ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENT TERRITORIALITIES: POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION OF THE SAMI HOMELAND

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ABSTRACT

Territoriality is approached in this paper by examining the changing relationship between the small group of indigenous Sami people and the nation-states in which they reside. The Sami have for centuries been a geographically peripheral northern group, but they have nevertheless experienced altering conditions of state border demarcations and nationalistic ideologies. The flexible system of Sami villages, *siidas*, has had a fundamentally different approach to territoriality than the states with their fixed boundary conception. This difference is discussed by using three case studies from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The examination indicates that it is possible for these different territorialities to meet and co-exist if the state's interests are not compromised. Furthermore, it suggests that the northern region-building processes, such as Barents and Northern Dimension, could benefit from such a flexible territoriality approach.

Key words: Northern Europe, territoriality, states, minorities, the Sami people

RELATIONS OF TERRITORIALITY

The relationship among states, indigenous peoples and territoriality is often seen as one-dimensional: the formation of the nation-state pushes aside any conflicting understanding of territoriality. There are, however, cases that suggest otherwise and prove that this is not the sole truth. In this paper, I will discuss the small group of indigenous people of Northern Europe, the Sami (sometimes called the Lapps), and their relationship towards territoriality in general, and state territoriality in particular.[1] In essence, the focus of this discussion is on the differences between the state-centric and the Sami understanding of territoriality.

This paper is part of a larger research project, which concentrates on the economic, social and political development in several European border-regions. The aim of this sub-project is to scrutinise the contemporary development initiatives between the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden and Finland) and North Western Russia, and the prospects for region building in this corner of Europe. The assessment of the differences of the Sami and state territorialities is used as a tool in discussing the possible meeting points and obstacles between the northern region building and the interests of the states involved in this process. One common denominator in this northern area is the historical Sami settlement.

Today, the Sami share their traditional areas with ethnic Norwegians, Swedes, Finns and Russians (see Map 1). In the case of the Nordic countries, the idea of state territoriality has not remained static – strictly state-centred – throughout the centuries, but has tolerated the Sami territoriality and, to some degree, negotiated the conflicts arising from this difference.

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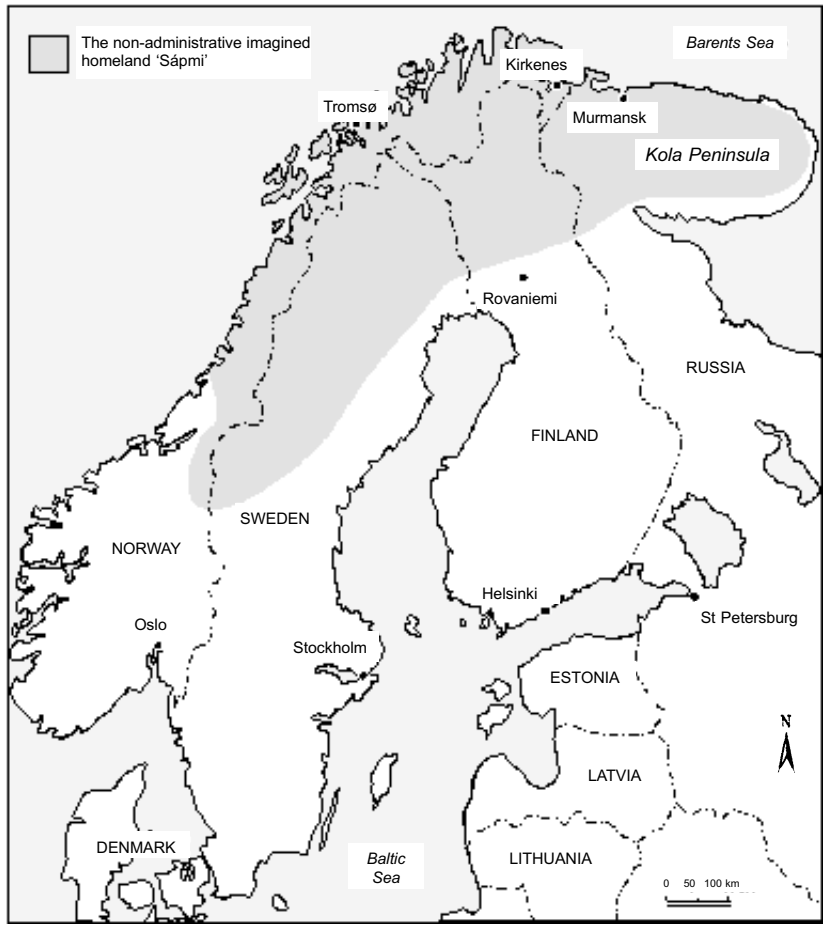


