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**The Mobile Culture Library**

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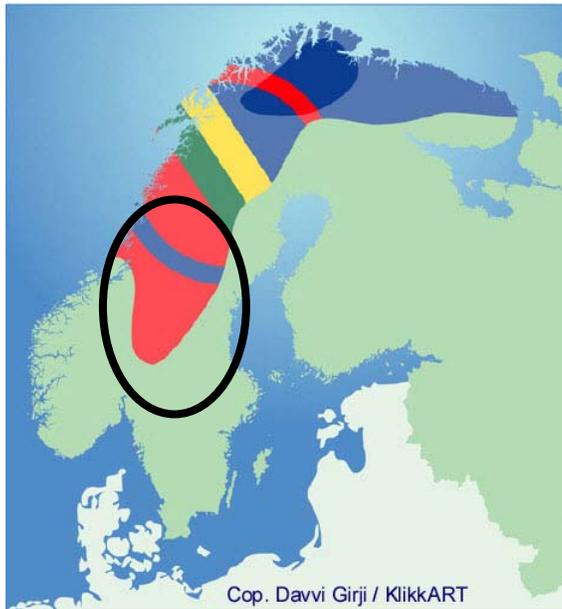
Nordland County Library, Norway

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### **1. Position – geographically and in the world of libraries**

The Library services offered to Samis in Norway are provided by the Sami Special Library (localized with the Sami Assembly in Karasjok), by the public libraries, and by the Sami mobile libraries. The County of Nordland has two Sami mobile libraries: the Lule Sami Bookmobile and the South Sami Mobile Culture Library.

The South Sami region is divided into three parts of roughly the same size. Gærjah Sijti Jarngeste covers the northernmost part of the South Sami region, which is south of the Arctic Circle. This area is about the size of Denmark.



- Area of Coverage

The South Sami Mobile Culture Library runs a regular service in 10 municipalities in Nordland and North Trøndelag, serving approximately 600 borrowers distributed along 93 stops.

Sami traditions do not necessarily restrict themselves within national borders. We are aware of an unfulfilled need for library services to South Samis who either live permanently or temporarily (due to reindeer husbandry) on the other side of the Swedish border. The South Sami Mobile Culture Library has carried out several Swedish-Norwegian projects where the Swedish County of Västerbotten was included in the service. An evaluation made by the County of Västerbotten Library concludes that cooperation between Norway and Sweden concerning Mobile Library services should be continued.

The legal authority for our activities is found in international and national legislation:

The ILO Convention No.169, the Norwegian Constitution's § 110A, the Sami Act, Norwegian Library legislation, regulations and also through the established administrative practice in counties and municipalities.

- The concept of the Mobile Culture Library

We have found the concept Mobile Culture Library to be more accurate than defining it as a pure bookmobile service. This is our definition: " – the bus will act as a unifying element of culture where it stops, and in venues where Samis gather. Through outreaching work, imparting, media, exhibitions and human resources it aims to preserve and revitalize the Sami language and culture."

The Mobile Culture Library, GSJ, began its work in January of 1995, more than 10 years ago. The bus is owned by the County Council of Nordland and

is operated by the County of Nordland Library. Currently the bus employs 3 people, and is stationed at Sijti Jarnge – the Sami Culture Centre in Hattfjelldal. From the outset and until now we have had over 150,000 media loans of all types, conveying the Sami language and culture by actively seeking out the users.

The County of Nordland Library and Sijti Jarnge typically own the media, but some is also deposited from other institutions, e.g. the Sami Special Library.

- A peculiar operation

We loan books, audio books, videos, CDs and DVDs. A large part of our loans are of media in the Sami language. We loan many books for children and youth, and books on Sami matters in Norwegian and Swedish, as well as literature commonly found also in other libraries and bookmobiles.

Many of the books requested by our customers are available in very few copies, and it is not uncommon for all the copies to be out with our borrowers. With a mobile library covering such great distance and long intervals between visits, it can often be difficult to recollect the borrowed materials when due, and this presents a challenge, especially with deposited materials. It is also worth noting that it is not uncommon for the borrowers to sub lend the materials, meaning that they pass it on to neighbours, relatives and friends to enjoy. Subsequently, loans are sometimes way overdue. The owner library will then sometimes discard the book and let us keep the deposited copy. The libraries we work closely with have over time achieved an insight and understanding of our particular library operation.

## **2. Key Definitions in the Sami Community**

*Sijte*: - a Sami working community, the areas of which can go beyond the borders of municipalities, counties and countries. A reindeer husbandry sijte consists of the practitioners and their family, permanent residents and friends who help with the work in one way or another. Most of the permanent residents do not consider themselves Sami, but they still belong to the sijte they are involved in.

