

SÁMI VALUES & TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

draft paper

for the Saami council's policy development on  
ecosystem based management

STORIES - ETHICS IN TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS

Arctic council's workshop Bergen

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# My spot of the Sámi territory is here at Salmon Riverside

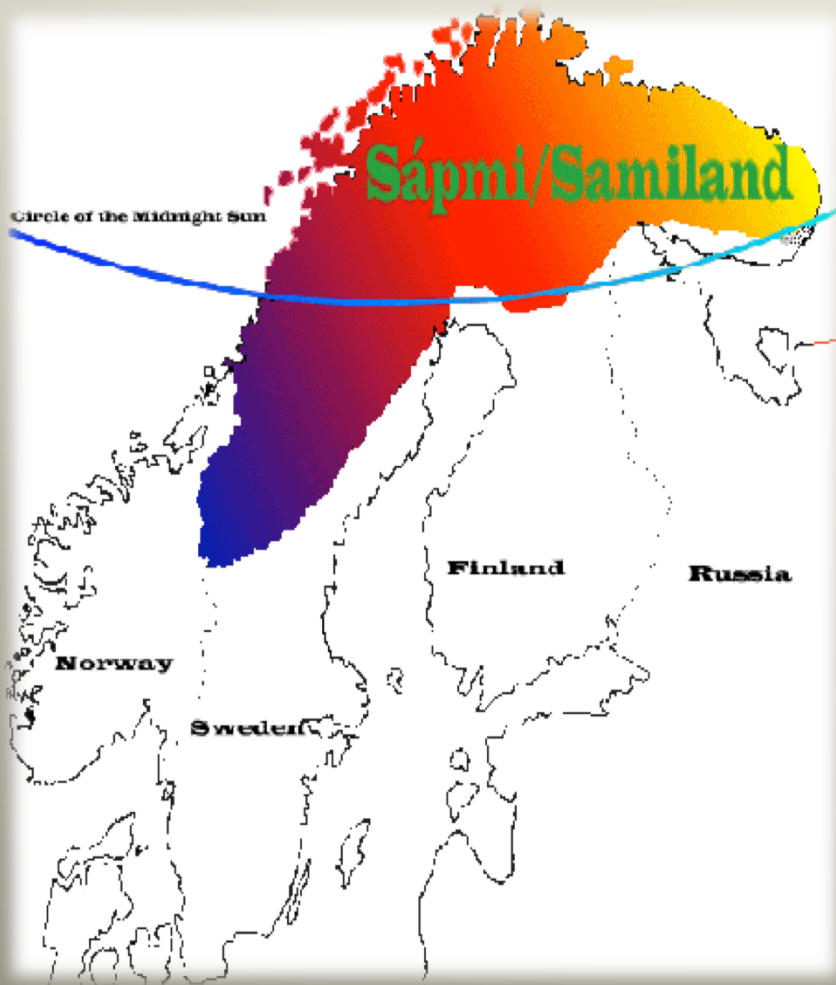


My limits:

- ✓ due to the short time given the material is not representing the entire Sápmi, or different adaptations..
- ✓ located mainly in inland communities North of Sápmi.
- ✓ Educator: pedagogical approach on TEK



*Which map is in your mind? Maps give direction for action!*





Sárgon Sara- connected  
to the land!  
«Teaching»  
the tradiotional Sámi TEK





“The values that the western world is making us forget”! Harald Gaski

We still did not erect our lávvu  
without the spirits' permission

Moved the lávvu if it chanced to  
be placed on a trail

And when we left our winter  
camp

We apologized if we had acted  
wrong

And thanked the camp because it  
had fed us and our reindeer



Áillohaš, Nils-Aslak  
Valkeapää: Trekways  
of the Wind 1985

And when we came to the summer camp

Some of us dressed in red gákti

Adorned ourselves

Offered a libation as well to our light beautiful camp

And asked it to open its embrace for protection  
once again

And when we went to the reindeer we did not go to  
work. We adorned ourselves too

So that it would be more fun for the reindeer too see  
us

Áillohaš; poet, yoiker, painter, cultural revitalizer – formulates the Sami  
inner strength, - prevalent tone of Saminess



# Clarifyings; Traditional Ecological Knowledge & Sámi TEK

One attempt to clarify the term TEK use; found among Berkes clarifications:

- ✓ TEK “is the knowledge, however acquired, of relationship of living beings with one another and with their environment” (Fikret Berkes 1999:6.)