Map 1. *The European North with the imagined Sami homeland Sápmi formed by the geography of the Sami language.*[2]

The examination of this relationship suggests that state territoriality has not always been assimilative and oppressive towards indigenous peoples, and when it has been, it has functioned as fuel to counter forces and triggered resistance. To illustrate this, I elaborate on three cases concerning the Sami people from three different periods of states and their development.

Among these periods of states are first, the peace between Sweden-Finland and Denmark-Norway in 1751 and the special agreement concerning the Sami, the Lapp Codicil (*Lappecodicillen*). Second, the period of aggressive assimilation from the mid nineteenth century onwards spawning the gradual development of the Pan-Sami movement.[3] Third, the more recent developments of the twentieth century: the notorious Alta struggle concerning the building of a hydroelectric dam in Northern Norway in the late 1970s and the effects of the European Union membership of Sweden and Finland since the mid 1990s. The latter mentioned developments of the twentieth century have been closely related with the international upheaval in and recognition of minority rights.

This examination shows that the Sami people are an example of an indigenous people and a minority, which has been able to face the changing forms of state territoriality and negotiate their interests rather well with the

nation-states. Additionally, their recent strategies have affected some state-centred practices and forms of co-operation to a degree where it would be justified to suggest that the Sami territoriality has brought new elements to inter-state territoriality. This has been supported by some of the general international changes and trends such as the emphasis on cross-border co-operation and supra-national economic areas as well as by the fact that the Sami have not recently been considered a threat to the existence and unity of the nation-states.

DIFFERENT TERRITORIALITIES – LIMITED SPACE FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Territoriality can in general be defined as a means to organise social relations. An often seen quote comes from Sack (1986, p. 19), stating that territoriality is an 'attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.' Territory, on the other hand, is the realisation or image of this strategy.

In twentieth-century academic writing, some researchers have taken territoriality to denote straightforwardly state practices and states' geographical domains, while others have seen the concept of 'territory' in itself as worthy of attention. The former practice is more common among political scientists of the realist school, whereas representatives of the latter include many (political) geographers. The difficulty of discussing boundaries, territoriality, nation and identity without referring to the concept of (nation-)state reflects the deeply rooted state-centricity of our thinking, but also the fact that 'state is everywhere'.

Our understanding of the state and its instruments has legitimised the need for state-centricity in transboundary communication.[4] John Agnew (1994) has captured this in his metaphor of the 'territorial trap', by which he refers to the fixation of geographical imagination, where states are seen as universal units of territorial space, the domestic and foreign are separate categories, and where societies are subordinate to states. The state is simply taken for granted as the unit for sociospatial organisation and society defined in terms of the state is seen as 'natural'. However, there does exist territoriality that is separate from the state-centric approach. The development of this predates both modern administrative territoriality and its full application to states' domains. Several indigenous and nomadic geographical practices provide evidence of 'negotiated territoriality'.

