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# Käsin, sävelin, sanoin ja kuvin

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## *Sámi artists in Finland*

English Summary

### *Research objectives, data and methods*

This study on Sámi artists is a part of a more extensive research project on artist support and multiculturalism conducted by the Arts Council of Finland Research Unit. The project consists of two separate research subprojects, one of them focused on Sámi artists and the other on immigrant artists in Finland. The position of Sámi artists was surveyed by collecting information about their number, age distribution, regional distribution and activities in different fields of art. One of the objectives was to study Sámi artists' status and activities in state arts administration, as well as the channelling of state arts support to the Sámi arts sector. The information was collected mainly from the grants register, documents and reports of the Arts Council of Finland.

The list of and information on Sámi artists was collected from bulletins and registers of institutions awarding grants, artist associations' member lists, works containing and handling artist names and information (literature, recordings, video material), informative materials published by cultural institutions, cultural news and web sites (including catalogues, discographies, filmographies, bibliographies). The member lists of Finnish national artist associations, Sámi Duodji ry and Sámi Dáiddacehpiid Searvin (SDS, or the Sámi Artists' Union) were also used.

Experts and artists from the most familiar fields of Sámi art (duodji<sup>1</sup>, music and cinema, literature, theatre and visual arts) were invited to form a small group of informants, who were interviewed and who evaluated the scope of the artist list drawn up by the researcher. This

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1 The northern Sámi word for traditional handicrafts and artistic handicrafts made by the Sámi is duodji.

resulted in as accurate and up-to-date a list as possible of Sámi artists active in different fields of art. This research method is known as the jury method.

## *Sámi people*

The Sámi are an indigenous people residing in parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, and the only ethnic group recognised as an indigenous people in the European Union. The Sámi (numbering 76,000–110,000 in all) form a minority in all of the aforementioned countries. There are around 50,000–60,000 Sámi in Norway, 15,000–25,000 in Sweden, around 9,000 in Finland and some 2,000 in Russia.

In Finland, Sámi refers to people who consider themselves Sámi in addition to satisfying one of the following criteria:

1. they themselves or at least one of their parents or grandparents have learned the Sámi language as their first language, or
2. they are descendants of a person who has been registered as a mountain, forest or fishing Lapp in the land, taxation or population register, or
3. at least one of their parents is registered or could have been registered as entitled to vote in the elections of the Sámi Parliament. (Act on the Sámi Parliament, 1995/974 (Section 3).)

The existence of a Sámi homeland is required in the Constitution of Finland (1999/731 (Section 121)) and specified in greater detail in the Act on the Sámi Parliament (1995/974). The homeland of the Sámi encompasses the municipalities of Enontekiö, Inari and Utsjoki, as well as the reindeer grazing area in the municipality of Sodankylä. The homeland also includes what is known as the Skolt Sámi area, where the Sámi are represented by law by a special Skolt Sámi village meeting. (Act on the Sámi Parliament (1995/974).)

The Sámi languages are the closest cognate languages of Finnish and other Finno-Baltic languages. Sámi and Finnish have a great number of lexicographical and structural similarities based on a common parent language. Sámi is often used as an umbrella concept, even though the Sámi languages number ten in all, six of which have their own orthographies. All of the Sámi languages are Finno-Ugrian and included in UNESCO's list of endangered languages – Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi as seriously endangered ones. In Finland, the Sámi population is linguistically and culturally divided into three groups: the Inari, Skolt and Northern Sámi. Of these, Northern Sámi has the largest number of speakers in Finland, Norway and Sweden. According to estimates, over 2,000 Northern Sámi speakers live in Finland.

Since 1996, the Sámi have enjoyed constitutional cultural autonomy in their homeland concerning their language and culture. Autonomy-related duties are handled by the Sámi Parliament, elected by the Sámi. The Sámi Parliament decides on appropriations for culture and teaching materials, as well as for social and health affairs. The Parliament has a term of four years. The Sámi Parliament represents the Finnish Sámi in national and international contexts and handles matters that deal with the Sámi language and culture and the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people. The authorities are also required to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament in all the aforementioned issues. The ultimate objective of the Act on the Sámi Parliament (1995/974) is to secure the Sámi the right to lead a life in keeping with their culture, without having to assimilate into the majority population.

