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The Saami languages and Finnish language legislation: a short historical overview*

Finland's political, social and cultural conditions were transformed after its handover from Sweden to Russia in 1809. Emperor Alexander 1st strongly supported the majority language, Finnish, which had not previously enjoyed official status. The official language had long been Swedish, although some authorities did try from time to time to support the use of the vernacular, such as in elementary education and in the translation of some legislation. The 19th century was marked by increasing nationalism in Finland, with the country seeking to strengthen its autonomous status despite several clamp-downs. As has often been observed, the Finnish nation, which can be characterised as an “imagined community” – a term coined by Benedict Anderson – emerged during that time. This emergence coincided with the development of the national literature, including the publication of the national epic, the *Kalevala*. As Anderson demonstrates, many incipient nations developed along with the growth of printed newspapers and literature, or as he designates it, “print-capitalism” (Anderson 1996: 30–32).

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1) *Suomen ja Sveitsin kielilainsäädäntöjen yhteisiä ja erottavia piirteitä*. Keski-Suomen Sveitsin Ystävät, Jyväskylä, Stammtisch. 9.5.2017;

2) *The Saami languages before Finland's first Language Act of 1922*. International Conference on Minority Languages: Revaluing Minority languages XVI, 28.–29.8.2017. Jyväskylä, Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä.

1. The language issue during the Finland's era as a grand duchy

During the 19th century important efforts were made to develop the Finnish written language with the help of the Finnish Literature Society, which was founded in 1831: scholars aimed at creating a language that could be used on a larger scale. At the same time, the first books in Saami were published. While the authorities paid a great deal of attention to furthering the education of the majority population, they neglected that of the Saamis.

Kenneth McRae has researched the language policy of several countries, including Finland. As he states, the language decree issued in the 1860s was not the first legal document relating to language: from as early as the 1840s, decrees began to be issued that required from the authorities to use Finnish with the Finnish-speaking population. In 1846, the clergy were required to demonstrate their Finnish language skills. In 1853, officials were required to have a knowledge of Finnish and to make available Finnish translations of official documents. This was taken a step further in 1858 with a decree mandating the use of Finnish in official contexts. In 1863, an even more important decree recognized, for the first time, the legal equality of Finnish with Swedish (McRae 1999: 35–36). According to the Schools District Act of 1898, pupils were to be taught in their own mother tongue in the different regions of Finland. The situation of the Finnish language did not, however, develop linearly. In 1900, the Russian authorities issued an edict imposing Russian as the official language of Finland, although that was soon retracted.

2. The Saami languages in the Grand Duchy of Finland

The first books, religious texts, translated into Saami were published after an order given by the Russian emperor, and repeated by the archbishop in 1824, that Saami was to be used. This led to the publication in 1825 of three Saami books. These were translations into North Saami for the use of Saamis living in the Northern part of Finnish Sápmi. However, the writing system used by the translator, Jacob Fellman, was subjected to harsh criticism, which may explain why no other books were published in Saami for several decades.

The Turku chapter was reduced in size in 1850 with the founding of the new chapter of Kuopio, to which Finnish Sápmi was transferred. One of the chapter's duties was to supervise education, as this was governed by the church, a practice that went on for longer in Finnish Sápmi than elsewhere in Finland. The chapter was to supervise the prescribed use of languages in its parishes. However, that was not systematically enforced in the case of the Saami languages.

The year 1848 was an important turning point in the history of publishing in Saami in Finland. The emperor ordered that the Saami languages (dialects) be used in religious instruction and that the materials used be translated into Saami. As a result, a few texts were published from 1849 to 1863, one in Inari and eight in North Saami.

Anders Andelin, pastor of the parish of Utsjoki-Inari from 1853, prepared a few texts with the help of the catechist Aslak M. Laiti. He received financial support following a decree issued in 1849. The second pastor of the parish, Edward Wilhelm Borg, who arrived in Inari in 1857, educated a young Inari Saami, Henrik Mattus, to be a catechist and engaged him to assist with the translation work. At the end of the century, Mattus also taught Inari Saami to one of Borg's successors, Lauri Arvid Itkonen, who was then able to translate and publish books in that language.