It is an often heard misconception that indigenous peoples do not have a sense of territoriality.[5] In such rhetoric, indigenous peoples are usually taken as synonyms for nomadic peoples, who also have their own territorial practices. The fact that indigenous peoples' territorial practices have differed from the modern state-centric territoriality should not be confused with the claim that indigenous peoples do not act or have not acted territorially.[6]

The Sami territoriality was well developed and complex, although it differed from the now familiar, exclusive state-centred territoriality in several ways. The Sami territoriality was historically based on the *siida* (or Lapp village) system, which was more flexible, diffuse and negotiable than the fixed territoriality of the states (Eriksson 1997, pp. 82–84; Forrest 1998, pp. 24–28; Helander 1999, pp. 17–19; Sillanpää 1994, p. 38). The basic structure of *siida* predates the development of reindeer herding (practised for about the last 500 years), thus the former not being a result of the latter. The *siida* system was structured, until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by the adaptation of the hunting culture to the land and its resources. The Sami area was divided into *siida* territories, with their own resources, administration, social system and customary rules for resource use (Helander 1999, pp. 17–18). In order to establish ground for the further discussion, some elementary features of *siida* territoriality are introduced.

Siida social structure was flexible concerning group membership, and the nuclear unit of the *siida* was a family (Helander 1999, p. 18; Forrest 1998, p. 24). Kaisa Korpijaakko-Labba's (1989, 1994) studies in the field of legal history have shown that these families within a *siida* had their own rights to a certain land, i.e. the Sami system combined private and collective ownership to the land. It has to be

remembered that the concept of land ownership in the northern parts of the Nordic countries had a different meaning in the seventeenth century than it has today. At that time, land was the primary source of livelihood and the prerequisite for living, not a piece of property measured monetarily.[7] These 'Lapp tax lands' were passed on within a family, and the families paid taxes for these lands. Further, the Lapp ownership of these lands was documented in the official land registers.

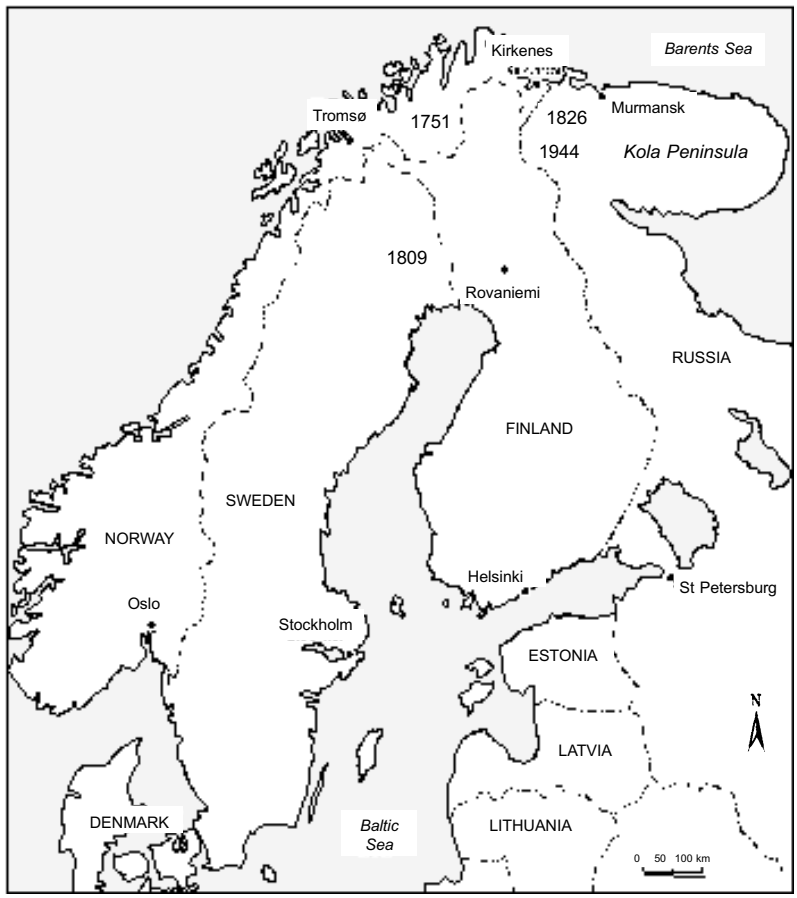
The size of a *siida* Lapp village could range from a couple of families to 20–30 families. The *siida* nomadic cycle was formed by the seasonal migration and the geographical extent of the *siida*, thus covering a broad area and a variety of ecological zones. The major divisions between *siida* territories were visible in the physical landscape (such as mountains or rivers). These divisions were thus not linear boundaries but rather denoted the transition from one type of area to another, and it was possible for more than one *siida* to occupy a single territory or share boundary zone territories. The simple fact that this territoriality has collided with the exclusive and fixed state territoriality has subjected the Sami to assimilation during different periods of time.

