most Kola Sami language users today live as a minority group in the municipality of Lovozero (Kildin Sami *Lujavv’r*). The remainder live spread across the whole Kola Peninsula and in the St Petersburg region.

After the 1917 Russian revolution, there was a short period when the Soviet state implemented certain practical measures to develop and protect the Sami languages and Sami culture. Orthographies for the Kola Sami languages were created, political documents were translated into Sami and materials for teaching of and in the Sami languages were published. In the Murmansk region teaching in Sami was introduced at schools and for adults, also for representatives of the dominant Russian speaking population, for example teachers and authorities who had an employment in areas of Sami settlements (Lujsk 1934: 23; Černavskij 1934: 6,7). In two teaching academies, in the cities of Leningrad and Murmansk, Sami language teachers were trained.

But at the end of the 1930s this positive period for the Kola Sami languages ended and almost 20 years of repression and russification followed (Rantala 2006: 5), which had a quite negative influence on the Kola Sami languages and culture. Although the repression ended after the death of Stalin in 1953, russification policies continued and the work with the Sami languages started again only in the beginning of the 1980s when new teaching materials and dictionaries were published. The end of the Soviet Union opened up for new opportunities for the political, cultural and linguistic development of the Kola Sami. However, new challenges, especially social and economic ones, also emerged.

Today approximately 800 people in Russia have some knowledge of Sami at some level. Among these 800 probably more than 200 could be counted as potential language users, which means people who have good passive language skills: they understand everything or a lot of the language and can often speak it, but for several reasons they do not use the language actively or do not speak it at all. Among the approximately 800 people who have knowledge of Sami, there are about 100 active speakers, meaning people who speak Sami fluently as their first or second language. Unlike the potential language users, the active speakers use Sami naturally in their everyday life on all levels of communication, i.e. they use Sami as an everyday language inside and outside their homes, regardless of conversation topics and also in more advanced discussions. This group of active speakers also includes people who do not necessarily use the language on a daily basis at home, but who regularly use it actively as a professional language, for example as interpreters (Scheller 2010:18-20, Scheller 2011 a): 82-84).

The Sami language is mainly used in families and mostly elderly people speak Sami with each other. In Russia there is nowhere today where the Sami people are in a majority and where the Sami language is used naturally in public life. The Russian federal legislation guarantees the Sami, like the other indigenous and minority peoples in Russia, language sovereignty and rights to use and develop their languages (Krjažkov, 2007: 164-172). The practical realisation of these rights depends both on the attitudes of the authorities and the dominant population to the Sami but also on the activity of the Sami themselves. Because the Kola Sami do not have their own administrative area, the Kola Sami languages have a much lower status than the languages of other ethnic groups that have the status of official languages and are used in the republics of the Russian Federation.

The Kola Sami languages belong to the Eastern Sami group of the Finno-Ugric language family and are traditionally divided into Kildin, Ter, Skolt and Akkala Sami.



Akkala Sami in Ęna who are learning Kildin Sami as an “intermediate language”, hoping to switch to Akkala Sami more easily after they have acquired a good knowledge of Kildin Sami. In 2010 the Akkala Sami in Ęna established an office that functions as a language centre and where language courses and other language revitalisation measures are taking place. Today there is no teaching of Akkala Sami, but there is an Akkala Sami grammar (Zajkov 1987) and there are audio recordings of Akkala Sami collected by the Russian Academy of Science in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (AA KRC 2010) that could be used to revitalise the language.

**Skolt Sami** has originally been used in Norway, Finland and Russia. On the Russian side today at least one person uses Skolt Sami sometimes actively in conversations with Skolt Sami from Finland, where the Skolt Sami language has a stronger position than on the Russian side of Spmi. Additionally there are probably at least 20 people in Russia with knowledge of Skolt Sami on different levels. There is teaching material and literature in Skolt Sami written in the Latin alphabet, which is used by the Skolt Sami in Finland and which the Skolt Sami community in Russia is interested to adopt. In Verxnetulomskij and in Murmaši optional courses in Skolt Sami are sometimes offered for adults. But these courses are not held regularly and have no permanent financing. Today Skolt Sami from Russia, Norway and Finland are cooperating to initiate a common revitalisation work. The Eastern Sami Museum in Neiden (Norway) is working with the development of teaching materials for the Skolt Sami in Russia (SKOG 2011). There are also audio recordings of Skolt Sami collected by the Russian Academy of Science (AA KRC 2010). A revitalisation of Skolt Sami in Russia would undoubtedly be possible, for example in cooperation with the Skolt Sami language community in Finland that still has active and passive language users.

**Ter Sami** has possibly two active language users today. Both are over 70 years old. Furthermore, the author of this article knows about at least ten people who have enough knowledge of Ter Sami to count as potential language users. All of these people are over 60 years old and live spread from each other over the Kola Peninsula as well as in and around the city of St Petersburg. There are no teachers and there is no teaching going on in Ter Sami, but there is a Ter Sami grammar (Tereškin 2002) and there are audio recordings of Ter Sami collected by the Russian Academy of Science that could be used for language revitalisation aims (AA KRC 2010).

**Kildin Sami** language knowledge on different levels have today probably approximately 700 persons. Among these 700 persons there are

more than 200 potential language users and about 100 active speakers. Most of the Kildin Sami language users live in the municipality of Lovozero today.

Kildin Sami is the biggest Kola Sami language with best chance of being revitalised as an active language. Almost all the language revitalisation work that is going on the Russian side of Sápmi today primarily concerns the Kildin Sami language. For that reason the focus of this article will be on the Kildin Sami language revitalisation process.

### **Kildin Sami language revitalisation – opportunities and resources**

There are a number of factors that point towards a revitalisation of Kildin Sami and could constitute the basis for an effective language revitalisation, even the reintroduction of Kildin Sami as an everyday language of communication, at least within the Sami community in Lovozero.