In the interim, several pastors claimed that some Saami dialects were becoming extinct. In particular, Anders Abram Favorin argued in 1861 that Inari Saami was dying out, and hence it was no longer necessary to publish materials in that language. At the same time, it was proposed that the North Saami dialect serve alone as a unified written Saami language (Capdeville 2017a: 135, 172, 210–211).

The Schools District Act, which was passed at the end of the century, could not be implemented in Finnish Sápmi, as L. A. Itkonen had suspected: there was too great a shortage of Saami-speaking teachers as well as a serious lack of printed materials (Itkonen 1901).

In 1911, Piehtar Helander (known later as Pedar Jalvi) was admitted to the teacher education seminary in Jyväskylä. He graduated in 1915, having published some articles in Finnish during his studies. He also managed to publish the first Saami novel in Finland (*Muottačalmi*, 1915), before his early death one year after starting work as a teacher in a Finnish school (Capdeville 2017a: 204–206, 214–226).

3. The language issue at the time of independence

In 1917, Finland became independent, but the transition did not occur without conflict: a civil war broke out (known by some as the Finnish Independence War). At the same time, the language conflicts of the previous century resurfaced as politicians debated the details of the constitution of the newly independent country. The draft “recognized the right of Finnish citizens to use their mother tongue – Finnish or Swedish – in dealing with public authorities.” This meant full linguistic equality for Finnish and Swedish speakers, and thus recognition of the latter as more than just an insignificant minority. The draft constitution accorded the Swedish-speaking regions some

form of self-government, an idea that had been adopted from the Swiss canton model (McRae 1999: 59). It should be mentioned here that Switzerland recognized Finland as an independent state as early as 29 January 1918. A Finnish Embassy opened in Bern in 1937, and a Swiss Embassy opened in Helsinki in 1939 (Loulota 2015).

In his book, McRae refers to several publications by Emil Nestor Setälä, a celebrated Finnish scholar, a Finno-Ugrian but also a politician, who took part in the drafting of the Finnish Constitution and later in drafting the Language Act of 1922. Fred Karlsson has analysed the role of Setälä as a language politician. He explains how Setälä, who was strongly opposed to the idea of a country with two nationalities, Finnish and Swedish, sought to enshrine the idea of one nation in the constitutional articles he drafted. Some politicians were keen to form a political system with two nationalities. In so doing they were drawing on the principle of one nation, one race or a “common origin” and one language, which in Finland meant foregrounding the differences between Swedish and Finnish cultures and their histories (Karlsson 2014: 283–284). Setälä’s core idea was that a nationality is not founded on a common language, a notion that becomes difficult to sustain in the case of multilingual countries such as Switzerland. As he explained it, Finland is to be viewed as one nation in which two languages are spoken.

In the Constitution of 1919, the language section (no. 14) reads as follows: “Swedish and Finnish are the Republic’s national languages”. At that time, the current Swiss constitution was the one adopted in 1874, in which section 116 reads as follow: “The three main languages spoken in Switzerland, German, French, and Italian, are the national languages of the Confederation”.¹ Setälä had presented the idea of introducing a Language Act as early as 1919 to allow the use of Finnish or Swedish with the country’s authorities, and requiring administrators to have a knowledge of both national languages. According to Karlsson, the Language Act published in 1922 is clearly the work of Setälä, as it does not mention “national languages” (Swedish: *nationalspråk*, Finnish: *kansalliskieli*) but “administrative languages” (Swedish: *ämbetspråk*, Finnish: *virkaikieli*). During the parliamentary debate, Setälä called for an end to the language conflict that had continued for several years. (Karlsson 2014, 286–287) The final title of the new law was simply the Language Act (Swedish: *Språkglag*, Finnish: *Kielilaki*).

¹ French: *Les trois principales langues parlées en Suisse, l’allemand, le français et l’italien sont langues nationales de la Confédération*. German: *Die drei Hauptsprachen der Schweiz, die deutsche, französische und italienische, sind Nationalsprachen des Bundes*. Italian: Art. 116. *Le tre lingue principali della Svizzera, la tedesca, la francese e l’italiana, sono lingue nazionali della Confederazione*. Cf. *Constitution...* (1874: 35); *Bundesverfassung...* (1874: 36); *Costituzione...* (1874: 36).