Continuity between the traditional *siida* structure and the modern Sami herding areas is visible as the established modern herding districts in the three Nordic states followed the boundaries of existing *siida* groups. Thus, these boundaries became fixed and part of state-centric modern practices rather than serving the ever-changing dynamic needs of the *siidas*. Herding boundaries were redrawn due to border changes or to reduce herder-settler conflicts, or later, to serve as part of state herding management strategies (Forrest 1998, pp. 25–26). Much of the contemporary Sami critique towards these practices deals with the effects of the remote, state-centric governance of the herding industry.

The contradiction between these two types of territoriality has also lead to a situation where the nation-states have neglected the Sami rights to land and water. The Nordic states have later viewed the Sami as nomadic, thus having no ownership of their land (Forrest 1998, p. 51; Korpijaakko 1989; Korpijaakko-Labba 1994, p. 53). In Finland, for example, the system of Lapp taxes was abolished in 1924, after which the Sami have not been documented as the rightful owners of their ancestral lands (Aikio 1994, p. 40). After this, it was rather simple for the state to claim the ownership of the lands in the northernmost areas of Finland.

Most often, when the indigenous system of land use and ownership has differed from the modern Western or state-centric practice, the result has been the state acquisition of land. The traditional Sami livelihood, reindeer herding, was viewed as backwards and modern forms of land use (agriculture) were favoured. In addition to these consequences of different understandings of territoriality, the demarcation of nation-state borders has artificially cut the Sami settlement and herding areas. Where Sami livelihoods were tolerated, modern systems of administration and governance have been introduced to control and regulate them. These practices have also had a territorial aspect to them.

The following three case examples highlight the relationship, influences and conflicts between the state and Sami territorialities through different periods of time. Each of them brings to the fore a different aspect of the co-existence of these different ideologies, shedding light on this complex and multi-dimensional majority-minority relationship. The presentation of each case is concise and concentrates on the most important factors of state/Sami colliding understandings of territoriality. Although the cases are presented in chronological order, there are time gaps between these, and they should not be taken as linear development from one to another. Furthermore, the Sami as citizens of the (now) three Nordic states and Russia have been subject to varying state policies. Even though the Nordic countries have close politico-historical ties, there are also several differences in national administrative practices and jurisdictions. Thus each presented case should be understood in its own context with limits to generalising them to all countries under scrutiny. Instead, these cases are discussed as examples to enable revealing the changes in the relationship of Sami and state territorialities.



Map 2. *Interstate borders dividing the Sami homeland: 1751 border treaty between Denmark(–Norway) and Sweden (–Finland); 1809 border treaty between Sweden and Russia(–Finland); 1826 border treaty between Norway and Russia (–Finland); 1944 Finnish–Soviet border adjustment.*[8]

TERRITORIALITY EXAMINED (1): FLEXIBILITY AND THE LAPP CODICIL 1751

The Lapp Codicil, often referred to as the Magna Carta of the Sami people, was a special addition to the border treaty between Denmark (including present-day Norway) and Sweden (including present-day Finland) in 1751 (see Map 2). With this border treaty, the two states agreed on a permanent border between them, which – without the Codicil – would have also meant the division of the traditional Sami grazing lands between the two countries and a stop to the Sami traditional use of land.

Prior to 1751, the Sami of this border area paid taxes to both the Swedish and Danish crowns, but otherwise were under the Swedish ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction. Additionally, the Sami in the Inari area of Finnish Lapland had to pay taxes to yet another collector, the Russian Czar (Pedersen 1996, p. 76; Thuen 1995, p. 28).

