

Cultural sites, traditional knowledge and participatory mapping; Long-time landscape use in Sápmi

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Abstract

The research presented in this paper explores the use of Participatory GIS (PGIS) methodologies in documenting Sámi land use through archaeological surveys. Using a combination of participatory mapping, traditional archaeological surveys and GIS, researchers from The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research work together with Sámi elders to map cultural heritage sites, land use management systems, and historical data in new ways.

Background and Relevance

Norway is facing a number of key challenges in meeting its obligations to the Sámi people (the Indigenous People of Norway). The 2005 Finnmark Act recognizes Sámi rights to their traditional land. However, due to persistent Norwegian colonial practices, documentary evidence of Sámi cultural history and land use are scarce. It is becoming increasingly important to develop alternative methods to help identify and record knowledge related to Sámi land use. The Finnmark Act demonstrates that Norway acknowledges this need, however, the government still does little to operationalize a process that overcomes this short-coming.

Methods and Data

The research presented in this paper explores the use of Participatory GIS (PGIS) methodologies in documenting Sámi land use through archaeological surveys. Using a combination of participatory mapping, traditional archaeological surveys and GIS, researchers from The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research work together with Sámi elders to map cultural heritage sites, land use management systems, and historical data in new ways. Specifically the research aims to:

- Develop methods to visualize Sámi historical land use through maps and
- Reveal new knowledge concerning continuity, variability and time depth in Sámi land use using GIS tools.

A fundamental aspect identified in PGIS practice, and central to the operation of this project, is that control, access and use of these cultural spatial data need to be kept in the hands of those communities who generated them. In this way PGIS practice can help protect traditional knowledge from external exploitation.

There are very few examples of PGIS research in Norway, and more broadly Scandinavia, involving the indigenous Sámi. Indeed, most research on the social and ethical implications of PGIS practice has been conducted in North America. In response to this, this paper compares research initiatives conducted in Canada and Norway. The paper explores similarities and divergences in the use, adoption and control of participatory mapping and PGIS tools and products by the Norwegian Sámi and the Tlowitsis Nation, a First Nation based in British Columbia.

Ongoing Results

This is an ongoing project. This paper will share some of the initial research findings, particularly in relation to the mapping process, the engagement strategy and the requirements of researchers working on research with Indigenous communities. Furthermore it will explore some of the similarities and differences between working with the Sámi and a First Nation community in British Columbia.

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