The Sámi have always resided in areas belonging to different nations, which has introduced a cross-border element into their culture and art. Northern Sámi can be called the common language of the Arctic Sámi, that is, the Sámi living in the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden. Of the Finnish Sámi population, around 70 per cent speak Northern Sámi. Cross-border cooperation has always been very extensive among the Sámi. The Sámi Parliaments of the three Nordic countries have a joint Parliamentary Council. The Sámi in Russia also participate in the Sámi Parliament's joint Language Board. Sámi unity is symbolised, for example, by a common flag and national anthem.

The Sámi Council was established in 1956 as a political cooperation body for the Sámi. Its objectives are to promote the interests of the Sámi as a people, to strengthen the feeling of unity among the Sámi, to attain recognition for the Sámi as a nation and to preserve the economic, social and cultural rights of the Sámi in the legislation of the four states. Measures taken to meet these objectives include agreements made between the states and the Sámi Parliaments, that is, the bodies representing the Sámi people.

## *Sámi artists*

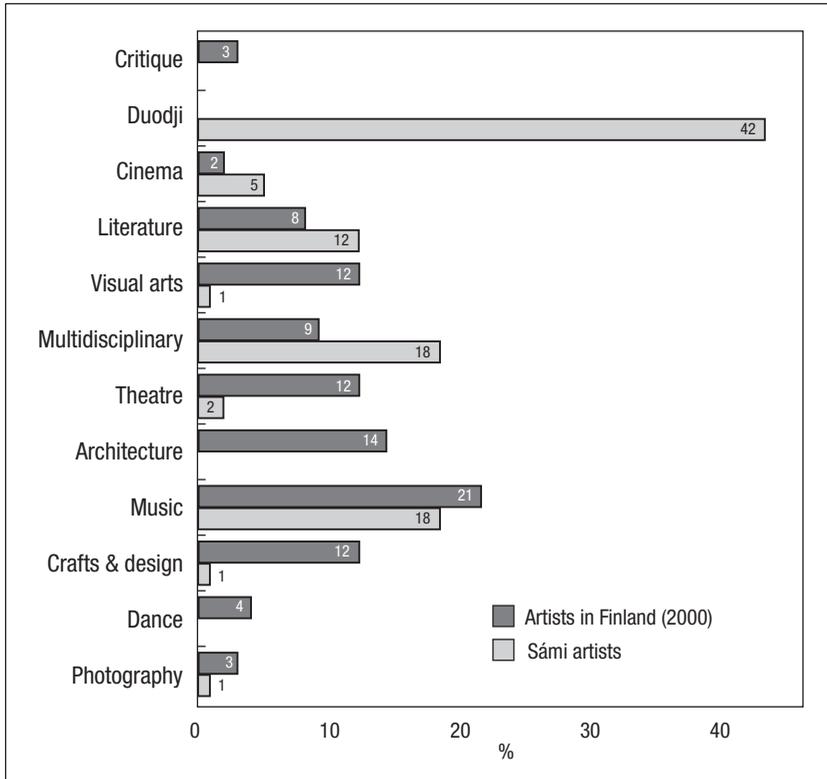
There are around 230 professional Sámi artists in Finland, which means that around one per cent of the artists active in Finland are of Sámi origin<sup>2</sup>. The proportion of artists is larger among the Sámi (ca. 2.5%) than among the overall population of Finland (ca. 0.4%). According to this study, the structure of the Sámi artist community

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2 The number of members in Finnish artist organisations was collected for the Status of the Artist 2010 survey. Artist organisations had a total of 21,787 members, 757 of whom belonged to more than one organisation. According to estimates, the overall number of artists in Finland totalled 21,000.

also differs significantly from its Finnish counterpart. The fields of art, for example, exhibit a distinctive structure and include, among other things, duodji, an art form typical of the Sámi. Over 40 per cent of Sámi artists work solely with duodji, and half of them are partly involved in the field. The other half of the artist community is distributed across other fields of art.

FIGURE 1. Sámi\* and Finnish artists by field of art\*\* (%)



\* Sámi artists in Finland (N=231).