In the border demarcation negotiations, the representatives of Denmark–Norway and Sweden–Finland respected the fact that the Sami groups migrated considerable distances with their reindeer, over the planned borderlines. This recognition of the Sami interests led to the establishment of the Lapp Codicil,

which secured the right of the Sami to continue seasonal migration over the national border.

The Lapp Codicil was not merely an agreement concerning the rights to cross borders while herding reindeer. It also gave instructions on the factors to be taken into account when clarifying the citizenship of the Sami, and regulated their use of land and water in another country (including sea fisheries) (Pedersen 1996, p. 76). As Pedersen (p. 78) stresses, the Codicil benefited not only the reindeer herding Sami, but also the Sami who searched for grazing lands or who were involved with salmon fishing.[9]

The Lapp Codicil granted the Sami full neutrality in case of war between Sweden–Finland and Denmark–Norway. Further, it institutionalised the internal legal system among the Sami through a Sami court. In this respect, the Codicil defined Sami rights as well as institutions on a broad basis. As Eriksson (1997, p. 85) has pointed out, the political and symbolic agenda of the Codicil was to 'preserve the Lappish nation', but despite all good intentions it nevertheless represented and imposed new regulatory and control mechanisms upon the Sami. Yet, the Codicil was rather unique in defining the transborder territorial rights of a non-state group.

The writing and signing of the Lapp Codicil was proof of the willingness of the eighteenth century Nordic states to recognise and appreciate an essential part of the Sami existence, their traditional livelihoods and the Sami way of practising them. In doing this, the states also came to recognise the Sami understanding of territoriality to the extent of including this feature, its manifestations and expressions, in an important, binding interstate document.

TERRITORIALITY EXAMINED (2): INFLEXIBILITY AND ASSIMILATION FROM THE MID 1800s

The sequence of events between the mid nineteenth century and the Second World War was a time of national consciousness building and strengthening in the Nordic countries. Nation, territory and people were united under slogans of homogeneity and national iconography. National romance, increasing geopolitical tensions in the Nordic areas and fear of foreign expansion as well as vulgar Darwinist trends affected the Sami in many ways. For the Sami, the nineteenth century spelled partition.

In Norway, these developments led to an overt campaign to eradicate the Sami culture and language (Magga 1994, p. 44; Thuen 1995, p. 29). The Sami language was forbidden at schools (Sami was officially forbidden from 1898 to 1959) and economic sanctions were imposed on those who refused to embrace the ethnic Norwegian lifestyle. For example, after 1902 land was sold only to those who could speak Norwegian and used it in their daily activities. This period also witnessed the supported pioneer settlement activities of ethnic Norwegians, the state of Norway claiming the former Sami lands as well as support for agriculture as a more 'progressive' livelihood.

The Norwegianisation of the Sami impacted their language, livelihoods, and relationship to the land as well as the self-respect of this indigenous people.[10] The Sami were considered inferior and treated accordingly. In response, the Sami did their best to hide the stigma of the Sami identity (Magga 1994, p. 45). The Norwegian assimilationist policies of this time did very little to respect Sami territoriality. In the southernmost areas of Sami settlement, the state acquired their lands and in the north the Sami found themselves competing for land with ethnic Norwegian settlers.

The demarcation of the new state borders also brought negative consequences on the Sami. With the establishment of the coastland border between Norway and Russia in 1826, the last overlapping taxation area disappeared (Eriksson 1997, p. 86). The Skolt Sami group was affected as they were divided by the boundary (see Map 2).[11] Gradually also the Skolt Sami transboundary rights were compromised. The Russian border closure of 1852 meant the ceasing of reindeer migration over the (now) Finnish–Norwegian border (Pedersen 1996, p. 81). The Sami residing in Finland were prohibited from crossing the boundary to Norway for sea fishing and hunting. As Pedersen has aptly remarked, 1852 marked a

drastic change for the Sami and their functional ecological adaptation, which had been developed over many generations.