*Sami (on the electoral roll)*: - person aged 18 or above who considers him/herself to be Sami, and has a great-grandparent who speaks Sami. (From the Sami Act).

*Maadtoe*: - the extensive kinship of the individual Sami.

*Duodje*: - practitioners of traditional Sami handicraft.

## **3. Our target groups**

The target audiences for the Mobile Culture Library's service are the people who fit the definition of sijte members, including children and youth. It is important to point out that only a minority of the sijte members are involved in reindeer husbandry, which is the traditional Sami trade.

The guide rule is to stop where there are Sami borrowers, but once the bus is at a stop, everybody – Samis and non-Samis alike – has the opportunity to borrow material.

In this balancing act, the Sami associations have joined in to help set the definitions for what users we should primarily focus on reaching out to in our operation.

The common knowledge about Samis among Norwegian and Swedish people is not great. Therefore it is important that everybody who interacts with a Sami family is given the opportunity to borrow literature on Samis. The Mobile Library covers a need for information that is of precious significance. Sami related media are important to the Samis. It enables them to find answers to their own questions about their Sami heritage in relation to themselves, and also to provide a book/video/CD that can be lent to a neighbour in order to create a greater awareness of the Sami culture. In other words, we define neighbours of sijte members to be included as a target group.

The largest target group is the children and youth. We visit kindergartens where sijte members want us to serve. We also visit schools that offer integration from the Sami schools in Snåsa and Hattfjelldal. The requests and wishes of sijte members are the basis also for these visits.

Another large group is made up of the elderly and ill in institutions. In addition, a number of people are in need of deacon services. In the event of death, divorce, and with illness and the subsequent economic issues inflicted, the MCL staff has on several occasions conveyed enquiries to the doctor, home care service, social services and other public services. This type of "immediate assistance" contributions has increased over the 10 years the bus has been in service.

The third major group is the people who practice Sami handicraft. They use the staff to get feedback on work they have done. They also need addresses for suppliers.

Another group who really are in need of a Sami mobile library are the organizations that conduct South Sami language classes. Classes are held at several levels, creating a need for a wide specter of books.

Certain "special areas", such as genealogy, have gained increased attention in recent years. There are Samis on both sides of the border with common ancestors and common culture, and the increase in genealogy seminars indicates that we have a large area that needs covering. The MCL staff has on several occasions contributed to reestablish lost contact between relatives, and in making connections in other areas.

#### **4. Why the need for a South Sami Mobile Culture Library?**

The Mobile Culture Library aims to preserve and revitalize the South Sami language and culture in our part of the region.

The concept of Mobile Culture Library covers Sami related media, Sami theme exhibitions on wheels, staff that speak South Sami, staff with qualifications in different areas of Sami culture and last but not least, a network of people in different Sami related areas.

The pressure of a majority culture and the suppression of the Sami language up until recently, have contributed to the traditional Norwegian library being a rather less visited place. Most of our adult customers have never even visited a library. When we started out, the elderly would often ask how much borrowing a book would cost? Upon hearing it was free, an old man on the Swedish side said: "You're either crazy, or you're rich."

The connections with the residents who help in the summer and winter land were and are part of the strengths of a sijte. In earlier days this covered the exchange of goods, art objects, work methods, labour force, commodities and information in general. In return, the residents were paid with a share in reindeer.

Today, the unification is in the struggle to survive in the primary trades. Problems with predators create alliances between the permanent residents and the Samis who keep reindeer.

## **5. What we do**

Only a fraction of the South Sami population masters the Sami language. The driver and librarian take an active part in language development by using it consistently in their work. We lend books and media, offer advice in choosing media, and convey reservations for remote loans.

Sub lending media has become a common occurrence in our work. We assist in organizing an internal distribution of books the customer has borrowed. Internal forwarding within some Sami fellowships (maadtoe) is a familiar phenomenon, a fragment of the old Sami ways of organizing the community. The responsibility of returning the borrowed media lies with the borrower. For instance, we lend media to sijte members in the Røros area, 700 km away, through the employees and pupils at the Sami School in Snåsa.

The bus brings along theme-based exhibitions that are changed every 3 months. These include themes such as tin wire works and pack saddling. In connection with these we liaise with human resources, such as retired reindeer herders, writers, joikers, duodje makers, Sami artists, Sami politicians and people who use the South Sami language. The items displayed in the exhibitons are borrowed from the Sami Museum in Snåsa and our host centre Sijti Jarnge in Hattfjelldal. Generously we are also lent utilities from private homes, and in addition the bus staff have contributed traditional items.