4. The minority concept in the Language Act

One major aim of the Act was to avoid labelling Swedish speakers as a minority. It should not be forgotten that great tensions existed between Åland and the rest of Finland, which was the reason Finland turned to the League of the Nations (cf. Setälä 1919, 1920a, 1920b). In 1920, Setälä published a book to explain the Finnish Constitution and the different concepts used in it. In the index, he refers to the minority as “speakers of other languages” (Finnish: *toiskieliset*), that is, to persons living in a specific administrative area and speaking a language other than that spoken by the rest of the population (Finnish or Swedish); as was the case with Saamis or Russians (Setälä 1920: 139). In 1924, Setälä published a book to explain how the Language Act was to be applied. Saami (Lappish as he wrote at that time) is mentioned in the law on education: public schooling should be given in the pupils’ mother tongue in areas where Finnish or Swedish speakers constitute at least 20 per cent of the local population. Moreover, in municipalities where at least 20 per cent of the pupils are Saami or Russian speakers, the educator should also be a speaker of Saami or Russian (Setälä 1924: 186–187). We now know that this has not been practiced for at least seven decades.

If we look at the table representing the linguistic situation of Finland’s municipalities published in Setälä’s book, we cannot ignore the fact that a large proportion of the population of different municipalities was ignored in those statistics, as in *Ohcejohka* / Utsjoki. We should not neglect the fact that a lot of Saamis preferred to present themselves as Finnish-speaking, believing this would help them in their everyday lives. It is clear that Setälä’s statistics give only an approximate idea of the situation. The last column has been added by the present author to demonstrate the deficiencies of the language section of the 1919 Constitution and of the Language Act of 1922 with respect to the situations in Saami-speaking areas, where the Saami peoples were not taken into account: they are designated here as “language-less” people, because the contemporary legislation did not pay as much attention to Saami languages as it did to the prevalence of Swedish.

1. Linguistic statistics of Finland’s northern municipalities (in 1910)²

Municipalities	Total population	Finnish speaking	Swedish speaking	“Language-less” Saamis
Enontekiö / Eanodat	1 055	882		174 = 16 %
Inari / Aanaar	1 736	925	5	811 = 46 %

² Statistics from the table published by Setälä in 1924.

Kittilä / Gihttel	4 471	4 442	8	21 = 0.46 %
Sodankylä / Soadegilli	4 590	4 478	3	109 = 2.37 %
Ohcejohka / Utsjoki	528	37		491 = 92.99 %

In my PhD research on Saami book history I could not refrain from presenting these statistics. It is well known that Saami speakers were often ignored, or rather that the authorities explained that they did not want to use Saami languages in teaching. The injustice of this situation was pointed out by the Saami catechist Aslak Laiti to his superiors in 1863 and 1864. He proposed that the education should no longer be implemented with the help of translators, as was often the case at that time (Capdeville 2017a: 211–212).

Tables 2 and 3 show the language landscape of Finland at the time of Independence, and the approximate number of Saamis in the whole of Fennoscandia as well in Finland.

2. The linguistic landscape of Finland at the beginning of the 20th century³

Finns	88 %
Swedes	11.6 %
Russians	0.2 %
Germans	0.1 %
Saamis (Lapps)	0.1 %

3. Saami populations

Total	from 60 000 to 70 000
Norway	about 45 000
Sweden	about 20 000
Finland	about 8 000
Russia	about 2 000
Saami speakers	from 22 000 to 30 000

In Finland, according to the Finnish Saami Parliament, of the 7 956 Saamis registered in 2005, 55% lived outside the Saami domicile area: this number more than doubled from 2396 to 5317 between 1972 and 2007 (Seurujärvi-Kari 2005: 340; Aikio-Puoskari 2009: 8).