Later, during the Second World War, the Skolt Sami were unwittingly thrust into the middle of an inter-state crisis. During the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939–40, the Skolt Sami were evacuated to Norway, the USSR and Finland. Petsamo home of the Skolt Sami, was surrendered to the Soviet Union in 1944, leading to the separation of many Skolt families. In 1949, the Skolts began to receive new state-financed housing in the Finnish Inari area, where the state designated regions for the Skolts (Lumijärvi 1996, p. 127). The results of Skolt resettlement were considerable. They no longer had large, fertile lands to utilise, they were forced to adapt to modern livelihoods, and many were separated from family members residing on the opposite side of the border.

The actions from the mid 1800s onward clearly demonstrate that the Sami had become an undesirable element in the society ('lower class'), a group not quite fitting in with the national self-image. In cases of cold or hot war between the states, the territorial and other interests of the Sami were forced to give way to national interests. The period broadly between 1850 and 1950 was the time for open Sami oppression. This was also the period marked by the first Pan-Sami attempts for organisation. Organisation along common Sami interests was seen as the only solution for this small group to promote its interests in the world of the nation-states. Thus, the states had caused the Sami partition, fuelling Sami attempts to regain their unity.

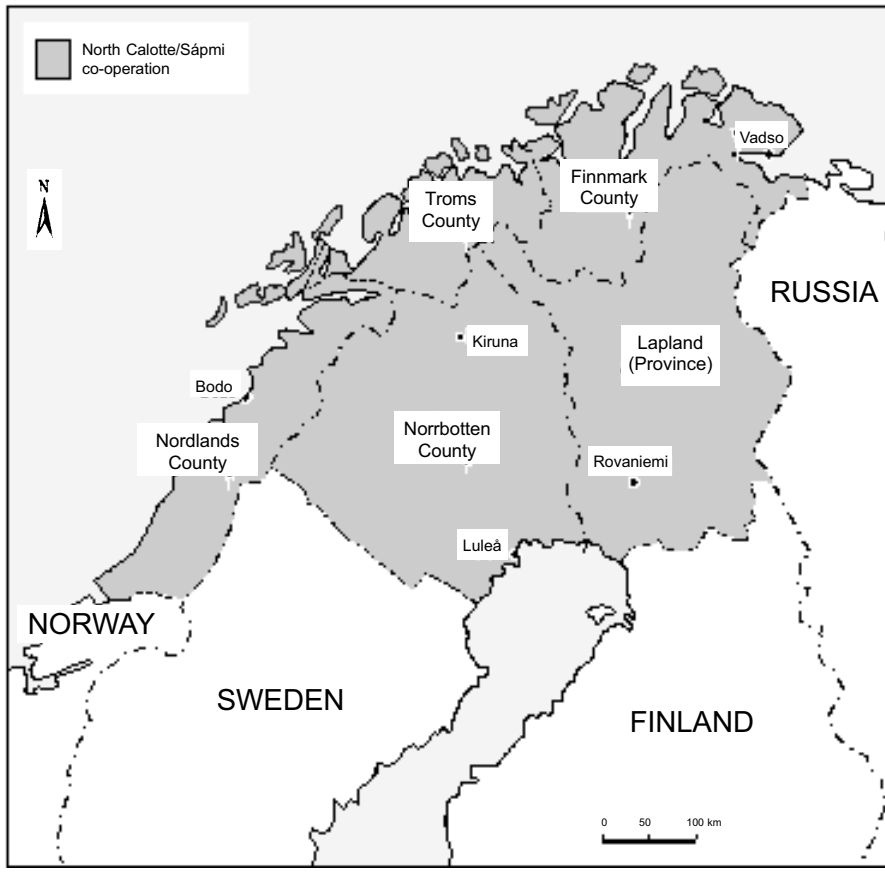
TERRITORIALITY EXAMINED (3): STATE AUTHORITY AND THE SUPRA-NATIONAL COMMUNITY

The 1960s and 1970s sparked an international awakening and discussion of minority rights, and during the 1970s and 1980s, over 1,000 international indigenous organisations were established (Corbett 1996, p. 40). The Sami have learned to use international recognition and organisational visibility for both their own and other indigenous peoples' causes.[12] All scales of co-operation, from local to global, seem vital to strengthening recognition and visibility. The Sami have been able to gain strength for their ambitions through effective networking.