The most important resources are the approximately 100 active Kildin Sami speakers, who mostly belong to the older generation (people over 60 years old) and the more than 200 potential language users who mostly consist of members of the middle-aged generation (people between 30 and 60 years old). Although most members of the younger generation (people who are younger than 30 years old) have not had the Kildin Sami language transmitted from their parents, many of them have heard it from the older generation when they were growing up and there is a group of younger people that have good passive knowledge of Kildin Sami. The growing interest for learning Kildin Sami among the younger generation can be seen as a positive factor for the language revitalisation.

Kildin Sami has a written language based on the Cyrillic alphabet. The literature that is written in Kildin Sami mainly consists of texts and poems for children. There are also some poems and prose text translations from Russian into Kildin Sami.

Today, the compulsory teaching of Kildin Sami exists in the vocational school PU-26 in Lovozero. Optional teaching in Kildin Sami for pupils from grade 1 to grade 4 is given at Lovozero's boarding school two hours a week. Optional Kildin Sami language courses for adults and children are held in several places in the Murmansk region. There are specially trained Kildin Sami language teachers and there are teaching methods and materials developed for school children. In Lovozero there was a Kildin Sami group in one day nursery where the teachers tried to transmit the Kildin Sami language to the children, but the main language of communication in this group has been Russian. The day nursery teachers were interested in establishing a Kildin Sami language nest in Lovozero,

oriented towards the Karelian and Finnish language nests in the Russian part of Karelia and inspired by the Inari Sami language nest in Inari in Finland (Pasanen 2009). But a comprehensive establishing work has to be done before such a language nest can become a reality. The biggest problem is that the educationalists of the Kildin Sami group are not used to using Kildin Sami actively as a language of communication. After the retirement of the Kildin Sami group's Sami speaking educationalist no new educationalist with knowledge of Kildin Sami could be found why the group was closed at the end of 2011.

Today there is no teaching in Kildin Sami at the level of higher education. But the Murmansk State Humanities University plans to establish a master program in Sami languages and culture. Kildin Sami is well documented and there are two dictionaries published for the language (Kert 1971, Kuruč 1985, Kert 1986). In cooperation with *Kola Sami Documentation Project (KSDP)*, *Giellatekno – the centre for Sami language technology* at the university of Tromsø is preparing a digital dictionary and digital teaching materials for Kildin Sami (Victorio 2010). Giellatekno plans to establish more permanent and future-oriented activities in Lovozero to develop language technology for Kildin Sami (Giellatekno 2010). The implementation of such a project would be of great importance for the Kildin Sami language revitalisation.

The local newspaper in Lovozero and a popular science journal in Murmansk publish articles written in Kildin Sami, if people hand in such texts (NBM 2010). In March 2009 a group of Kildin Sami language activists from Lovozero created “Kil Kjäjjn”, an unofficial newspaper in Kildin Sami where people are encouraged to use the language actively by writing articles in the newspaper (KK 2009).

In Lovozero a Kola Sami radio station was established with financial support from the Nordic countries. *Kola Sámi Radio (KSR)* has its own premises and the necessary modern technical equipment for producing radio- and TV broadcasts. Although the special educated radio staff is responsible for broadcasting transmissions in Kildin Sami (Somby 2005: 25), most of the transmissions have been in Russian. Because of mismanagement and internal problems, KSR is closed today (NRK SR 2009). However, the radio still constitutes a very important potential for Kildin Sami language revitalisation.

During the last five years, a Kildin Sami revitalisation process has started in Lovozero. Active speakers, potential language users, adults and children started to meet during language evenings, where they practised active Kildin Sami language use. From 2007 to 2009 Kildin Sami summer

language camps have been organised for adults and children (SKS-2007, SKS-2008, SKS-2009) and new teaching materials for adults and advanced students have been developed. To continue the revitalisation work more effectively, the Kildin Sami language activists plan to establish a language centre in Lovozero (PZCHD 2009). From 2009 to 2010 the most active Kildin Sami language activists participated in a course in Lovozero and were trained in practical language revitalisation work and the establishing of language centres. The course was initiated by the Sámi university college in Kautokeino (Norway) and local Sami organisations, financed by the Norwegian government and largely organised and implemented by the university of Tromsø (Norway).

Since 1989 the Kola Sami community has been politically and culturally organised (Berg-Nordlie 2011a, Berg-Nordlie 2011b). Most of the political and cultural Kola Sami organisations express their interest to pursue a policy to promote the Kildin Sami language.

The federal Russian legislation guarantees the Sami several legal rights giving them language sovereignty and rights to use and develop their languages (Krjažkov, 2007: 164-172, 428). But for the practical realisation of these rights the Kola Sami community needs to hold a constant constructive dialogue with the municipal and regional authorities, which have expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Sami in the development of the Sami language and culture. During recent years a generation shift has been going on within the Russian authorities. The old generation of authorities and bureaucrats have retired and have been replaced by a younger generation with different attitudes to their predecessors who started their careers in the bureaucratic system of the Soviet Union. Since autumn 2008 the municipality of Lovozero too has been lead by a new municipal executive committee consisting of a younger generation of politicians and authorities who pursue more pragmatic and modern policies than their predecessors. This opens for new possibilities and for a more liberal dialogue with regard to Sami language development. The head of the cultural department of the municipality of Lovozero participated in the competence development course in practical language revitalisation and the establishing of language centres implemented for Kildin Sami language activists in Lovozero 2009-2010. She also expressed her support for the Sami language revitalisation and her own interest in learning the Kildin Sami language. This can be seen as a positive development for the status of the Kildin Sami language.

Conversations with members of the Sami community in Russia and an extensive questionnaire investigation of the Kola Sami language situation

that the author of this article carried out during 2007 indicate that a major part of the Sami population in Russia show a pronounced interest in learning and revitalising their ancestors' language.

### **Challenges and barriers**

Although there are good theoretical and practical preconditions for a successful revitalisation of Kildin Sami, there are also factors that create obstacles for the linguistic, cultural, economical and political development of the Kola Sami. In the following part I will discuss some of these negative factors with focus on Kildin Sami language revitalisation.