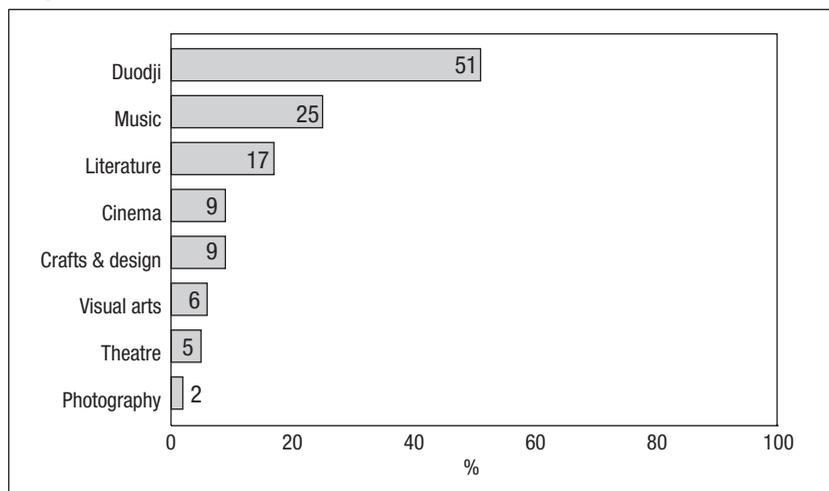
\*\* Forms of art are mutually exclusive. Multidisciplinary artists are pictured as a group of their own.

Nearly one in every five Sámi artists works in music, in practice as performing artists, composers and song and yoik writers<sup>3</sup>. The proportion of multidisciplinary artists is much higher in the Sámi artist community (18%) than in the Finnish artist community in general, seeing as nine per cent of Finnish artists were categorised as multidisciplinary in 2000. Literature, cinema, and crafts and design (excluding duodji) are other fields typical of Sámi artists. In the state arts administration,

3 A yoik is a traditional Sámi form of song and way of singing. It is one of the longest living music traditions in Europe.

crafts and design includes illustration and graphical design, as well as artistic handicraft, industrial design, interior decoration, textile and clothing design, and cartoon art. Hardly any Sámi artists work in the fields of critique, dance and architecture. (Figures 1 and 2).

FIGURE 2. Sámi artists by field of art (%), incl. the fields of multidisciplinary artists\*

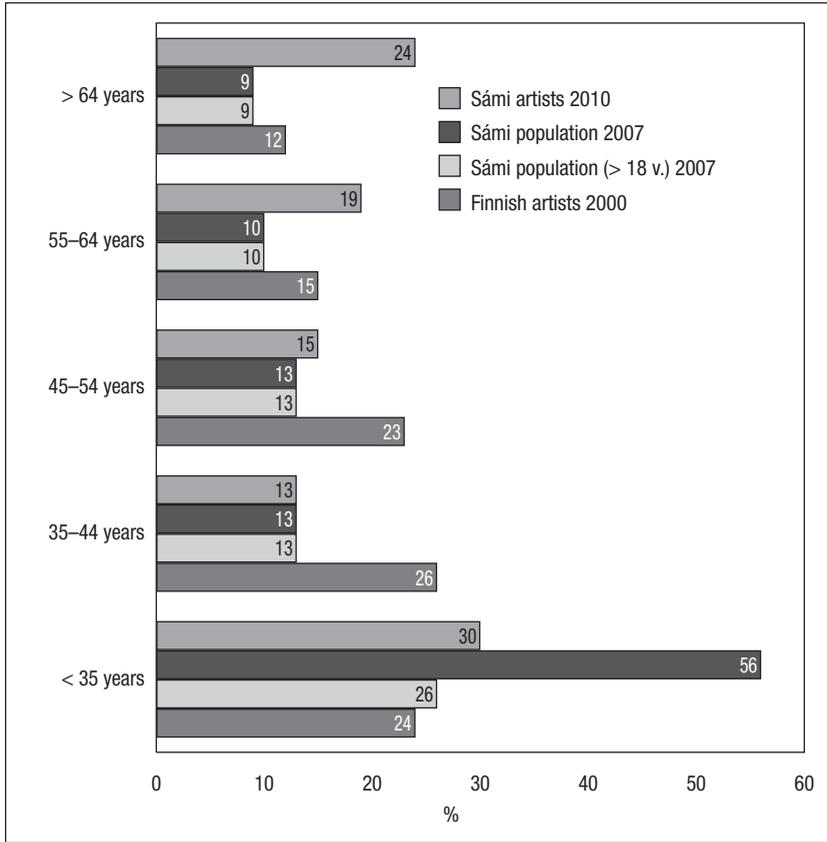


\*The fields of art are not mutually exclusive but overlapping (the total % does not equal 100), meaning that the fields of multidisciplinary artists are included in the share of each individual field of art. N=231.