The evaluation report made by the County of Västerbotten Library says the following about the facilities provided by the South Sami Mobile Culture Library:

*"The South Sami Mobile Culture Library is more than just a lending library on wheels. It acts as a social institution and also as an important centre for information. Answering questions, giving advice and directions and acting as a*

*hub in the South Sami area, make up a large part of the work. Other important services are: finding complementing literature, images, gathering of information. They also give tips on lecturers and educators to the organizers of seminars and classes or various projects for developing the competence in the South Sami groupings.”*

Establishing contact between borrowers on different routes is a continuing effort, regardless of season and work hours. The same goes for the contact between suppliers and customers; the phone may ring late even on weekends.

## **6. "Optional services"**

Establishing meeting points within a sijte, where people with common interests are given a chance to meet up, requires ingenuity and the will to try and fail. In Rana, we set up a meeting point called "Boksjabben" ("The Book Plodder"). This venue captures the interest especially of the older generation, but it still took us 3 years to find a comfortable form and location. In the end we decided to meet in a roadside café, where the borrowers may also have a chance to socialize over dinner and coffee. Making connections between different groups of borrowers with common interests across the borders of sijte, municipalities, counties and countries, is another challenge we address.

In the Sami society there are several organizations. Many of these seek funds for certain causes. Our task has become to try and coordinate the classes and seminars that inquire for monetary support. This affects the choice of theme for our exhibitions, and lets us concentrate on a few subjects at a time. This effort has led to the establishment of networks using new technologies such as the Internet and SMS (text messages).

The staff has performed deacon services since the beginning in 1995. The Church of Norway in junction with the Sami Mission appointed a dedicated deacon for the Norwegian South Sami region in 2003. The deacon has an extensive mission, bearing in mind the needs that can be found within a geographical area of this size. The staff still see a need for advice and counselling, especially in connection with services offered by the municipalities (e.g. home care). In some places we have actually helped establish positive communication between individuals and the public authorities.

## **7. Target effect**

An important payoff in the trail of the Mobile Culture Library is that the users become more confident with their own identity, and so eventually dare live their lives as Sami without reservation.

Revitalizing Sami culture is not particularly easy when you live in a settlement where the majority culture dominates.



Gærjah Sijti Jarngeste with the Sami flag on the stern in combination with the Sami coloured decor is the most visible Sami institution in the South Sami region. Our customers who have the bus stop in their neighbourhood have expressed great positive improvements in relations with their neighbours. They no longer have to explain and defend every little thing to do with Sami.

## **8. Target result**

We wish to create a lasting factor of identity, a "town square" that can contribute to increased understanding of Sami culture and Sami language, both with the Samis themselves and equally with those who live next door.

Also, we will do what we can to create a positive attitude towards the Sami language in the municipality libraries in the 10 municipalities we visit. We do this by helping all kinds of library staff become more aware of where the Sami are described in the local history, and in which language; North, Lule or South Sami. The libraries in Norway are obliged to provide a library service for all of the nation's inhabitants, including the Samis. This is a somewhat ignored fact in our young kingdom.

The communities where the reindeer herders abide have the best conditions for preserving the culture. This traditional activity is still important for the culture today. We note that there is an awakening concerning the Sami language. In recent years a series of Sami language classes for beginners have been arranged. The South Sami language is a part of the Norwegian heritage, whether you like it or not.

## **9. A new bus**

I had planned to conclude this with asking you as readers of this paper to put in a word with your gods, in order to secure us the funds for a new bus through the state budget in autumn 2005. I will need to ask for a rain check instead, because in the revised national budget the Sami Assembly was granted the missing funds, NOK 2 million, for a new South Sami mobile library. So the Sami Mobile Culture Library will be on the road for at least another 10 years.

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Media = books, audio books, video, CD, CD-ROM	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999
<b>The S. Sami Mobile Culture Library</b>	15652	14633	15565	15 720	13 269
- Books for children and youth	2307	3545	3843	3 508	2 156
- Total lending of Sami media	1671	2655	1953	2 084	2 079
- Total lending in Sweden	5084	812	0	0	0
<b>Lending from the office, Sijti Jarnge</b>	418	350	321	298	243
- Books for children and youth	79	50	50	18	
- Total lending of Sami media	41	50	50	67	38
- Antiquarian books and microfilm viewed in the building by minoring/majoring students, genealogists and others.	170	50	50	57	25