Some indirect actions by nation-states have also triggered improvements for minority rights. Such was the struggle associated with the building of the hydroelectric dam on the Alta River in Norway from 1978 to 1981. The national governmental decision to build the dam faced strong opposition from the Sami, who feared negative consequences on their settlements, fishing and herding. The battle gained large media attention outside Norwegian borders, and the Sami activists were accompanied by environmental activists (on the Alta case, see Thuen 1995, pp. 44–47; Eriksson 1997, pp. 99–104; Sillanpää 1994, pp. 91–92). The Sami tools against the building project included demonstrations, hunger strikes, negotiations and marches as well as roadblocks and human walls to prevent machinery from entering the river area.

Although the dam was ultimately constructed and the Norwegian state won the battle, the process also had positive consequences for the Sami. The Alta conflict is generally understood as the main impetus for the establishment of the Norwegian Sami Parliament in 1989.[13] The Alta case also demonstrated the influence of Pan-Sami unity in the form of transboundary support: the project was understood as a common threat to the Sami of all countries, not only as a conflict between the Norwegian state and the local Sami of the dam area.

In addition to the international recognition of minority rights, other factors have also worked for the benefit of the Sami. Curiously, also European Union policies, which tend to downplay the role of nation-states, have contributed to the Sami. An example of this is the Community Initiatives Programme of the EU, such as the Interreg Programme aiming to promote cross-border co-operation. During the previous EU Structural Funds Programme period, the Sami managed the 'Sápmi' (Samiland) sub-programme within the Interreg North Calotte Programme of 1996–99 (see Map 3). The aim of this programme was to develop Sami industries and culture according to the terms of the Sami. Consequently, the



Map 3. *Interreg IIA – Nordkalotten (North Calotte)/Sápmi (Samiland).*

selection process of the financed measures and projects was decided by a council comprised of Sami representatives.

The Interreg Programme was welcomed by the Sami, and its results considered positive but the effects of the national borders seemed to have hampered the Sami economic cross-border contacts. The long presence of differing regulations, tax systems and border controls had efficiently partitioned the Sami into national Nordic categories (Karppi 2000, p. 235; Mennola *et al.* 1999, pp. 39–40), and it would take more than one Interreg Programme to heal this separation. Another factor lessening the success of the Interreg Programme involves the programme's financial processes, which made it difficult for small Sami organisations and firms to participate. Interreg Programme's operations, as well as many other EU programmes, allocate funding on a reimbursement basis, forcing applicants to outlay resources outright. This was often impossible or difficult due to the already limited resources, stifling many promising initiatives.

In all, international development of minority rights and media attention – as in the Alta case – can increase minority latitude. In the case of the European Union Programme example, the increased space for the Sami was of course a side-product of the EU objectives of downplaying the influence of national borders, and had very little to do with the Sami *per se*. Regardless of their original agenda, programmes such as Interreg can serve in building yet another layer and forum

of cross-border co-operation among the Sami. Although these programmes and their geographical areas of operation are often detached from any former sense of state or Sami territoriality (rather they tend to decrease the influences of the former), they can function in political and functional re-establishment of Sami unity. The national boundaries have never been part of Sami territoriality and the gradual diminishing of their value, in most cases, could be expected to serve not only Sami interests but also the development of local communities on each side of the border.

REFLECTIONS

From historical examination, it is evident that the relation between the state and the Sami territoriality has depended highly on the development of the state. In other words, it is the international context, but also domestic developments, that have affected this relationship. The Sami, as a small indigenous minority, have been able to negotiate their interests in periods where the general international interest has supported the Sami needs, as demonstrated by the first and the third case. Correspondingly, when the interests of the states have been in conflict with Sami traditions and territoriality, the Sami minority has been forced to concede, as illustrated by the second example.