One of the major differences between the Sámi and Finnish artist communities relates to the age distribution. The Sámi community is, in a way, “bipolar”, with the bulk of the artists belonging either to the younger or to the older generation (Figure 3). In turn, Sámi artists in the mid-age groups (35–54-year-olds) account for a significantly smaller share (28 %) compared to the overall Finnish artist community, where this age group includes nearly half of the artists. One explanation might be that those belonging to the age group in question did not receive instruction in the Sámi language at school, and that the Sámi culture was not as highly appreciated during their formative years as it was before and has been afterwards.

The Sámi artist community is dominated by women – partly resulting from the art field distribution. Women account for 74 per cent of all Sámi artists. Artistic handicraft is usually a female-dominated field, and the proportion of women is especially high in duodji, where it totals 87 per cent (Figure 4). Over half of Sámi women artists work with duodji, compared to 25 per cent among men artists.

FIGURE 3. Sámi artists, Finnish artists and the Sámi population\* by age group (%)

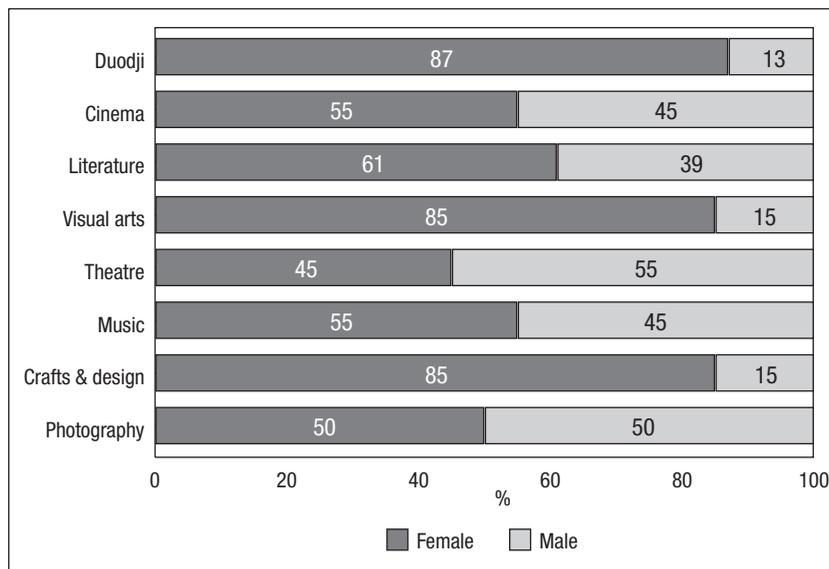


\* In addition to the age distribution of the overall Sámi population, the Figure shows the distribution of those over 18 years of age, to clarify the size of the youngest age group for the purpose of comparisons.

Sources: Number of Sámi in the 2007 Sámi Parliament elections (Sámediggi). [www.samediggi.fi](http://www.samediggi.fi); Rensujeff 2003, 20.

Cinema, photography, theatre and music show the most equal gender distributions in the Sámi art sector. Although nearly a third of all Sámi male artists work with music, the field cannot be characterised as a male-dominated one, since women also have a strong representation (55%) among musicians. (Figure 4.) In contrast, music is the most male-dominated field in the overall Finnish art sector (with men accounting for 80 % of the artists).

FIGURE 4. Sámi artists by form of art (%) and gender



The clear majority of Sámi artists live and work in the Sámi homeland (78%). In 2007, less than half of all Finnish Sámi lived in the homeland (the municipalities of Enontekiö, Inari, Utsjoki, as well as the northern areas of the Sodankylä municipality). There are many explanations for the difference in residential distribution between Sámi artists and other Sámi people. One is the large number of duodji makers in the artist community. The procurement of raw materials needed for duodji is often linked to reindeer grazing and/or the nature of Lapland. Duodji's status as a form of "applied art" also means that the items made by duodji artists (especially traditional Sámi outfits) may be highly culture-bound and have small demand outside the Sámi culture. Another factor explaining the residential distribution is the Sámi language. Many Sámi artists use their mother tongue in their work. It is easier to speak a language and keep up one's language skills when surrounded by a community using the language. Furthermore, the community provides the artist with a linguistically well-versed local public and/or market area. Based on the material studied, the migration of artists working abroad has targeted nearly exclusively Norway and Sweden. An analysis of the fields of art, excluding duodji, shows that 67 per cent of the artists live in the Sámi homeland, 25 per cent elsewhere in Finland and 8 per cent abroad (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. Regional distribution of Sámi artists and the Sámi population (%)