It is surprising that, as a Finno-Ugrian, Setälä did not offer a stronger defence of the use of the Saami languages. From 1930 to 1932 he was member

³ Statistics from 1910 (*Société des Nations...* 1921: 7).

of a committee that was preparing a Saami ABC book (Itkonen T. 1934; Capdeville 2017a: 154–155); and thus was fully aware of the need for the language, especially in elementary education. But, as explained above, the Language Act and other legal dispositions remained unchanged for seven decades.

From a marginal position of a few isolated provisions in school and child care legislation, Saami was given [...] recognition by law in 1991 that contains striking parallels with the Language Law of 1922 as currently amended. In this law, the Saami domicile area is first defined and limited to four large municipalities in northern Lapland province: Enontekiö, Inari, Utsjoki and part of Sodankylä. (McRae 1999 : 331)⁴

McRae notes similarities between Saami and Romansh in Switzerland, which were first recognized in 1938 (McRae 1999: 220, 231–233), and finally incorporated into the Constitution in 1999.⁵

The Saami Language Act passed in 2003 does not accord equal rights to the majority of the Saami peoples, who nowadays lives outside the Saami areas of domicile. The consequences of the Finnish policy continues be seen today in the public life of the Saami peoples.

Signs in the municipality of Ohcejohka or Utsjoki



⁴ Toponyms on local Saami languages: Enontekiö, North Saami: Eanodat; Inari Saami: Aanaar ; Utsjoki, North Saami: Ohcejohka ; Sodankylä, North Saami: Soadegilli.

⁵ The first legal text mentioning the Saami languages in Finland was published in Finnish, Swedish and North Saami, and is accessible on the websites of the Ministry of Justice. The appendix presents some extracts from the Finnish and the Swiss constitutions written in both countries national languages. In this article we use the term “Romansh”, which is used in the Swiss Constitution. Linguists prefer to use the term: Rétho-romanche.

As the law stands, the majority language should be used first in bilingual municipalities, as in public signs. But in *Ohcejohka* / Utsjoki, as we can see in the above picture taken in 2013, the municipality's name is written first in Finnish and then in North Saami, while the name of the road is given first in North Saami and then in Finnish. This would not be the case in Swedish-speaking areas. The picture is a good example of the present-day status of the Saami languages, showing that the law is not enforced as strictly as it should be. *Ohcejohka* is the only Finnish municipality where a Saami language (North Saami) is spoken as the majority language. The fact cannot be ignored that the authorities do not treat the Saami languages on an equality with Swedish.

2. Conclusion: difficulties in better status for the Saami languages

As the slow development of the Saami book history until the 1970s shows, the authorities failed to support the development of the Saami languages in Finland. An important turning point was the foundation of the *Sámi Čuvgehussearvi* (Finnish: Lapin sivistysseura, English: Society for the Promotion of the Lappish culture) in 1932, when its Saami as well as Finnish members succeeded in publishing several Saami books and studies on Saami culture. In the 1970s, an increase in the number of Saami writers improved the possibilities for young people and adults to read and to be educated in their own language. Irja Seurujärvi-Kari describes how Saamis sought to re-appropriate their own language and culture during the 1970s, and especially the 1980s after the struggle over the Alta dam (Seurujärvi-Kari 2005).

We should not forget that the Saami languages are not just minority languages, but above all they are indigenous languages! The difference between the Saamis and other minorities groups is that the former are indigenous people, who pre-date the other minorities in the country, and thus can be argued to have a stronger claim to recognition of their cultural and language rights than the later arrivals. Although Finland did not ratify the ILO 169 convention, its Constitution recognizes the rights of ethnic minorities to preserve and develop their own culture and language (Seurujärvi-Kari 2011: 344–345 ; Aikio-Puoskari 2015, 2016).