### **I. Historical events with negative consequences**

For a better understanding of the language situation and to find solutions for the problems connected to the cultural and language revitalisation work, we need knowledge about the historical background of the language community. The cultural and language situation of the Kola Sami has been characterised by various events that took place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the consequences of which still affect the Kola Sami community today. But also many other indigenous and minority peoples in Russia's North were affected by the historical events that will be discussed here. Collectivisation, Stalin's repression policy and World War II affected the whole population in the Soviet Union. However, the article discusses these events with focus on the Kildin Sami language situation.

#### **Collectivisation, Stalin's repressions and World War II**

From the end of the 1920s to the end of the 1930s the Soviet state carried out a collectivisation of agriculture in the whole country. Private property and private means of production were transferred into collective ownership, *kolkhozy* – collective farms – were established (Allemann 2010: 65-69). Because reindeer herding and fishing were rated as agriculture, also the Kola Sami were affected by collectivisation. For smallholders and people who did not own any land or means of production, collectivisation implied an improvement of their living and working situation. But most peasants and reindeer herders, who had their own reindeer herds and/or hunting and fishing grounds with an efficient self-sufficient economy, resisted collectivisation. The state accused them of being *kulaks* exploiting other people's labour to get rich and held them responsible for starvation, poverty and misery. That triggered persecution in the whole country. Elderly informants tell that able and active reindeer herders could be denounced by their labourers, by envious neighbours or by people who were lazy and who did not want to build up own efficient

economy. In this way whole families and clans were exterminated through execution and deportation, which was a huge loss for the community. With collectivisation a state meat production industry, based on the reindeer herding system of the Komi people<sup>2</sup> (Konstantinov 2005: 14, 15), began to replace the traditional Kola Sami reindeer herding system. The new system did not include the whole family in reindeer herding anymore. This had negative consequences for the social structure of the Kola Sami society and for the transmission of the Sami language and culture.

At the end of the 1930s the whole of the Soviet Union was affected by Stalin's repression policy that aimed to eliminate political opponents. Now Russian language and culture stood for a united motherland, for progress and development. Divergence from the language and cultural norm could entail being accused of being a nationalist or an enemy of the state, which could have deadly consequences. The repression policy meant the end of a modern and successful Soviet language policy. The work with the Sami languages was discontinued and suddenly it became dangerous to speak, write, read or to do research on Sami. While the most diligent members of the community were eliminated during collectivisation, now a big part of the most competent leaders and educated elite were executed and deported. One example is the so-called "Sami conspiracy" where more than 30 Sami, Komi and researchers were executed or deported having been accused of planning to establish an independent Sami state (Rantala 2006: 5, Dasjtjinskij 2006: 67-75). During this time, one informant tells that his mother and other inhabitants of her village burned their Sami books and destroyed all things that could give the slightest reason for being accused of being a Sami nationalist. Another informant tells that each village had to be purged and, irrespective of whether there were opponents of the regime or not, the council of the village was forced to hand over a certain number "enemies of the state" to the security police. That triggered denunciations for the most banal reasons, because everybody tried to save the lives of their own families.

With the beginning of World War II the worst repressions stopped and after the death of Stalin in 1953 many of those convicted were rehabilitated (Ilic 2009: 2). But the fear of standing out in society and coming into conflict with the authorities has been transmitted to the following generations and constitutes even today an obstructive psychological factor among individuals when it comes to dealing with the authorities in linguistic, cultural and political issues.

An elder Kildin Sami informant tells that, as a consequence of World War II, many men returned to their place of origin unable to participate

in working life because of physical war wounds and serious alcohol and psychological problems they couldn't cope with, which had negative consequences for the social and economic situation of the village. According to this informant, the Soviet army used alcohol and cigarettes as a sedative for their soldiers in psychologically strenuous situations, thereby laying the basis of the alcohol problems that are widespread in Russia today.

### Enforced resettlements

From the 1930s to the 1970s the Soviet state carried out an extensive centralisation and modernisation policy in the whole country. During this time most Kola Sami groups were displaced from their original settlements to bigger centralised multi-ethnic villages. Because of isolation and a lack of infrastructure, some traditional Sami villages were seen as difficult to modernise, others had to move to make space for hydroelectric power stations, mining industry and railways. During the Cold War in the 1960s and 1970s, some Kola Sami villages were razed to give space to military bases (Allemann 2010: 67, 75). The Kildin Sami who had their traditional grazing grounds on Kildin Island and on the territory where the city of Murmansk was founded in 1916, were forced to move several times before they ended up in Lovozero in the beginning of the 1960s (Jakovleva 2003: 37, 38).

The Kildin Sami who mainly live in the municipality of Lovozero today are not a homogenous group. They consist of several groups that differ from each other both in terms of language, culture and traditional industries. Still today the Kildin Sami divide each other into different groups according to origin and dialect: *Kıllt saam'* or *Čud'zjavv'r saam'* (the Sami from the Kildin Island who were displaced to Čud'zjavv'r before they were sent to Lovozero), *Koarrdegk saam'* (the Sami from Voron'e), *Årsjogk saam'* (the Sami from Varzina) and *Lujavv'r saam'* (the Sami from Lovozero).

The enforced resettlements affected the social, cultural and language situation of the Kola Sami very negatively. Displaced people did not only lose their homes, reindeer grazing lands and hunting- and fishing grounds, they also lost their roots. Many families who were replaced to Lovozero, had to wait years before they got housing and therefore had to live with relatives or strangers, several families in a little house or flat (Jakovleva 2003: 38, 39). Still today there are families where three generations live in a one- or two-room flat. Another problem was the shortage of opportunities for work in Lovozero. The original inhabitants of Lovozero had to share their hunting-, fishing and berry-collecting



2007: Remains of the “old” village of Lovozero by the Virma river. (Photo: E. Scheller)



2007: The “new” village of Lovozero. After the relocations most of the Sami were settled in blocks of flats. (Photo: E. Scheller)

grounds with the newcomers, which caused conflicts both within the Sami group and between Sami and other ethnic groups. These conflicts are still going on today and have had a very negative affect on the language situation. One informant says that she never speaks Sami in Lovozero after having received a telling-off because of her “ugly” language when she used her dialect after she had been displaced to the village in the 1960s. Also original Lovozero Sami tell that the newcomers criticise their dialect.