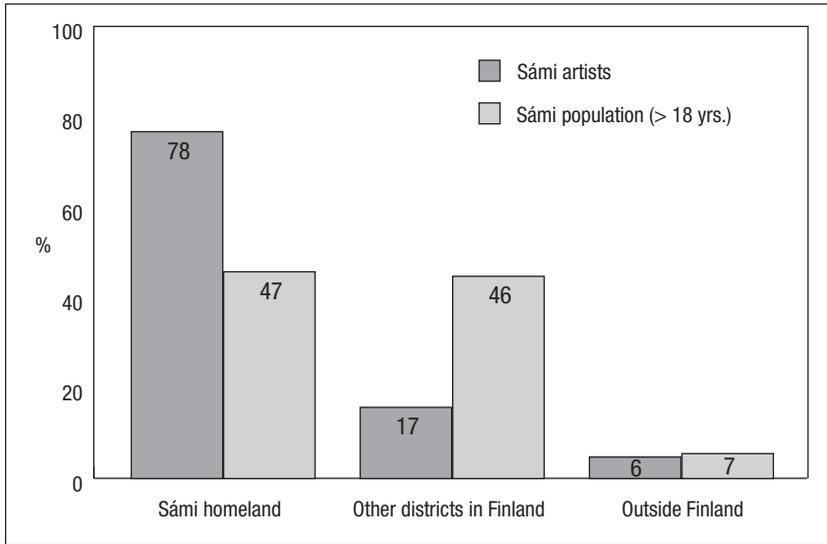


TABLE 1. Sámi artists in a nutshell

The number of Sámi artists in Finland	231	
Female artists	74 %	
Under 35 years	30 %	
Average age	47	
Residence in Sámi Homeland	78 %	
<i>Art forms</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%*</i>
– Duodji	42	51
– Cinema	5	9
– Literature	12	17
– Visual arts	1	6
– Theatre	2	5
– Music	18	25
– Crafts & design	1	9
– Photography	1	2
– Multidisciplinary artists	18	–

\* The percentages include the fields of multidisciplinary artists, which means the total does not equal 100.

The regional distribution of Sámi artists is very atypical compared to the results of other artist surveys. Nearly all other surveys of the status of artists have shown artists to be strongly concentrated in metropolitan areas. For example, the Helsinki metropolitan area is home to around half of Finnish artists and over half of state grant applicants. In contrast, only three per cent of Finnish Sámi artists reside in and around Helsinki.

### *Support of Sámi artists*

The support granted to Sámi artists and culture originates from several sources, similar to the situation of other groups working with art and culture. Sámi artists receive support from the Sámi people's own institutions, with each of the Sámi parliaments distributing support in their own countries (in practice) and the Sámi Council providing support in all countries with a Sámi population. In Finland, similar to other countries, the Sámi also get support from national and regional institutions, such as foundations and funds, the Ministry of Education and Culture, towns and municipalities, as well as the Arts Council (Central Arts Council, National Art Councils, boards for grants and subsidies, Arts Council of Lapland). Norway and Sweden have institutions that distribute regional and national support, from which Sámi artists residing in Finland can also get support for their projects. Based on the interviews conducted for this study, state grants for artists are extremely important for artistic work in Finland. In contrast, the grants awarded by the boards of culture of the Sámi Parliament and the Sámi Council were considered too small.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Sámi artists have been a marginal group of applicants for grants and subsidies awarded by the Arts Council of Finland and National Art Councils, seeing as they submitted fewer than 100 applications in 2004–2008. There has been hardly any variation at an annual level, with the number of applications submitted by Sámi artists and communities averaging 18. Overall, the Arts Council receives 8,000–9,000 applications a year (excl. Regional arts councils). The annual average number of individual Sámi artists applying for support is 15. Support has most commonly been sought for projects in the fields of literature, visual arts and cinema. The number of applicants in literature is influenced by the abundance of state support forms, as well as the success of Sámi authors in Norway and Sweden. Applicants in the field of cinema are mainly associations. Duodji artists have submitted very few applications for state grants and subsidies in comparison to the number of players active in the field.

