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Approaching Sámi school history in Finland - Assimilation and empowerment

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Themes, questions

- An outline of Sámi school history in Finland 1930s to the present.
- What kind of narratives have been articulated in research on the Sámi school history?
- Ways forward/one additional angle to the Sámi school history.

Sources, theoretical starting points

- Research, Sámi school history, written both by Sámi and non-indigenous scholars.
- Main focus on historians
- Linguistic and pedagogical research on school and education.
- Dealt with as a *corpus*, the scholarly production on the theme.
- To create texts is action, which creates and forms new realities (Kristin Asdal).
- Jörn Rüsen: Narrative mobilizes the past in the way, which makes the past understandable and the future possible to form.
- *A critical narrative*: create distance from tradition, deemed unwanted, and point out a new better action for the future.
- *A genetical narrative* takes heed of the historical change as such, without normative grip to the change, and reflects on the need of the change in politics in tact with the actual historical change.

The school-institution in the Sámi domicile; 1930s-1940s

- One school where teaching is given in Sámi (Outakoski).
- Folk school (with dormitories)
- Still continuing catechist teaching (one debated issue of the Sámi school history in Finland).
- The nationalist-conformist and linguistically Finnish teaching does not reach all the pupils from the age-cohorts in the Sámi regions, a factor that sustained the command of Sámi language in some parts of the Sámi domicile and in some age-groups.
- Break in education during the war-time
- In principle: using the Sámi language in schools was never forbidden and developing it was possible and sometimes even articulated, but in practice nothing was done to arrange teaching in Sámi language and the initiatives to secure the Sámi educational rights were not put into effect.

1940s and 1950s

- 1940s: Folk school, with dormitories or home-quartering as a rule for children from peripheric parts of the Sámi domicile.
- School dormitories make full coverage of the education possible: Public sphere and media mostly positive to the education of the Sami, as well as to the dormitories.
- While dismantling policies of assimilation elsewhere in the Nordic countries, the Sámi pupils in Finland are faced with the period of most consistent exposition to assimilative forms of education, as whole age-cohorts receive full education.
- Period, when the cultural distance was at its' widest concerning the Sámi pupils from the Sami-speaking regions encountering the folk-school-institution with Finnish substance in teaching and curriculum (see Keskitalo, Paksuniemi, Nyysönen, Linkola, Turunen & McIntosh, Ennen ja nyt 3/2016)
- Creating a generation with defects in command over Sami languages.
- Sámi protests on the lacking cultural sensitivity of the school institution.

The School-institution in the Sámi region: 1960s and 1970s

- Beginnings of the dismantling of the dormitories
- Continuation of dormitory-quartering of the Sámi pupils
- The few Sámi teachers (e.g. Pekka Lukkari) working and teaching partially in Sámi, mostly in Finnish, but working on Sámi teaching material.
- Beginning of the Sámi protests against the dormitories and lacks of Sámi substance in school education and defects in teaching the Sámi language to pupils.
- First committees, with Sámi majority as experts begin to work on the education.
- The Sámi Delegation (est. 1973) begins to work on the matter.
- The aims and the Sámi Imperative: survival and development of Sámi culture and functional bi-lingualism.
- Real results from the 1980s onwards.
- A strong interest group appears: Sámi teachers, connecting the school-issue and the fate of Sámi languages and culture.

From 1980s onwards

- Dedicated and consistent work for language revitalization
- For Sámi education
- Defending its share in the education plans
- In and outside the Sámi home region.
- The Sámi Parliament has taken both administrative responsibility and continuing political responsibility in advocating improvements in education situation.
- The achievements: 1985: the school legislation secures the right to enjoy teaching in Sámi language. (the plan for teaching [opetussuunnitelma] still stresses the sustainment of the Finnish identity and Finnish culture and Sámi culture goes unmentioned).
- Greatest ethnopolitical achievement (in a «soft» interest-area, with less at stake to the Finnish state, and has not substituted the Finnish curriculum – the achievements in the field of Sámi teaching have taken place within the Finnish educational structures, the institutional change has not been potentially so radical as in resource management).