The STEK:

- ✓ The term Sámi TEK“ is the knowledge, that Sami have acquired, of relationship of living beings with one another and with their environment”,

# The pedagogy – Traditional teachings

- TEK/STEK; accumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and
- *handed down through generations by cultural transmission*, about the relationship of living beings (including human) with one another and with the environment (Berkes 99:8)
- TEK/STEK is dependent on the continuation of *traditional teachings*

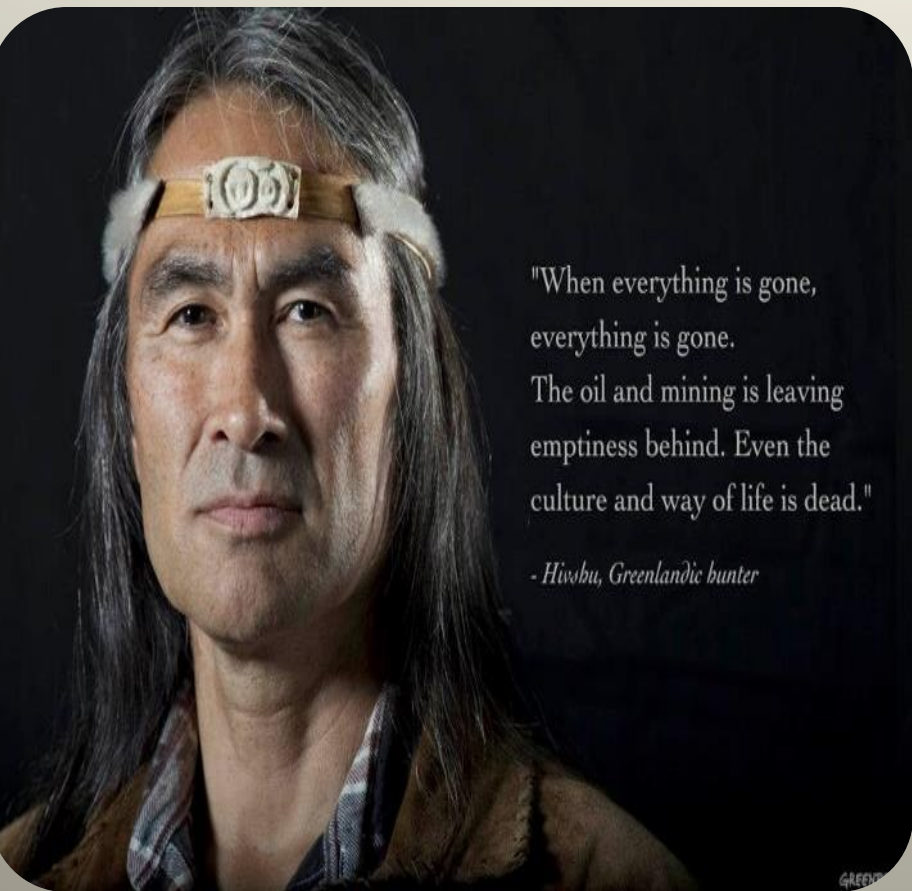


# Traditional teachings enwoven in TEK

Sámi traditional knowledge has its own value and legal and ethical system that differs from the surrounding societies (Andersen 2002: 13).

Taking this system to account the traditional ways of teaching TEK also consists of the traditional ideals or visions for these teachings.

# Vision – the ideal to foster/Olmmožin eallit



To live like a good person in "soabalaš" agreeable, peaceful fellowship and mutuality with others, the surroundings and all living things.

Oskal, 1995

Balto 1997, 2008, 2014



# The untold story ..

The teachers' story who was raised in a traditional Sami family and taught to practice certain rituals.

In a seminar with Sami teachers where all were expected to share their Sami traditional knowledges she resisted to do so. She faced a dilemma; on the one hand she felt responsible to share and to pass on Sami traditions, but on the other hand she was too anxious of being laughed at, or to face that her experiences would be treated as valueless.

- ✓ She told they had to bring the remaining bones from the reindeer meat back to nature. After having their meal, the remaining bones were brought to a certain place in the surrounding nature.
- ✓ While doing this they gave thanks to the nature. They were grateful that the nature was feeding them with the reindeer meat and grateful for the nature's generosity in general.
- ✓ They sent prayers for the new reindeer calves to be born.

