



---

## **The views of Europaforum Northern Sweden on INDIGENOUS PEOPLES RESEARCH within HORIZON 2020**

2013-03-15

Europaforum Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a partnership and network of councillors at local and regional level covering the four northernmost regions in Sweden: Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Västernorrland and Jämtland, representing half the geographical area of Sweden.

The objective is to increase knowledge and awareness of policies at EU level, and especially to increase involvement in shaping EU policies on matters concerning northern Sweden.

Our opinions represent the positions of elected officials and the comments have been formed in close cooperation between the regions.

According to the [positioning paper](#) EFNS adopted on 30 March 2012 with focus on Horizon 2020, the region has specific strong fields of research and business which are of strategic importance both to EFNS and to NSPA (Northern Sparsely Populated Areas in northern Europe – Norway, Sweden and Finland), and to Europe in a wider context. The region also works in close cooperation within the Barents Region, which additionally includes north-western Russia.

The EFNS region has many conditions common to NSPA – large geographical area and therefore long distances, and a cold climate. The region has less than 4.9 inhabitants per square kilometre, unlike any other region in the EU. The NSPA network comprises 14 regions collaborating in the European arena.

The indigenous peoples in the Barents Region comprise the Sámi population (in Sápmi, which extends across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia), and the Nenets and Vepsian peoples in Russia. Within the region there are today both Sámi and Arctic research centres and research groups that also collaborate internationally.

### **Indigenous research - research-based expertise for sustainable development**

There are indigenous populations both in other parts of Europe and other parts of the world – for example the Arctic region including the Barents Region, Africa, Asia, Australasia, North and South America – and have similar needs regarding research and innovation, in order to secure research-based expertise for sustainable development.

In the ongoing preparatory work for Horizon 2020, there is wording for example on “*minorities and indigenous people*” with focus on “*Reflective societies - Cultural heritage and European identity*”.



---

*“The aim is to contribute to an understanding of Europe's intellectual basis: its history and the many European and non-European influences; as an inspiration for our lives today. Europe is characterized by a variety of different peoples (including minorities and indigenous people), traditions and regional and national identities as well as by different levels of economic and societal development. Migration and mobility, the media, industry and transport contribute to the diversity of views and lifestyles. This diversity and its opportunities should be recognized and considered.*

*European collections, including digital ones, in libraries, archives, museums, galleries and other public institutions have a wealth of rich, untapped documentation and objects for study. These archival resources, together with intangible heritage, represent the history of individual Member States but also the collective heritage of a European Union that has emerged through time. Such materials should be made accessible, also through new technologies, to researchers and citizens to enable a look to the future through the archive of the past. Accessibility and preservation of cultural heritage in these forms is needed for the vitality of the living engagements within and across European cultures now and contributes to sustainable economic growth”.*

However, sustainable development – in the context of indigenous peoples – presupposes research and innovation within most of the areas in Horizon 2020. Primarily within “societal challenges”, the EFNS region and the NSPA region can constitute a European research and innovation centre, as well as a “demonstration and pilot environment” in fields such as:

- Health, demography and wellbeing.
- Food security, sustainable agriculture and bio-economy.
- Secure, clean and efficient energy.
- Smart, green and integrated transport.
- Climate action, resource efficiency and raw materials.
- Inclusive, innovative and secure societies.

Also Excellent Science, for example researcher mobility between universities in Europe and the world, and Industrial Leadership, for example with focus on innovative SMEs in relevant industries, are crucial to sustainable development for indigenous peoples.

EU2020 indicates the direction for EU's growth work and can be summed up in the watchwords *smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth*. The OECD recommends that regional growth strategies be given a stronger role and more distinct implementational focus, and this must also applied to the indigenous peoples.

## **The Sámi in Sweden**

The Sámi are the only indigenous population in Sweden, in the EFNS region and in large parts of the NSPA region, and one of few in Europe. Development in Sápmi can be described both in terms of successful collaboration and of conflict. However, it is evident that both the



---

history and present-day situation of the Sámi are complicated and comprise largely unknown processes. Here, research has a major responsibility and major opportunities to combine social benefit with scientific development, and to achieve far-reaching internationalisation. The Sámi administrative area is part of making Sámi history and culture visible.

Sámi culture can be seen as one of the most unknown assets in Europe. It links contemporary times with the past in an unbroken cultural chain that is unparalleled in the world. In addition, it offers a unique opportunity to carry out highly significant research tasks of considerable value to continued development in Sápmi and to indigenous peoples in other countries.