1990s

- Achievements: 1994 new teaching plan for the comprehensive school: the Sámi are acknowledged as indigenous people and the right of the children to grow into members of the Sámi and Finnish society is acknowledged.
- 1991-1995, the position of Sámi as the language of instruction is fortified. Recognition as an independent mother tongue to be taught.
- 1998: first mention of the obligation to arrange teaching in Sámi in the schools of Sámi home region to the pupils in command of the Sámi language.

Current situation? The realization of the legislation on the teaching in Sámi?

- Rahko-Ravanti, Rauna: Saamelaisopetus Suomessa, Tutkimus saamalaisopettajien opetustyöstä suomalaiskouluissa, Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis 332, Rovaniemi 2016: The frames of the Finnish school are still Finnish and taking Sámi parameters as a starting point in teaching is still found difficult by and dependent on own initiative of the teacher.
- The school has had to take much of responsibility to teach the pupils Sámi language and the teaching of the Sámi handicrafts lies still on the individual teachers. The autonomy and room for proactive agency of the Sámi teachers is still smaller in comparison to the Finnish teachers.
- The rights of the 70 per cent of the Sámi speaking pupils, who live outside the Sámi home region are poorly covered.

Historiography, biographies: Assimilation

- Veli-Pekka Lehtola, Jukka Nyysönen, Ritva Kylli, Otso Kortekangas
- Seminal work: Marjut Aikio: Saamelaiset kielenvaihdon kierteessä (1988)
- Much focus on linguistic assimilation.
- Schools are seen as actors behind the de facto language change (with the help of the other welfare institutions)
- Much focus on variation and on teachers with command over Sámi languages
- Cathecists
- No assimilative intention? No intention of uprooting or re-placing the indigenous culture?
- Strong alternative narrative: school as a foreign factor pushing towards urbanity and modern as well as a zone for Sámi passive resistance and non-attendance; a place for shortest possible, perhaps also troubled stay on the way back to the reindeer herding.

Sámi research: narrative of assimilation

- Studies on dormitory histories. (Minna Rasmus etc.) Internationally a late emergence of the research genre and interest, but grim histories were revealed.
- Taking heed of the multiplicity of the dormitory-experience, while highlighting the negative and traumatizing elements.
- Latest example, Rahko-Ravanti 2016: The school has had two-fold significance for the Sámi: 1: Cultural and linguistic assimilation and weakening of the contact to the Sámi culture and 2: possibilities for improvement in personal incomes.

Critical Narrative of assimilation and action for healing on the schools: De-colonization and indigenizing the teaching

- Irja Seurujärvi-Kari and Rahko-Ravantti 2016: a narrative from assimilation/colonization to de-colonization and linking the Sámi teaching the indigenous discourse and pedagogies. The Sámi movement engaging into a struggle against linguistic assimilation.
- Post-colonial studies (Pigga Keskitalo, Rahko-Ravantti:) exist especially in the sphere of pedagogy: Building indigenous institutions (of education etc.) from the practices and values of the folk itself. Getting rid of the external, colonial structures and implementation of own cultural models to the modern structures.
- The assimilation frames the narrative and gives it both a substance and a starting-point, which has to be get rid of: the element and action for future change is articulated most openly in the critical narratives produced in the pedagogical studies.

The narrative of assimilation

- Strengths of the narrative: Political and identificational potential: the discourse on assimilation connects Sámi authors and scholars in Finland to the global discourse of the ongoing struggle of the indigenous peoples and to that of colonialism/imperialism and decolonization.
- Problems: the reigning narrative: stingy in elements for positive self-image.
- Stunting the variation in historical experiences (Sanna Valkonen).
- Articulation against truly dominant state discourses, which code Finland as a «good» state.
- Leading to problems in explaining attitudes positive to receiving and providing education (another debated issue, and the Finnish dilemma in the Sámi school history, equivalent to that of explaining the «full» assimilation and the resulting ethnopolitical mobilization in Norway.)