# Giving thanks to the nature and sending prayers

- ✓ After negotiations and convincing her to share she told how they used to bring the remaining bones from the reindeer meat back to nature.
- ✓ After having their meal, the remaining bones were brought to a certain place in the surrounding nature.
- ✓ While doing this they gave thanks to the nature. They were grateful that the nature was feeding them with the reindeer meat and grateful for the nature's generosity in general.
- ✓ They sent prayers for the new reindeer calves to be born.



# Emotional commitment..

And she continued with a broken voice that she was the one who was breaking the circle.

- ✓ She could not practice this; neither could she pass it on to her children, because in an urban town where they lived, there was no space for such customs.
- ✓ She was suffering for not being able to practice her spiritual traditions and she also felt like a betrayer who did not manage to preserve the ancestral tradition, and as she puts it in this way: she breaks the sacred circle of life every day
- ✓ She doubted that this issue was appropriate to be included in the contemporary school knowledge, and that some parents would dislike it too. Kind of paganism (Balto 2008: )

# Lessons to learn... from self-sufficiency

Look at the change of conditions:

From self-sufficiency to outside dependency

- ✓ Ways of living changes in the Sami villages the last 3-4 decades
- ✓ the transition from a virtually self-sufficient society where people produced the food, clothing and the knowledge they needed into another society - with 9-4 jobs in the service industries - made them more dependent on goods and knowledge that are produced elsewhere
- ✓ For the small indigenous communities these changes increased their dependency on the mainstream societies

# Lessons to learn ...new dependency

The new adaptations;

- ✓ from the primary commercial living, fully or partly engaged in reindeer herding, fisheries and agriculture and nature nourishment
- ✓ to earn their living in 9-4 jobs in the service industry made a great impact on the conditions for the practicing of TEK and the spiritual past of it in particular



# Lessons to learn

Look at the change of conditions: Christianization

- ✓ The Sami spiritual practices were judged by the Christian church (missionaries and priests) as paganism and
- ✓ everything that reminded the people on their own faith and spiritual values were eradicated and spiritual practices were punished, sometimes to death.
- ✓ By the attempts to destruct the spiritual practices, burn the drums and even kill the shamans (noaidi) the authorities were able to dissolve the (noaidis' ) shamans leadership of the communities. ...
- ✓

# The impact of colonial education and christianization

- ✓ ..is a paradox that Sami themselves label the spiritual practices as paganism today and that they do it with strength, while few outsiders raise their voice in that respect (JT Solbakk 2007: 6.)
- ✓ But what outsiders often do, is to blame the Sami for not living according to their expectation on indigenous peoples as “environmentalists” who live in a close and harmonious relationship with the nature

# Dont take more than we need proverb

- ✓ Sharing and modesty – “li váldit eanetgo dárbbáša”
- ✓ Salmon from last year
- ✓ Collecting Chaga (medicine plant)
- ✓ Reflected in rituals and cultural practices guiding how to relate to nature, seeing nature not as an object for humankind, as a never ending resource ,but more as a living source to care for, respect and to be thankful towards.
- ✓ These direct for living a SUSTAINABLE way of life



- ✓ The underlying concern is the collective principle - that we are relationally dependent on each other, both as humans between each other and as humans and nature.



# **We do not take more than we need!**

- ✓ Grandfather walks with his grandson on the their land, and he shows the meadows and tells how he was the one who cleared this land, and how now has taken down all of the fences on the property.
- ✓ The grandson becomes very upset, argues about their ownership to this land. But the grandfather explains that since nobody in the family wants to continue to cultivate or use the land- he wants:
- ✓ “nature to be allowed to take over again and the traces of mankind's labor to thus vanish. I only borrowed the land for as long as I needed it," the grandfather said (Balto 2006: 98).

# To ask for permission –bivdit!

Term Bivdit- to catch/hunt, but also to ask for  
Still today appears in some rituals;

- ✓ someone pours coffee from their cups into the fire (libation, offering)
- ✓ ask for permission to set up a fireplace on the land
- ✓ ask for permission to build a house on a certain place
- ✓ They ask the spirits; according to the traditional Sámi pre-Christian beliefs (by priests, missionaries labelled as religion), the world was permeated by spirits (hálddit).
- ✓ The tight link between nature and man was and still is obvious in their thinking. According to Oskal humans could only be successful in making their living if they cooperated with the natural forces (see: Oskal 1005, 110, 115 )

# The legends - ethical guiding

- There are richness of stories and legends to guide children/people how they should behave towards living beings.
- A well-known is about the chudes and the spider. Grandparents were often the traditional teachers and many of us who have heard it from them, we never dare to kill a spider
- The ancestral root “Máddu” of animals and living creatures is watching over and protecting all his/hers descendants. To meet Máddu means you are confronted with what you have done to the smallest beings in your life, example frog, ants, wasp...
- These teaches that all are related – what we do to them we do to ourselves ...