Three Saami languages – which developed very differently – are spoken in Finland. The North Saami orthography *davvisámegiella* was finally accepted in 1978, and the Inari Saami *Anarâškielâ* orthography in 1992. *Anarâškielâ* is the only Saami language spoken only in Finland, and its development improved after the foundation of the Inari Saami Promotion Society, *Anarâškielâ servi* in 1986. The situation of the Skolt Saami *nuõrttsää 'mkiõll* is rather different, because the area of domicile of Skolt split between three

countries, Russia, Finland and Norway. Since 1993, instruction in Skolt Saami has been provided in Sevettijärvi *Če'vetjäu'rr* (Aikio-Puoskari 2015). By way of comparison, the Romansh dialects were developed and began to be standardised with the support of the *Lia Rumantscha* society founded in 1919. To arrest the alarming decline of the language, the society decided to develop a unified language, which appeared in the 1980s (*Romanche...* 2004: 84, 92).

The first Saami PhD students defended their theses in their own mother tongue during the 1990s, and were appointed as professors at the turn of the millennium. The very slow development of the publishing in Saami demonstrates how the centralized political and educational system of Finland neglected the Saami peoples. Inari Saami or *Anarâškielâ* did not become extinct, as predicted by some clerics in the 19th century. Instead as research has shown *Anarâškielâ* has seen a revival.⁶ The situation of the Skolt Saami has been more difficult in the aftermath of the Second World War (Aikio-Puoskari 2015). The first Skolt Saami publications did not appear until the 1970s and these were mainly religious texts. The Skolt Saami literature seems currently to be on the increase, with the first Skolt Saami gaining his baccalaureate with Saami (not Finnish or Swedish) as his mother tongue only in 2012 (Lavia 2012, Fofonoff 2012). Much effort has been made to reinforce the status of the Saami languages for all the Saami speakers in Finland, and different organisations such as *City-Sámit* (Helsinki), *Sis-Suoma Sámisearvi Bárbmu rs.* (Jyväskylä and Tampere), *Roavvenjárgga Sámi Searvi MII* (Rovaniemi) and *Oulu Sámit* (Oulu) are working hard to bring this about.

For these three languages, some language nests have been organized in different municipalities to help young people, or even adults, to finally learn the native language of their parents or grand-parents. Ulla Aikio-Puoskari secretary of the Department of Education of the Finnish Saami Parliament, published a report in 2016 which includes a history of the Saami languages and describes the different measures taken during recent decades for the revival of the Saami languages in Finland, Sweden and Norway (Aikio-Puoskari 2016).

Support for the Saami languages is assured especially in their area of domicile, but not for the Saamis who have to move away to find a job. Romansh dialects seem to share the same kind of problem: their use is assured in the speakers' areas of domicile, but not for those who have to relocate outside of the canton of Grison (*Grischun, Graubünden, Grigioni*). Romansh speakers often prefer to use Swiss German in their dealing with other Swiss citizens. In Finland, the Saamis have long thought it would be

⁶ Cf. Olthuis, Kivelä, Skutnabb-Kangas 2012; Pasanen 2015.

preferable to speak Finnish with their children in the interest of their future rather than teach them the language of their ancestors. Nowadays, young Saamis are seeking to reverse this tendency by actively using the language of their parents and grand-parents. For this purpose, internet language courses are organized by the Saami Education Centre of Inari / *Sámi oapahusguovddáš*.

As we have seen the revival of minority languages (as both countries' mainstream populations designate them from outside) has become possible with the foundation of societies, that have done a lot of work to maintain and develop the use of these languages. The situation of Romansh continues to be alarming, as the Swiss media regularly testify (see, for example, the articles by Bondolly 2017 and Tissot 2017). In Finland, one can only wish people would stop designating the Saami languages as minority languages, especially since we know they were spoken throughout Finland several hundred years ago. Saamis receive little support from the various countries, which is all the more the reason why their language situation should be improved.

**Appendix:
languages sections in the Swiss and the Finnish Constitutions
adopted in the 1990s**

This appendix presents the languages sections of the Swiss and the Finnish constitutions that refer to their national languages, first in both countries own national languages and then in English. The text are available on the official pages on both countries administration, the Swiss constitution is presented on the site of the Swiss Federal Council, and the Finnish constitution on the site of the Finnish Ministry of Justice, Finlex. In the case of Finland, the Saami version written in North Saami, was obtain from the Saami Parliament of Finland.

Swiss constitution of 1999 (sections 4 and 70)

Art. 4. Landessprachen: die Landessprachen sind Deutsch, Französisch, Italienisch und Rätoromanisch.