Alternative approach

- Lars Ivar Hansen: Samene i lokalhistorien: Utfordringer og erfaringer, Heimen 4, 2010.
- Charting of the local developments within demography, social condition and resource utilization.
- Reconstruction of how the local Sámi have tried to utilize the existing and accessible resource foundation, which was in their disposition and which the existing contacts provided for them.
- The institutional resources included.
- It is possible to take into consideration the asymmetries in the relations between the Sámi and the stronger institutional actors, but one avoids of taking starting-point in Sámi lacking initiative and passive actors, or as victims.

New focus: Empowerment and integration into the Finnish/Nordic/global society

- Possibilities: Focus on Sámi «leaping into modernity» out of their own initiative (Veli-Pekka Lehtola, with reference to Philip J. Deloria in *Sámi Histories, Colonialism, and Finland*, *Arctic Anthropology* 52/2, 2015.).
- Focus on the Sámi strategies of integration, including the numerous «disappeared» Sámi groups, those who have chose to/had to hide their ethnicity/ethnic identity.
- Focus on the pathways to modernity and to hybrid identities.
- Possibility of reaching a more in-depth knowledge on the Sámi communities and Sámi history.

The school experience and ethno-political mobilization

- The Finnish school institution and education as a pathway to a more informed ethno-political mobilization, (Lehtola, Veli-Pekka: Saamelaiset suomalaiset, Kohtaamisia 1896-1953, 2016)
- 1960s: Oula Näkkäläjärvi and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää: making the problem visible and making the Sámi protests visible.
- Fuel for/fueled by ethnic mobilization
- Entering into teachers' seminars to receive education to become teachers and change the Finnish education to the Sámi.
- The dormitory experience is used in creating a connection to the Indigenous peoples movement. Shared histories of subjugation and resistance of the assimilative educational systems.
- The victim narratives have turned out to be the most effective tools in bargaining improvements in the educational system in Finland: the greatest ethno-political victory.

New focus: Empowerment and integration into the Finnish/Nordic/global society

- Not forgetting/hiding/silencing the histories of assimilation and trauma, but not drowning the Sámi historical agency to them either.
- Assimilation, trauma, mobilization as well as «leaps into the modern» are all part of the Sámi School history and history of education.
- The fates, strategies and traumas do not negate one another, but add up to the multiplicity of the historical school experience of the Sámi.
- The uniformity of the school experience is a fable originating from the desks of the researchers.
- Or a political tool, to which different epistemological rules apply.
- In historical research, the historical and the political have to be separated, or the history politics have to be backed up with careful contextualizations, highlighting the variety of the school experience. Omitting it might turn out contra-productive.

Dual legacies of the actual school history

- Legacy of both: Linguistic assimilation (weakening of the bi-, or-tri-lingual Sámi communities, and the legacy of the threatened languages)
- The inter-generational cultural communication has experienced breaches.
- As well as of rise of education level, especially among Sámi women, and increasing stratification of the Sámi communities, while the traditional sphere has remained as attractive and lucrative sphere as well: there is no full devaluation of the traditional sphere, while education has and does provide employment to those, to whom the traditional sphere can not provide employment.

Conflicting narratives?

- Has critical narrative done its' job? (in pedagogical research the narrative is still reproduced under the ethos of continuing struggle)
- In research of history *genetical narratives* (Rüsen) seems to have become more prevalent, which takes heed of the historical change as such, without normative grip to the change, and reflects on the need of the change in politics in tact with the actual historical change and in tact with historical action of different actors, the various Sámi actors included.
- Has the «mere» narratives of historical change anything to offer history politics-wise to disciplines that aim for implementation and change?
- The effect of de-politicizing the narratives?
- Could the existing stress on assimilation still create synergies?
- Or is there such need?