The Sámi have gained this status because their traditional land, Sápmi (which takes up part of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia), has been subject to external state-driven colonisation, and because today they are a minority population as regards language, culture, business activities and identity who differ from the rest of society. Sweden has received criticism from UN Special Rapporteur Paul Hunt, member of the UN Committee for Human Rights, from the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and from the European Council for how we handle Sámi issues. The problem however is often a lack of knowledge to enable action. We have never investigated how colonisation actually took place, or investigated the wellbeing of the Sámi today. The societal benefit of research also has a Sámi perspective. Year after year, for example, reindeer herders are parties in court trials versus forestry and mining interests over the right to use land and water: here there is a lack of essential research input. Sámi ambitions for sustainable development in Sápmi are also threatened by rapid environmental changes, and here research input can be crucial to developments. Mental ill-health is today a problem for young Sámi people – reindeer herding is the most dangerous profession in Sweden and there is a problematic rate of outward migration – two other circumstances into which the Sámi desire more and better research.

The Swedish Sametinget – which is both a state authority and an elected Sámi Parliament – has its headquarters in the EFNS region (in Kiruna), and has as its overarching mission to monitor issues that concern Sámi culture in Sweden.

### **Sámi and Arctic research in Sweden**

Within the EFNS region, Umeå University together with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) has long been the strongest seat of Sámi research in Sweden. The Centre for Sámi Research is the most important research player in the field in Sweden, and an exclusive research environment with the resources to act in the most advanced international contexts. Networks are led from here which comprise players in the national arena (in all major universities), in the Nordic countries (involved universities) and a large number of overseas seats of learning. The researchers are internationally prominent and have well established networks in, among others places, Australia, Russia, USA and Canada.



---

The Arctic Research Centre (at Umeå University) provides deeper and broader knowledge, and spotlights Sámi culture, society and history. The findings create a new playing field for health, environment and supranational law in Sápmi and improve conditions for the last indigenous population in Scandinavia.

This centre has an international profile and constitutes one of the strongest fundamentals in indigenous research. What we in Sweden learn about Sámi conditions is in fact of considerable value to indigenous peoples in other countries, who have long seen developments among the Sámi as a shining example as regards, among other things, health, organisation and rights. For example, the Sámi are the only indigenous population to have seen positive development in health and who today have the same life expectancy as the majority population. The centre for indigenous research is therefore of great value, and is a guiding star not only for Sweden and the Sámi, but also for indigenous peoples all around the world.

There are exceptional conditions in Sweden for the study of the development, complexity and consequences of colonisation. We have research which already today is internationally renowned, we have access to unique databases and we have active Sámi participation and some of the most promising young researchers in the field.

The database that includes all the people who have been resident in Sápmi between 1750 and 1900, and is managed by the Demographic Database at Umeå University, has no counterpart in the world. In it, each person is followed from cradle to grave through the entire process of colonisation.

### **European and international centre for indigenous research**

There are 5,000 indigenous populations in more than 70 countries worldwide – in all, almost 400 million people. In many parts of the world they are today encountering major difficulties, and if we look back we find that a large number of these indigenous populations have ceased to exist. There is a great need of knowledge and international cooperation to achieve improvements for indigenous peoples. It is a question of enabling sustainable and democratic development, and in certain cases a question of survival and creating conditions more conducive to positive development.

The Sámi are often cited by other indigenous peoples as a positive example when it comes to rights, organisation and life expectancy. Their experiences are thus of global interest, which permits Sámi research to take a leading role in the international indigenous context. Sámi research must also take as its initial standpoint the status of the Sámi as a minority people and an indigenous population, which places them in an extensive international context in which the situation of Sápmi in the boreal region is of particular significance, and there are several international contexts for research and higher education, such as Arctic Europe, the Barents Region, the circumpolar region and globally. It applies for example to initiatives for the



---

psychosocial life environments of the indigenous peoples and the presence of predatory animals to health, demographic development and wellbeing.

Indigenous populations constitute a central theme for everyone, and the research findings are of major importance to enabling positive development in the northern areas and to contributing to global understanding of, and the development of, indigenous peoples and their situation today.

This puts Sámi research in an excellent position to develop international cooperation. Already today, there is a network of researchers from for example Australia, USA, Canada and Russia. Sweden – and in particular the EFNS region – is excellently positioned to achieve unparalleled European and international indigenous research.

### **EFNS proposals**

EFNS proposes that:

- a European research and innovation centre be established in the EFNS/NSPA region, with focus on European and international indigenous research for sustainable development.
- initiatives in indigenous research – within the framework of H2020 – are strengthened with regard to all three priorities (Excellent Science, Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenges) and International Cooperation.