The loss of their homes, unemployment, housing shortage, conflicts, discrimination and stigmatisation from both their own group and from the non-Sami majority deprived many people of their belief in the future and caused depression and pessimism both among the displaced and among the original Lovozero Sami. As a result a large section of the people became affected by alcoholism, social misery and poverty, which drove many to commit suicide (Jakovleva 2003: 39). This caused physical and psychological health problems like depression and trauma that have been passed on to new generations and that are still prevalent today. The members of the middle-aged generation were hardest hit by the consequences of the enforced resettlements. Many of them grew up rootless, in a precarious situation without a place of their own to live and without social security, victims of poverty and their parents’ depression and alcoholism. They were also severely exposed to discrimination, assimilation and stigmatisation than the older and younger generations. Today it is these very members of the middle-aged generation that have the resources to revitalise the Sami language: they have a good passive and partly active language knowledge and they are young enough to carry out effective long-term revitalisation work. But depression, alcoholism, social and economic problems as well as a lack of belief in the future and insufficient self-confidence, constitute serious barriers for these people to engage in long-term language revitalisation projects.

### **The boarding school system**

After the Russian revolution in 1917 the Soviet state introduced measures to fight illiteracy throughout the country. The indigenous and minority people of the North were to learn to live in modern Soviet society, get a school education and chances to develop on the same terms as all other Soviet children (Kiselev 1987: 158). For children who usually spent most of the year with their reindeer herding parents in the tundra, boarding schools were established. Older Kola Sami informants tell that, before the enforced resettlements, most of the Sami villages had their own schools, often with boarding facilities, and that the children were

not isolated from their families during the whole year. After the enforced resettlements the reindeer herders continued to work on their herding territories and had to spend more time away from their new homes in Lovozero, where their children had to attend boarding schools while their parents were in the tundra most of the year. A middle-aged informant tells that also Sami children whose parents lived and worked in Lovozero were forced to live in the boarding school from grade 1 to 7. In addition to the boarding school there was also a “normal” secondary school in Lovozero and in theory the parents had the right to choose between these two schools for their children. But the informant tells that in practise most Sami children had no chance of getting a place at the “normal” school and had to go to the boarding school instead. In Soviet times it was also common that the children from the Kola Peninsula were sent at public expense to holiday camps by the Black Sea during the summer. In this way the children were meant to recover from the raw northern climate and get vitamins, warmth and sun. But for the boarding school children this had serious consequences, because in practice it meant they were isolated from their families, native culture and language during the whole year. Informants tell that many members of the middle-aged generation had never been in the tundra and that they do not speak Sami, having grown up at the boarding school and having seen their families only during shorter periods.

Boarding school children did not grow up in normal families, where traditions, norms and values were transmitted from generation to generation, and where the children learned to take responsibility for their own lives. In addition to the isolation from the families, there was mobbing among the boarding school children and the informants tell also about harassments and sexual violence from some educators. Today many of the former boarding school children have difficulties with social relations. Alcoholism and family problems are widespread among this group of people, who live so to speak between two cultures: the Sami culture that they were not raised in and the Russian majority culture that they got only partly transmitted through their upbringing at boarding school. In everyday life these peoples’ romantic ideas about the “real, original” Sami life they have missed out on, stand in a strong contrast to the reality of the older generation’s lifestyle and norms. A middle-aged informant who has been unemployed for many years tells, for example, that he does not want to take one “of these Russian jobs, where you have to submit to fixed working hours and roles” because he has “Sami genes” that allow him only “a free life in the tundra, where you decide yourself when, how and where you will work”. An older informant, on the other

hand, criticises members of the middle-aged and younger generation who “want to be Sami but they don’t want to work, they just drink and amuse themselves and don’t bother about social order and then they say that such is the Sami culture”.

Also during the Kildin Sami summer language camps, when members of the older, middle-aged and younger generations lived together for two weeks, the author of this article could observe a rift between the generations and their cultural and social values. The middle-aged potential language users who ran the camp and taught the students in Kildin Sami, were not consistent when implementing the roles and plans they had decided beforehand. For that reason one of the language camps ended up in chaos, because neither the children or the teachers followed the arranged times and rules on the grounds that “these are the rules and the social system of the Russians [...] Sami children have always grown up without rules and constraint”, whereas among the older active Kildin Sami speakers, who participated in the language camp and also had their grandchildren with them, there was order and stringent regulation of duties, mealtimes and bedtimes. But the middle-aged generation seemed not to grasp their elders’ norms. They chose the parts of traditional Sami life that they considered as “real”. As a result, conflicts between the participants of the language camp arose and were negotiated in Russian. The aim of speaking Sami went out the backdoor and most of the children did not even participate regularly in the lectures. After this conflict-laden summer the language activists have not held any more language camps.

In other connections too, like the activities to establish private Kola Sami reindeer herding, the author of this article has observed that no natural contact or cooperation seems to exist between the middle-aged and younger generations on the one side and the older generation on the other, which also has serious consequences for the transmission of the Sami language. Quite probably, the natural contact between the generations was broken when great parts of the middle-aged generation grew up isolated at boarding schools. Also the industrialisation of the reindeer herding has contributed to the destruction of the traditional social network between the different generations.