Now, at the beginning of the new century, traditional, flexible Sami territoriality could well have something to lend to northern region-building in Northern European. The states have already agreed on certain common goals for the development of the 'Northern Dimension', of which the Barents Region is one geographical part. The next step would be to foster daily cross-border contacts and collaboration, something the Sami practised for generations. As long as northern region-building and co-operation does not stand against the interests of the states involved, such endeavours could not only be tolerated but also supported. The European Union Barents and Kolarctic programmes are examples of such win-win region-building and co-operation efforts, as was the institutional establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) in the beginning of the 1990s.

With increased legal and desirable cross-border activities, the difficulty lies in controlling criminal activity. The Lapp Codicil is an exemplary case in point of the ability of the states to reach agreement on the protection of their interests, while simultaneously facilitating natural movement, economic activity as well as social contacts across borderlines. It still seems that one of the most crucial issues of these territorialities relations is the necessity to balance the transboundary needs and possibilities of this peripheral northern area with the interests and resources of the states.

Notes

1. The estimates of the number of the Sami differ greatly, but figures between 60,000 and 100,000 are often presented. Most Sami live in Norway and the number decreases the more east one moves on the map. The Sami languages belong to the Finno-Ugrian language group, and there are several Sami dialects or languages. The largest of them is North Sami, which is spoken in Norway, Sweden and Finland. 'Sami' refers to an ethnic group, whereas the term 'Lapp' indicates traditional property ownership. The term 'Lapp' is considered somewhat derogatory.
2. The idea of Sami unity as one people started to develop institutionally from the beginning of the twentieth century, with the concept of Sápmi (the Sami homeland) being one of its political manifestations. There are other nationalistic Sami symbols as well, for example national anthem, national day and flag. Thus, the Sami have borrowed some of their nationalistic iconography from the states' toolkit.
3. It should be noted, however, that there were also previous processes of assimilation involving the Sami people. One of the most influential forces was the church and the introduction of the Christian belief system to the Sami from the seventeenth century onwards.
4. These include, for example, the Weberian monopoly of violence within a state's realm, unity of the state and a nation, as well as national borders separating these entities. From the perspective of region-building, see Karppi (forthcoming, 2002).

5. 'Tell them we don't just wander' a Sami herder implored ethnographer Robert Paine (1994, p. 11). The 'wandering claim' has been used in legitimising the acquisition of Sami lands by the states in the Nordic countries. On nomads and modern territoriality, see Thomas Hylland Erikssen (1991).
6. For an interesting account on aspects of Sami territoriality, see Forrest (forthcoming, 2002), and Lehtola (forthcoming, 2002) on Sami *siidas* and the states.
7. Korpijaakko-Labba (1994) has shown that, despite this understanding of land ownership, there were actual cases where a Sami had sold his land, although this was very rare. The documented existence of this has impact nevertheless on the Sami claims of land title today. Korpijaakko-Labba (p. 59) is very careful in emphasising that although this phenomenon of land sale among the Sami existed, it is different from claiming that is was common.
8. Important border treaties partitioning the Sami homeland (the present-day states belonging to those of the mentioned border treaties). For more details, see Eriksson (1997) and Pedersen (1996). Finland was ceded to Russia by Sweden in 1809 after being part of Sweden for seven centuries, and declared itself independent in 1917, whereas Norway was part of Denmark from the late 1400s until 1814 and became independent from a union with Sweden in 1905.
9. The Sami collected a special type of hay or grass to serve as 'shoe hay', which was stuffed inside the shoes made of reindeer fur skin. Grass functioned as insulation and kept feet warm even if the shoes became damp.
10. The Sami were not the only group in Norway to be subjected to Norwegianisation policies. The loyalty of the Quains (*kvens*), ethnic Finns who had migrated and settled to the northernmost areas of Norway, was also questioned.
11. The Skolt Sami belong to the group of Eastern Sami, together with the Inari Sami and the Kola Sami. The division between Eastern and Western Sami is often drawn according to the basic linguistic division among the Sami languages or dialects.
12. The Sami are active in, for example, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP).
13. *Sametinget, Samediggi*. The Sami Parliaments in Finland and Sweden were established in 1973 and 1993, respectively.

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