In the five-year period under review, Sámi artists were awarded grants and subsidies to writers and translators (annually), working

grants, travel grants, project grants, quality support from the National Council for Design, grants for visual artists and project grants for children's culture. The most important support forms for Sámi artists were grants and subsidies to writers and translators and working grants, both of which are awarded for artistic work. In the period under review, Sámi artists did not receive any working grants for artists from the National Art Councils. However, the Arts Council of Finland awarded two three-year (both for visual arts) and three one-year (crafts and design, literature, visual arts) working grants in the period surveyed. Sámi artists and communities received a total of €185,247 in support (including library grants for authors and translators) from the Arts Council of Finland and the National Art Councils in 2004–2008. The average annual amount of support totalled €37,000. Nearly a third of the grants and subsidies targeted visual arts projects, even though very few Sámi artists work exclusively in that field. However, visual arts are a more common field among multidisciplinary artists.

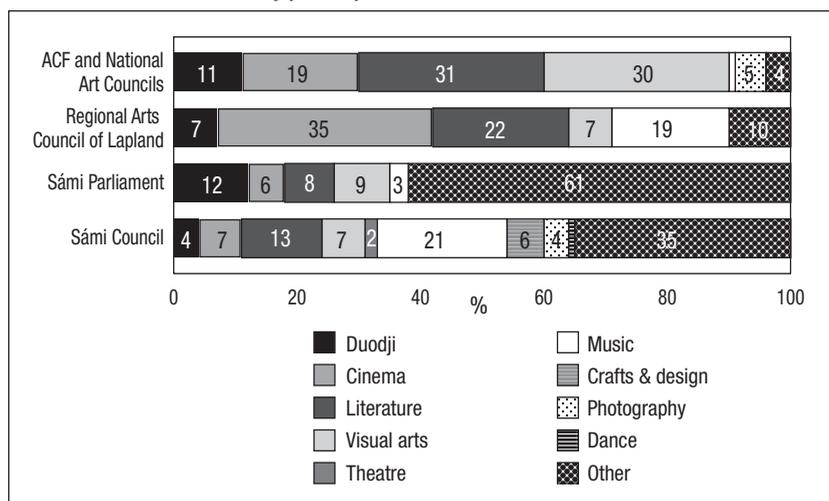
Analysed by individual field of art, the Arts Council has granted support to Sámi artists and communities especially in the fields of literature, visual arts and cinema. The last of these formed the largest group receiving support from the Arts Council of Lapland. Duodji and the visual arts have been the most frequent recipients of support from the Sámi Parliament. Most of the Sámi Council's support has gone to artists active in the field of music. Although there are many musicians and duodji artists, their relative share as recipients of support is minor. Duodji does not constitute the biggest field of art in any support system (Figure 6). This certainly does not depend on a lack of interest in supporting duodji artists through various systems, but rather on duodji artists not applying for grants and subsidies.

The distribution of support recipients by form of art shows there is a clear need for versatile support systems, since the different systems appear to complement one another and specialise in different fields (Figure 6). The reason for specialisation most likely stems from the group of applicants. Artists in different art forms also apply for support through different systems, perhaps due to "habitual" application methods being established over time. Since this type of specialisation has been detected, each system has a place and role to play in the promotion of Sámi art.

The Sámi's own art support boards operating in connection with the Sámi Parliament and the Sámi Council provide support especially for events and other projects not necessarily linked to work in a single field of art. This is evidenced by the large shares of "Other" in the Figure 6. The Sámi Parliament's support in particular has targeted communities rather than individual artists. The Arts Council, in turn, provides more support to artistic work in individual fields of art. Nevertheless, nearly a fifth of the support the Arts Council of Lapland

granted to Sámi artists and communities took the form of discretionary government transfers and went to communities to help organise activities and produce events. In terms of individual artists, the support of the Central Arts Council, National Art Councils, divisions and boards was of biggest interest and best suited to authors and visual artists, and in terms of communities, to those active in cinema. (Figure 6.)