## **II. Internal challenging factors**

### **Purism**

As in other minority groups (Trosterud 2003, Johansen 2008), purism is common also in the Kola Sami community where certain members of the older generation language users criticise younger community members for speaking a very bad Sami. Although they themselves often have not

transferred the language in their own families, some older language users express their frustration over the on-going process of language shift from Sami to Russian by making the younger community members responsible for the language loss. The demands made by the language community on Sami who are learning Kildin Sami are high. Non-Sami community members or foreigners with very limited language command can receive much praise and get a status as “fluent Kildin Sami speakers”, while Kildin Sami language users with good language command, who speak Kildin Sami fluently but with some difficulties, can be presented as unqualified and are in some cases not even counted as Sami speakers. This causes a barrier among Sami who are learning Kildin Sami and especially among community members who have good command in the language but who do not speak it as fluently as the older active language users.

The typical Kildin Sami purists seem to be retired Sami language teachers who themselves did not transfer the language to their children and grandchildren. Although they have a good command in Sami, most of these people speak mainly Russian, also with those they criticise for not using Kildin Sami actively. This shows that also purists can feel a psychological barrier that hinders them from speaking Sami. Their expressions of purism can be interpreted as a way of hiding own feelings of guilt and expressing frustration because of not having transferred the language to the next generation.

In the 1980s two Kildin Sami alphabets with minimal differences became officially state-recognised. Since then, members of the educated Kildin Sami elite have been involved in a dispute about which of the two alphabets is to be the definitive norm for the written Kildin Sami language and have tried to impose their respective orthographies on the language community. The dispute, which has been going on for almost 30 years, has caused insecurity and fear among the members of the language community and has been an obstacle for the natural development of free writing activity among the Kildin Sami language users. Today, with the exception of those involved in the dispute, in practice nobody produces larger coherent texts in Kildin Sami. However, in recent years the use of Kildin Sami in SMS and at the Internet (in Emails, on homepages, on Facebook etc.) has increased, also among younger people (Scheller 2012).

Problematic for the language work are also some Kildin Sami language experts' claims that only persons with higher pedagogical education are competent to work with language revitalisation. Some Sami politicians who are engaged in language issues even forbid and actively try to prevent “non-educated” Sami language activists from working with language revitalisation. This behaviour certainly reflects a common

feature of Russia's social hierarchal structure, where education and social status can be crucial in terms of individuals' freedom to act in society. But the real motives for the Kildin Sami elite seem rather to be matters of prestige, economic interests, competition about project financing and publications, political interests and the power to decide about language issues. Among community members on the grass root level this aggressive knowledge-puristic policy causes insecurity and fear of engaging in language revitalisation work and has led to a burn-out of the non-elite language community members who were most engaged in Kildin Sami language revitalisation in recent years. This is a serious barrier for language revitalisation.

### **Out-dated language teaching methods and unused resources**

Today a majority of the children and youth have not been transferred the Sami language and need teaching in Kildin Sami as a foreign language. But most Kildin Sami language teachers still use the same teaching methods and materials that have been developed in the 1980s, for school children who grew up with Kildin Sami as first or second language at home and who were learning to read and write in Kildin Sami at school. The same out-dated materials and teaching methods are also used in optional courses for youth and adults and there are hardly any opportunities to train in active oral language use or to learn Kildin Sami at a higher level. Particularly among the specially trained and relatively well-paid Kildin Sami teachers employed in the state educational institutions, work motivation and engagement in competence development seems to be low. However, there are some enthusiasts without pedagogical training who teach Kildin Sami for a low wage and there are some language activists who have developed teaching materials for advanced students and organised language camps and language evenings with a focus on oral everyday language for adults and youth with a basic or passive knowledge in Kildin Sami.

There is almost no prose literature for adults written in Kildin Sami. Poetry, folklore texts and literature for children seem not to be enough to build up a Kildin Sami reading circle. Some of the literature in Kildin Sami is published abroad and therefore difficult to obtain and too expensive for most of the Kildin Sami.

In Lovozero the *Ethnic Cultural Centre (NKC)*, *Kola Sámi Radio (KSR)* and the Kildin Sami day nursery group could function as environments where Kildin Sami is alive and at least partly used as an everyday language of communication. These institutions are also potential work places where a knowledge of Kildin Sami should be required to get

employment. But no knowledge of Kildin Sami is required from the employees at NKC and the requirements for a knowledge of Kildin Sami for day nursery staff are low. Within KSR only the position of the radio announcer requires a knowledge of Kildin Sami. According to statements from radio staff, this particular position has been worse paid than the other positions within KSR, because it does not demand any higher education. Besides higher education the better paid positions require a knowledge of North Sami instead, because the radio has to finance itself through selling news programs in the North Sami language to the Sami radio and TV-stations in the Nordic countries. That is not advantageous to the status of Kildin Sami. During the last three years there have been no regular transmissions in Kildin Sami. Because of mismanagement the radio is closed today (NRK SR 2009).

The local newspaper in Lovozero and a popular science journal in Murmansk publish articles in Sami. But according to both Kildin Sami informants and employees of the newspaper this potential is seldom if ever used because almost nobody delivers articles in Kildin Sami for publication.

Although the authorities express their support and interest for Sami language revitalisation, the language community seems not always to use this resource or to grasp the opportunity to affect the language policy (Scheller 2011 b): s. 103).

Today there is no extensive inter-generational cooperation between language activists, language experts and language users at the grass root level and no coordinated Kildin Sami language planning and revitalisation work is going on. A language centre or another initiative to carry out a more coordinated and well-planned language work could solve that problem.

### **III. External challenging factors**

#### **The promotion of North Sami**

The second biggest Sami language on the Kola peninsula today is not an original Kola Sami language but North Sami, a Western Sami language, originally spoken in the North of Norway, Sweden and Finland. North Sami came to the Kola Peninsula in the 1990s after the end of the Soviet Union, when new contacts and regular cultural and political cooperation between Sami from Scandinavia and Sami from Russia was established. Courses in North Sami financed by the Nordic Sami community and by the Nordic countries are regularly held in the municipality of Lovozero and in Murmansk. With the help of scholarships, Sami from Russia get the opportunity to go to Scandinavia to learn North Sami in intensive

courses or get a higher education in this language. Today there are probably more than three active North Sami speakers with Kola Sami origin living in Russia and more than 100 people with knowledge of North Sami at various levels. Some of these have gained a knowledge of North Sami through participating in language courses held in Russia, others have learned it during intensive language courses or studied it in Norway and Finland.