# Lessons to learn ...

- ✓ The recognition of TEK is dependent on whether the traditional teachings are practiced and passed on to new generations or not..
- ✓ If the “society” do not value or find TEK relevant for the future survival, then it does not make sense to keep on practicing and transferring it
- ✓ These changes hand in hand with the effects of the colonization of the minds of Sami people over hundreds of years, threatens the Sami TEK and the ways of practicing them

# Johan Turi 1910 «An Account of the Sami

- Sami call their dwelling places duovdagat
- Say that they are beautiful and good dwellings for the reindeer
- Sometimes the places are so beautiful that they smile and when people are happy and everything is fine then all the places are smiling too.
- But when someone is sad and mourning then the landscape, stones and trees and the whole world cry (1987: 80).



# The Sámi way of life; Áillohaš:



«How I respect the old  
Sámi way of life  
That was true love of  
nature where nothing was  
wasted where human  
were part of nature»

«take a stone in your hand  
and keep it there  
until you can hear its heart  
beating «

## Concluding remarks ..

- ✓ This paper shows how Sami TEK has an ideology for a how to manage and relate to nature and natural resources in a sustainable way
- ✓ The aim is not to compare Sami TEK with western approaches, but it is obvious that it differs from the surrounding societies' way of management
- ✓ The principle that we should not take more than we need represents an alternative world-view to the one where humans are the rulers and masters of nature, which has led to extreme ways of extracting and exploitations of nature and natural resources.



## Concluding remarks..

- ✓ And to make clear; the closeness, and respectful relationship to nature and other living beings is not developed because Sami are more “nature lovers” or more environmentalists than other people.
- ✓ But because their ways of living has been dependent on nature and natural resources up to our days.
- ✓ It has been necessary to keep the sensitive relationship to the nature, to listen, to communicate even with the landscapes in order to live in a sustainable way to secure the future living of both humans and all living beings, even “things”.

## Some concluding remarks

- ✓ Sámi ancestral knowledge has been and still remains rooted in people's everyday lives as an integrated part of a social environment and in close communion with the natural world
- ✓ and has given strategies for the ways of life that secure the sustainable continuity of survival in these Arctic areas
- ✓ Question is how can this be made relevant and valuable for management of nature and natural resources today?
- ✓ The obvious ignorance and disparagement towards STEK in the education system, lacking even in the Sami schools threatens the STEK

# Challenge;

## Good practices to transfer STEK today

### Western teaching –School way

- ✓ Verbal instructions on what to do or not
- ✓ Efficiency with direct methods -moralizing
- ✓ Rational – not emotional
- ✓ Results: not really committed

### Traditional teaching –Sami way

- ✓ Impact from participating in ceremonies, rituals: embodied knowledge
- ✓ Storytelling - good situations, not forced, but not necessarily easy
- ✓ Awakening commitment, curiosity, fun and,
- ✓ responsibility, through emotional engagement, identity development
- ✓ Results; value creation, love to the land, language, TEK ...

# STEK and the well-being of societies

- ✓ Inga Maria Mulk discusses the well-being of Sámi society, stating that this well-being is reliant on a harmonious balance between the people and the environment.
- ✓ Mulk also connects this well-being with the capacity to take care of the relationship via social structures and practices, including spiritual practices Inga Marie Mulk 1994: 127-128



# The suffering result of colonization

The reason that Indigenous people in North America suffer disproportionate levels of violence, illness and poverty, and unhappy and unhealthy lives;

- ✓ is not from a lack of recognition of their self-determination,
- ✓ or that they have not or can not succeed based on mainstream standards.

The central source of oppression derives from a;

- ✓ broadly affecting spiritual crisis caused by the dispossession and disconnection of First Nations people from their lands,
- ✓ alienation from Indigenous ways of life, and the normalization of this injustice in mainstream society and increasingly even within First Nations society itself.

The politics of recognition: a colonial groundhog day discussion paper

Prepared for chiefs of Ontario PREPARED BY: G.Taiaiake Alfred and Erin Michelle Tomkins august 25, 2010

# TEK –four interrelated levels, Berkes