FIGURE 6. Distribution of support from the Arts Council, Sámi Parliament and Sámi Council (%) by field of art\* 2004–2008



\* In the art form classification of the Arts Council of Finland (incl. regional councils) the field of crafts and design includes duodji.

When dealing with a small indigenous people, the support policy faces a notable challenge in deciding how to ensure equal distribution of support to those creating something new and those preserving traditions. In a sense, Sámi artists belong to both categories, but those granting support need to understand that grants and subsidies are needed in both areas and that the appropriations must be sufficient for the needs of both. From the perspective of the Sámi, artists active in “new fields of art” (e.g., cinema) deserve to be supported in their artistic work similarly to those active in traditional fields (e.g., duodji and music).

The research data showed the Sámi artist community to be very heterogeneous in terms of artist support. Most Sámi artists get no grants or subsidies for their artistic work. According to the number of applicants and the register of grants, they often do not even apply for support. A minor share of artists applies for different types of grants and subsidies on a near-annual basis from the National Arts Councils, subcommittees and boards of the Arts Council, as well as from the

boards of culture of the Sámi Parliament and Sámi Council. The lists of decisions and the register of grants show that they also receive a moderate amount of grants and subsidies. The distribution of support by field of art clearly indicates that the number of applicants is very small, since those applying for and receiving support usually represent the smallest fields of art among the Sámi artist community. Artists working with duodji and music, the biggest fields in the Sámi artist community, apply for much less support – especially from the Arts Council.

### *Sámi artists and peer assessment*

The Sámi have participated in the Arts Council's operations as experts and peer assessors since its establishment in 1968. However, the number of Sámi members in the National Art Councils has been minor, seeing as only 15 Sámi representatives were appointed as members in 1968–2012. The Arts Council of Lapland has had the largest number of Sámi members. As for the National Art Councils, the Sámi have been best represented as members in the National Council for Design. The Board for Grants and Subsidies to Writers and Translators has had three Sámi deputy members in all (from 2000 to 2011). Moreover, the National Council for Literature has had one and the Subcommittee for Multiculturalism two Sámi members.

In the Arts Council, Sámi artists and experts have played a bigger role as regional artists than as members, in terms of activities and resources<sup>4</sup>. The Arts Council of Lapland had a regional artist working nearly uninterruptedly with Sámi art and culture for 30 years (1978–2008). From 1973 to 2008, twenty-six per cent of the “regional artist years” in the Arts Council of Lapland were allocated to Sámi artists. Two of the regional artists specialised in music, two in literature, and two were multidisciplinary. However, not one of the Sámi regional artists represented duodji, the traditional Sámi handicraft, even though duodji artists form the biggest group in the Sámi artist community in terms of their number. The reason for this may be that duodji artists have not applied for a position as a regional artist.

The Arts Council of Finland, National Art Councils and Regional Arts Councils grant direct support to artists based on application. Decisions on support are based on peer assessment, the main criteria always being artistic quality. Peer assessment involves difficult situations when dealing with a small minority, whose culture and lan-

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4 The Regional Arts Councils employ regional artists to work as salaried special experts of different art forms with a view to promoting art and art-related activities in several regions (13). The system of regional artists was created in 1972.

guage are not always familiar enough. Firstly, it may be difficult to find members of the group to act as experts in arts councils (or other institutions conducting peer assessment). Secondly, members of the group may often be disqualified from participating in decision-making because of family relations or other connections. Peer assessment expertise is easily put at risk especially in literature, because there are so many different Sámi languages, and even Sámi experts are not usually familiar with all of them. Moreover, translations are rarely available.

The future status of Sámi artists looks quite bright in Finland. Overall, one-third of the artists are under 35 years of age, which means that the field of art and culture is vibrant and strongly in the hands of young artists. In the future, Sámi artists will more equally represent both genders, the age distribution will even out, the level of artistic education will rise and the share of Sámi speakers will increase. They play an important role in securing the vitality of the Sámi culture. This makes special arrangements necessary in some cases, even though the support granted to Sámi artists cannot be described as minor in relation to their number and especially to the number of applications submitted. In the future, the status of Sámi artists should be surveyed using more extensive material related to income formation. The research group could also be expanded across national borders to include Sámi artists in Norway, Sweden and Russia.