North Sami has the highest status among the Sami languages, gets most financial governmental support, has come furthest in language revitalisation and is used as a *lingua franca* among the Sami people from all four countries. Nevertheless, the popularity of North Sami among the Sami from Russia is not only motivated by reasons of status and communication. Studying North Sami implies also lucrative scholarships and the possibility to travel to a Western European country. There is a tendency among Sami students from Russia to immigrate for economic reasons to a Nordic country in connection to their studies. This is natural and understandable and has benefited the revitalisation of North Sami. But this is not unproblematic for the maintenance of the Kola Sami languages. The severe social and economic living situation of many Kola Sami and the fact, that there is no comparable economic and ideological support for the maintenance and revitalisation of the Kola Sami languages today, causes a power imbalance between North Sami and the Kola Sami languages, which seriously influences the personal language choices of Kola Sami individuals (Scheller 2011 a): 88, 89).

### **Research activity and Western aid projects**

The research activity that both Russian and foreign institutions are carrying out on the Kola Peninsula is only of use for the Sami language community if the research results are rendered understandable for the members of the language community and if they are easily usable in practical language work. Even the most extensive audio and video recordings of endangered languages are worthless for the language community if they are not accessible and if they are not prepared for easy use within the revitalisation work. Grammars, dictionaries, or articles that are published in English or in other languages that the majority of the members of the language community do not understand, help promote the researchers' careers within international research circles, but they are of no particular benefit to the language community. That includes also conferences and seminars about language and revitalisation issues that are organised, for example, in Lovozero, but that exclude most of the members of the language communities, because they are carried

out in English without, or with inadequate interpreting<sup>3</sup>. Problematic for minority language communities is also an all too intensive research activity that the researchers do not coordinate with each other because they do not know about each other's activities and are not aware of the vulnerability of the minority language community. This can lead to an overburdening of the informants and restrict them in their private lives. This is not only an ethical problem, but can also block a productive cooperation between the researchers and the language community, which can play an important role in the language revitalisation process.

To share experience in and knowledge about language revitalisation and to get complementary financing, it has been important for the Kola Sami language community to cooperate with other language communities also on the international level outside Russia. Since the beginning of the 1990s an intensive cooperation between Russian (Eastern) and Nordic (Western) Sápmi has been an important support for the cultural, political and language development of the Kola Sami. But there have also been a number of projects that have not given the desired results. Examples are the fiasco of the Kola Sámi Radio or the scandal around the Ethnic Culture Centre in Lovozero in 2009 (NRK SR 2009, NRK Sápmi 2009). The institutions mentioned were established according to Nordic models and with help of financing from the West. But because of mismanagement, nepotism, corruption and incompetence among their own leaders and Kola Sami boards, these institutions could not develop structures to continue their activities after the Western financing to establish the projects had ended.

But the problem cannot only be explained with corruption and mismanagement on the Russian side. As Berg-Nordlie (2011) and Skedsmo (2010) point out, the Western partners all too often lack knowledge both about the Russian majority society and about the local conditions of the Kola Sami community. Projects are carried out according to Western models and ideologies, that would work in the Nordic countries, but that are not adapted to the conditions on the Kola Peninsula and are not realistic in a Russian context (Berg-Nordlie 2011c: 28-33; Skedsmo 2010: 39-42, 55). Another serious problem is the lack of knowledge of the Russian language, also among Nordic partners like the *Sami Trade- and Development Centre (SEG)* or the *Norwegian Barents Secretariat* who have worked with projects in Russia for many years, but who still carry out their work with help of interpreters. The lack of language, local and cultural knowledge and the Western cooperation partners' relatively short stays on the Kola Peninsula often lead to misunderstandings between the different participants and make it difficult for the Western

partners to understand the different mechanisms of Russian society and their effect on the project work (Compare also with Skedsmo 2010: 57, 58). Western mass media's often one-sided picture of the Kola Sami as a poor, suffering and helpless group oppressed by the Russian majority society and depending on Western help (Berg-Nordlie 2011c: 26, 27) has obviously led to a degradation of the Kola Sami as equal partners within the project cooperation between Eastern and Western Sápmi. Russian officials are not infrequently attributed the main responsibility for unsuccessful project activities, whereas other possible explanations are not discussed at all.<sup>4</sup> According to statements of a politically engaged Kola Sami activist, distrust and prejudice against Russian state authorities have the result that not all Western projects pay taxes and other employer's contributions. That produces not only discontent among the authorities. It also promotes misuse of project funding both within the Kola Sami community and within the Western partners. The project employees on the Russian side have no legal employment and lose pension, sickness and other benefits. In this connection several informants criticise the Danish-Greenlandic NGO *Infonor* and the *Sami Trade- and Development Centre (SEG)* for illegal and non-transparent project activities.

The foreign sponsors do not always control the results of the project work or what happens with project funding on the Russian side of Sápmi. The uncontrolled flow of Western money into a community characterised by serious economic and social problems, has without doubt contributed to increased conflicts, corruption and nepotism within the Kola Sami community (Read also Berg-Nordlie 2011c: 27, 33, 34). During several years of work on the Kola Peninsula, the author of this article could observe how Western aid contributed to the establishing of an elite that consists of Kola Sami politicians and cultural leaders who tend to misuse project funding for personal benefit. The same group controls the project work, irrespective of what interests they represent or if they are competent to carry out the projects. Those leaders who really are working for their people's development, and other competent people who do not belong to the elite, are, as a rule oppressed. The elite keep them excluded from activities, or expose them to pressure until they choose to withdraw from the activities. That is a serious barrier for a successful language and cultural revitalisation. The pressure from the elite has caused passivity and a lack of self-confidence among a majority of the Kola Sami, who prefer to pass on responsibility for the language and cultural work to their leaders, in order to avoid conflicts and trouble within their own community. Especially in Lovozero and Murmansk, the places that have received most Western attention, this is a problem. The habit of getting