Art. 4. Langues nationales: les langues nationales sont l'allemand, le français, l'italien et le romanche.

Art. 4. Lingue nazionali: le lingue nazionali sono il tedesco, il francese, l'italiano e il romancio.

Art. 4. Linguas naziunalas: las linguas naziunalas èn il tudestg, il franzos, il talian ed il rumantsch.

Art. 4. National languages: the National Languages are German, French, Italian, and Romansh.

Art. 70. Sprachen

1. Die Amtssprachen des Bundes sind Deutsch, Französisch und Italienisch. Im Verkehr mit Personen rätoromanischer Sprache ist auch das rätoromanische Amtssprache des Bundes.

2. Die Kantone bestimmen ihre Amtssprachen. Um das Einvernehmen zwischen den Sprachgemeinschaften zu wahren, achten sie auf die herkömmliche sprachliche Zusammensetzung der Gebiete und nehmen Rücksicht auf die angestammten sprachlichen Minderheiten.

3. Bund und Kantone fördern die Verständigung und den Austausch zwischen den Sprachgemeinschaften.

Art. 70. Langues

1. Les langues officielles de la Confédération sont l'allemand, le français et l'italien. Le romanche est aussi langue officielle pour les rapports que la Confédération entretient avec les personnes de langue romanche.

2. Les cantons déterminent leurs langues officielles. Afin de préserver l'harmonie entre les communautés linguistiques, ils veillent à la répartition territoriale traditionnelle des langues et prennent en considération les minorités linguistiques autochtones.

3. La Confédération et les cantons encouragent la compréhension et les échanges entre les communautés linguistiques.

4. La Confédération soutient les cantons plurilingues dans l'exécution de leurs tâches particulières.

5. La Confédération soutient les mesures prises par les cantons des Grisons et du Tessin pour sauvegarder et promouvoir le romanche et l'italien.

Art. 70. Lingue

1. Le lingue ufficiali della Confederazione sono il tedesco, il francese e l'italiano. Il romancio è lingua ufficiale nei rapporti con le persone di lingua romancia.

2. I Cantoni designano le loro lingue ufficiali. Per garantire la pace linguistica rispettano la composizione linguistica tradizionale delle regioni e considerano le minoranze linguistiche autoctone.

3. La Confederazione e i Cantoni promuovono la comprensione e gli scambi tra le comunità linguistiche.

4. La Confederazione sostiene i Cantoni plurilingui nell'adempimento dei loro compiti speciali.

5. La Confederazione sostiene i provvedimenti dei Cantoni dei Grigioni e del Ticino volti a conservare e promuovere le lingue romancia e italiana.

Art. 70. Linguas

1. Las linguas uffizialas da la Confederaziun èn il tudestg, il franzos ed il talian. En il contact cun personas da lingua rumantscha è er il rumantsch lingua uffiziala da la Confederaziun.

2. Ils chantuns determineschon lur linguas uffizialas. Per mantegnair l'enclegientscha tranter las cuminanzas linguisticas, respectan els la cumposiziun linguistica istorica e resguardan las minoritads linguisticas tradiziunalas.

3. La Confederaziun ed ils chantuns promovon la communicaziun ed il barat tranter las cuminanzas linguisticas.

4. La Confederaziun sustegna ils chantuns plurilings tar l'ademplement da lur incumbensas spezialas.

5. La Confederaziun sustegna mesiras dals chantuns Grischun e Tessin per mantegnair e promover la lingua rumantscha e taliana.

Art. 70. Languages

1. The official languages of the Confederation are German, French and Italian. Romansh is also an official language of the Confederation when communicating with persons who speak Romansh.

2. The Cantons shall decide on their official languages. In order to preserve harmony between linguistic communities, the Cantons shall respect the traditional territorial distribution of languages and take account of indigenous linguistic minorities.

3. The Confederation and the Cantons shall encourage understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities.

4. The Confederation shall support the plurilingual Cantons in the fulfilment of their special duties.

5. The Confederation shall support measures by the Cantons of Graubünden and Ticino to preserve and promote the Romansh and the Italian languages.