paid from foreign projects and the belief that money can solve most problems has become a barrier for voluntary work. Requirements for getting financing for smaller projects are often relatively modest for Kola Sami applicants. Project applications and final reports that would not have been approved in a purely Nordic context, are often accepted if the support concerns the Kola Sami community and the project results are not often checked<sup>5</sup>. This has not led to people on the grass root level, those usually less used to write project applications, gaining access to project funding. On the contrary, it seems that the low requirements have led to a “surviving strategy” among some members of the cultural and political elite, who subsist with the help of several projects, often without producing satisfactory results. This would probably not happen to the same extent with funding from the Russian state where there are stricter demands to applicants. That possibly explains why Kola Sami community members usually rather apply for Western funding than use state and private funding from Russia.

Experience from 20 years of project activity on the Russian side of Sápmi seem not to animate the Western financiers to change their working methods. Berg-Nordlie writes that the West sees Russia as “[...] a ‘tabula rasa’ when it comes to indigenous policy, a vacuum that needs to be filled by the import of Nordic institutions [...]” and that “[...] we do not see too often that the roles and behaviour of Western actors are looked critically into – nor the actual efficiency of the projects they get involved in. These are things that need to be debated in the media” (Berg-Nordlie 2011c: 33, 34). A current example is the activity that a respected North Sami institution from Norway runs in connection with the Kola Sami language and cultural revitalisation in Lovozero (SAO 2010). The institution trained a group of active Kildin Sami language activists in practical language revitalisation and the establishing of language centres (see p. 7), but does not include them in the ensuing project to establish a centre of competency with focus precisely on language revitalisation. The centre-of-competency-project (CCP), financed by the Norwegian government, cooperates instead with members of the cultural and political Kola Sami elite, who are responsible for the failure of other Western-funded projects. The Russian project coordinator, an academic from Moscow without experience within language- and cultural revitalisation and with a lack of knowledge about the local community and its needs, is criticised by both Kola Sami community members and by researchers who are active in Lovozero, among them also the author of this article, for being more interested in a cooperation with highly educated Russian academics than in the locally active Sami with competence to establish their own

activity according to the needs and interests of the local population. This wrongly orientated activity undoubtedly discourages local activists from the grass root level and can have serious consequences for the language work. The most actively engaged language activists, who worked with language revitalisation on a voluntary basis over the last four years and who aimed to establish a language centre, lost their motivation to continue their work because of exclusion from the CCP and because of aggressive verbal attacks from some members of the Kola Sami elite that are involved in the project.

Both Kildin Sami language activists, members of the cultural Kildin Sami elite and researchers informed the responsible North Sami institution orally and in writing about these unfortunate circumstances several times and asked for a common discussion to find constructive solutions. But the North Sami partners ignored the suggestions. After more than one year's project work the employees of the CCP still have not worked out any framework for the centre of competency and its formal establishment. Two months before the end of the project, the North Sami project owner officially invited the Kildin Sami language activists to cooperate with the CCP and offered them the opportunity to participate in a seminar to work out an administrative structure at least for the part of the centre of competency that will deal with language issues. The activists were also invited to publish on the web side of the CCP their examination papers, written as part of their training in practical language revitalisation and containing concrete suggestions for the establishing of a language centre in Lovozero. In this way the North Sami partner secures that the project will not end without formal results, while the active Kildin Sami language workers who were excluded during a great part of the establishing phase of the project, suddenly are expected to implement in an unrealistically short time the work that the responsible project employees omitted to do during one and a half year of project activity.

Although a physical centre of competency will be hurriedly established during the final stage of the project, there is a great risk that the centre will fail in the same way as the Kola Sámi Radio. This would not only mean a financial loss, but could also have serious consequences for the Kola Sami community, who perhaps will not get another opportunity to build up their own competency and their own institutions in the same way in the coming years, since applications for Russian state funding for a similar activity can be rejected on the grounds that the Sami already have received extensive Western funding for the establishment of such a centre of competency.

A large part of the project funding goes directly as overheads to the Nordic institutions that are responsible for the projects. This, and not least the status as benefactor and the trust from the Kola Sami community members, should be strong motivations for the Nordic partners to carry out a responsible and result-oriented project activity where the Kola Sami community members are seen as equal partners irrespective of education or social position.

The criticism that has been discussed here is not aimed at stopping Western project activities or at restricting the cooperation between Eastern and Western Sápmi. On the contrary, Western funded project activities constitute an important support for the language, cultural and economical development of the Kola Sami and are a rich source of knowledge for both Eastern and Western partners. However, researchers and project partners from the West should be aware that projects that are carried out wrongly, without taking into consideration local conditions and needs, can lead to more harm than good for a Kola Sami community struggling with political, social and economic circumstances that differ much from the conditions in the Nordic countries. Western aid is only of use for the Kola Sami if it is implemented responsibly, transparently and in a result-oriented manner, including both the authorities and the local population in the projects that concern them.

Language revitalisation is a process that requires a comprehensive engagement from the language community members. Therefore it is important that the people who are engaged at the grass root level get the possibility to influence the language and cultural work and to participate in building up their own institutions and working structures, adapted to local needs and conditions. The responsibility of the researchers is to give support by conveying their knowledge and experiences to the members of the language community and creating debates that can drive the language revitalisation process forward. The main task of the Kola Sami political leaders is to implement language policy issues on the local, regional and state level. Authorities such as domestic and foreign funding agencies have the task of offering legal and financial support, adapted to the local conditions and protected against misuse.