Finnish Constitution of 1999 (Section 17)**17. Rätt till eget språk och egen kultur**

Finlands nationalspråk är finska och svenska.

Vars och ens rätt att hos domstol och andra myndigheter i egen sak använda sitt eget språk, antingen finska eller svenska, samt att få expeditioner på detta språk skall tryggas genom lag. Det allmänna skall tillgodose landets finskspråkiga och svenskspråkiga befolknings kulturella och samhällliga behov enligt lika grunder.

Samerna såsom urfolk samt romerna och andra grupper har rätt att bevara och utveckla sitt språk och sin kultur. Bestämmelser om samernas rätt att använda samiska hos myndigheterna utfärdas genom lag. Rättigheterna

för dem som använder teckenspråk samt dem som på grund av handikapp behöver tolknings- och översättningshjälp skall tryggas genom lag.

17. Oikeus omaan kieleen ja kulttuuriin

Suomen kansalliskielet ovat suomi ja ruotsi.

Jokaisen oikeus käyttää tuomioistuimessa ja muussa viranomaisessa asiaansa omaa kieltään, joko suomea tai ruotsia, sekä saada toimituskirjansa tällä kielellä turvataan lailla. Julkisen vallan on huolehdittava maan suomen- ja ruotsinkielisen väestön sivistyksellisistä ja yhteiskunnallisista tarpeista samantyyppisten perusteiden mukaan.

Saamelaisilla alkuperäiskansana sekä romaneilla ja muilla ryhmillä on oikeus ylläpitää ja kehittää omaa kieltään ja kulttuuriaan. Saamelaisten oikeudesta käyttää saamen kieltä viranomaisessa säädetään lailla. Viittomakieltä käyttävien sekä vammaisuuden vuoksi tulkitsemis- ja käänösapua tarvitsevien oikeudet turvataan lailla.

17. Vuoigatvuohta iežas gillii ja kultuvrai

Suoma riikkagielat leat suoma- ja ruotagiella.

Juohkehačča vuoigatvuohta geavahit duopmostuolus ja eará eiseválddiin áššistis iežas giela, juogo suoma- dahje ruotagiela, sihke oažžut doaimmahusgirjjiis dainna gielain dorvvastuvvo lágain. Almmolaš váldi galgá fuolahit eatnama suoma- ja ruotagielat álbmoga čuvgehuslaš ja servodatlaš dárbbuin seammalágan vuodustusaid mielde.

Sápmelaččain álgoálbmogin sihke románain ja eará vehádatjoavkkuin lea vuoigatvuohta bajásdoallat ja ovddidit iežas giela ja kultuvrra. Sápmelaččaid vuoigatvuodas geavahit

sámegiela eiseválddiin ásahuvvo lágain. Seavagiela geavaheaddjiid sihke lámisvuoda dihte tulkon- ja jorgalanveahki dárbbáseaddjiid vuoigatvuodat dorvvastuvvojit lágain.

17. Right to one's language and culture

The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish.

The right of everyone to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts of law and other authorities, and to receive official documents in that language, shall be guaranteed by an Act. The public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis.

The Saami, as an indigenous people, as well as the Roma and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Provisions on the right of the Saami to use the Saami language before the authorities are laid down by an Act. The rights of persons using sign language and of persons in need of interpretation or translation aid owing to disability shall be guaranteed by an Act.

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Abstract

The Saami languages and Finnish language legislation: a short historical overview

For a long time, the Saami languages were not mentioned in the Finnish Constitution. However, they were not totally ignored during the 19th century, in the period when Finnish was recognised as the second official language of Finland and the first Saami books were published. Having dealt with the language situation during the Great-Duchy period, I present the developments which took place after gaining independence by Finland. The first language chapter in the constitution drafted in 1919 was based on the model of the Swiss constitution, as E. N. Setälä explained in his publications, that is why this constitution will be briefly presented. Indeed, both countries have a multi-lingual policy and minority languages which were not mentioned in their constitution for a long time. We also describe the spaces open to the Saami languages during the 1990s.