## **Conclusions**

All four Kola Sami languages are seriously endangered by a language shift from Sami to Russian. North Sami who is endangered too, is the Sami language with the highest status and gets more and more language users also on the Kola Peninsula. The Kola Sami language with best chance of survival and revitalisation is Kildin Sami. Various factors have

affected the Kildin Sami language revitalisation process both positively and negatively. Collectivisation, repressions, World War II, enforced resettlements and the boarding school system are examples of historical events and political measures by the majority society that caused collective traumata within a large part of the Kola Sami population. The negative consequences of this continue to affect the language community today. During the collectivisation and repressions the Kola Sami community lost its most resourceful and active community members. The fear of standing out in society or coming into conflict with state authorities and one's own leaders has been transferred to the next generations and constitutes still today a psychological brake on achieving and promoting language, cultural and political issues at the level of the authorities. World War II, collectivisation, enforced resettlements and the boarding school system have had many negative consequences for the structure of the Sami society and for the transmission of the Sami language and traditional, cultural and social norms to the present middle-aged and younger generations. The middle-aged generation of Kildin Sami, severely affected by the consequences of the enforced resettlements and the boarding school system, can be seen as the most resourceful for carrying out a language revitalisation. But for many of these people depression, alcoholism, social and economic problems, a lack of belief in the future and insufficient self-confidence constitute serious barriers for engaging in long-term language revitalisation projects.

Other negative factors that affect the Kildin Sami language revitalisation negatively are purism, the lack of effective language teaching methods and materials and the promotion of the North Sami language. The power imbalance between North Sami and the Kola Sami languages seriously influences the personal language choices of Kola Sami individuals, who for status and economic reasons rather tend to learn North Sami instead of their ancestors' language. This is a serious threat to the traditional Kola Sami languages.

Although the Kildin Sami language community has some resources at its disposal to carry out an effective and long-term language and cultural revitalisation work, this potential is not used effectively. Russian authorities' and the majority population's interest and will to cooperate in terms of language and cultural revitalisation has developed in a positive direction over the last few years. But the resources that the Russian state offers are seldom used because many Kola Sami tend to apply for funding from the West instead. Although Western development projects that have been carried out on the Kola Peninsula since the 1990s have been of great importance for the development of the Kola Sami languages and

culture, they still constitute a braking factor. Western Sápmi's one-sided picture of the Kola Sami as a pure group without rights, at the mercy of the majority populations and Russian authorities' harassment and dependent on Western aid, has led to a degradation of the Kola Sami as equal partners within the project cooperation work between Western and Eastern Sápmi. The Western partners' lack of language skills and local knowledge and the lack of responsibility for the project activities shown on the Russian side has enabled the establishment of a corrupt political and cultural elite with a tendency to misuse project funding for personal use and monopolise the language and cultural work so that community members who are not part of the elite are not given the opportunity to participate in the language and cultural revitalisation work. To obtain Western project funding or to justify inactivity and unsuccessful project activities, some members of the Kola Sami elite make use of the prejudices the West has towards the Russian state by representing Russian authorities and the majority society as not cooperative and as systematic oppressors. In this way attention is diverted from the real reasons for unsuccessful project activity and corruption within the Kola Sami community to a larger socio-political level while the barriers that stand in the way for the practical language and cultural revitalisation are not discussed. However, an on-going shift of power within the Kola Sami leadership, where a new generation of language activists and younger political and cultural leaders are replacing the old elite, gives hope for a more fruitful discussion of problems concerning language and society in the future.

Particularly the Kildin Sami language community in Lovozero seems to have the necessary political, financial and practical preconditions to be able to carry out an effective language revitalisation. The Kildin Sami who live in Lovozero get considerably more financial and practical support from foreign actors for preserving and developing their language and culture than other Kola Sami groups. Another important but untapped resource for the Kildin Sami language revitalisation is the invisible group of active and potential language users. During the last two years the interest in learning and revitalising Kildin Sami has grown within a large part of the Sami population in Russia, especially among the members of the younger generation. This can be seen as the most important precondition for language revitalisation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The author of this article works on a separate article about the situation of Akkala Sami and plans to publish it during 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The *Komi* are a Finno-Ugric people with own language and culture, that traditionally lived of reindeer herding and agriculture. At the beginning of the 20th century a group of *komi-ižemcy* emigrated from the area around the river *Ižma* together with their reindeer herds to the Kola peninsula and settled there together with their families and their Nenets reindeer labourers. The intensive Komi reindeer herding system with large herds that are watched day and night, has been one important reason for the replacement of the traditional extensive Kola Sami reindeer herding system with small free-grazing herds (Konstantinov 2005: 14). Today about 1000 Komi are living on the Kola peninsula (VPN 2002). In the autonomous Komi republic the Komi language has the status of official language. The *Ižmadialect*, spoken on the Kola peninsula is as endangered as Kildin Sami (Ušakova: 43).

<sup>3</sup> One example is a workshop about Language and cultural rights of minorities and indigenous peoples that the *Poga Language Survival Network* organised in Lovozero in 2007 and there most of the Kildin Sami community members were excluded because the workshop was held in English with very badly organised and inadequate interpretation (Poga 2007).

<sup>4</sup> One example is the scandal around the Ethnic Culture Centre in Lovozero in 2009. The Kola Sami director of the centre was dismissed because of mismanagement and embezzlement. But this issue was not discussed in Western mass media. The dismissal of the director was instead explained as a result of a conflict of interests between the Kola Sami community and Russian officials (NRK Sápmi 2009). The same former director has today a new important position in a Western-funded project to establish a centre of competency in Lovozero.

<sup>5</sup> The author of this article has had insight into project applications that have been sent to funding agencies in Western Sápmi through the Ethnic Culture Centre NKC in Lovozero and also Nordic applications to get financing for project activities on the Kola Peninsula that Norwegian state funds have granted.



*August 2007 during the first Kildin Sami language immersion camp: Anna V. Afanaseva practices her Kildin Sami language skills with the active language user Evdokim K. Zakharov (1956-2011). During the language camp Anna, who didn't get transferred the language in her childhood, started to speak Kildin Sami fluently.*

*(Photo M. Riessler)*

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