

# Report of the Seminar on Skolt Saami History, Cultural Heritage and Psychological Support

## PAST AND PRESENT OF THE SKOLT SAAMI

Seminar on history, cultural heritage and psychological support



Presentation "Sorrow, resistance and remembrance in Skolt Saami history" by Astri Andresen

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Interreg



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**OUMMU RÂÂST RAAJ**  
People cross the borders



Sør-Varanger  
kommune

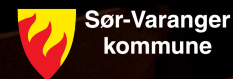
  
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# Summary

- **The seminar was one of the key knowledge sharing and community-building events of the Oummu rââst raaj project**, bringing Skolt Saami history, cultural heritage, language, psychosocial support and genealogy into one cross-border programme.
- **Participation was strong:** the Friday seminar reached over **110 people on-site and online**, and the Saturday genealogy workshop gathered over **40 community participants**, approximately **half from Norway**.
- **The event addressed a historically significant moment:** 2026 marks **200 years since the 1826 border demarcation**, which deeply affected Skolt Saami families, sijdids, and ways of life.
- **Feedback confirms clear impact:** participants rated the Friday seminar **4.59/5**, the Saturday genealogy workshop **4.75/5** and willingness to recommend future project events **4.71/5**.
- **The seminar demonstrated a strong need for continued cross-border work**, especially genealogy, Norwegian-side Skolt Saami history, Skolt Saami-led content and shared arenas where the **community can meet, learn and strengthen cultural continuity**.



Picture: Presentation "The Border Treaty of 14/2 May 1826 and the Skolt Saami Special Rights" by Waling T. Gorter



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Oummu r  st raaj (People cross the borders) project represents a strategic cross-border initiative focused on the preservation and revitalization of Skolt Saami language and culture. This collaborative effort between the municipalities of Inari and S r-Varanger is operating within the Interreg Aurora framework and is co-funded by the Interreg Aurora programme. The project acknowledges that the Skolt Saami community has been historically fragmented by national borders, which has led to a critical endangerment of their language and a disruption of traditional social structures. To address these challenges, the project implements a variety of low-threshold cultural activities, educational seminars, and community workshops designed to reconnect the community and strengthen its collective identity.

The seminar entitled Past and Present of the Skolt Saami served as a central milestone in the project's second year. Held on February 27 and 28, 2026, the event combined scholarly research with community-led heritage work and specialized psychosocial support. The seminar contributed especially to the project Work Package 1, by strengthening knowledge exchange between institutions and experts, and Work Package 3, by supporting the continuation of Skolt Saami traditions, identity and cross-border community connection.

The timing of this seminar was particularly significant as it took place in 2026, the year marking 200 years since the 1826 border demarcation between Norway and Russia. This historical context

gave the event a concrete and timely relevance, as the border demarcation had long-term consequences for Skolt Saami families, communities and traditional ways of life.

This context is also connected to the ongoing Truth and Reconciliation processes in Finland and Norway, where national discussions have highlighted the long-term impacts of assimilation policies on Saami people. The seminar served as a platform to address these historical experiences through scholarly analysis, community dialogue and information on culturally adapted psychosocial support. Rather than functioning as a therapeutic intervention, the seminar introduced support services and created a respectful setting for discussing sensitive historical themes. By facilitating dialogue between researchers, institutions and community members from both Finland and Norway, the seminar aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical events that continue to shape the lives of the Skolt Saami today. This report details the objectives, implementation and feedback of the event, ensuring that the insights gained are preserved for future project planning, reporting and possible follow-up cooperation.



## 1.2 Event objectives

The event was designed to create an accessible and low-threshold arena for learning, discussion and community building around Skolt Saami history, cultural heritage, language situation and psychological support. The seminar responded to the need to address historical experiences of border demarcations, displacement, assimilation, marginalization and language loss in a respectful and knowledge-based setting. At the same time, it aimed to connect this historical understanding to present-day revitalization work and to the future of the Skolt Saami community across borders.

A central objective was to bring together researchers, cultural heritage actors, psychosocial support providers, Skolt Saami institutions, community representatives and interested wider audiences. The seminar gave space for academic presentations, community-based perspectives and dialogue on how historical knowledge can support identity work, community wellbeing and future planning. The Saturday program continued this work through genealogy activities intended primarily for Skolt Saami community members, supporting cross-border connections between families and relatives.

The event also had a forward-looking purpose. It was arranged in 2026, the year marking 200 years since the 1826 border demarcation between Norway and Russia. That historical border had long-term consequences for Skolt Saami families, sijdds (the traditional skolt saami village communities), and ways of life. The seminar therefore created an important space to discuss how borders have shaped Skolt Saami history and how the community can continue strengthening its language, culture, identity and cooperation today.

The seminar also supported the project's long-term objective of developing sustainable structures and future cooperation models for Skolt Saami language and culture work across the Finland-Norway border.

Picture: Presentation "Borders, families and sijds" by Sonja Tanhua



### 1.3 Organizing parties

The implementation of the seminar required a high degree of coordination between multiple institutional partners. The lead partners, Inari Municipality and Sør-Varanger Municipality, provided administrative leadership and financial management. The project team handled logistical arrangements, stakeholder communication, and on-site coordination. The Skolt Saami Siida Administration, represented by Trustee Veikko Feodoroff, provided essential community leadership, ensuring that the program remained respectful of traditional governance and cultural protocols.

Academic expertise for the seminar was drawn from multiple institutions, including the University of Helsinki, the University of Bergen, the University of Turku, and the University of Oulu. These partners contributed specialized knowledge on history, language, cultural heritage and social change. A significant portion of the research presented is part of the Kone Foundation funded project, Petsamo: A Finnish Settler Colony (Suomen unohdettu siirtomaa: Petsamo kansallisessa muistissa ja yllirajaisissa yhteyksissä), which explores the historical exclusion and inclusion of the Skolt Saami within national strategies. Important project partners included the Norrõs Skolt Saami Association, with Maja Ekroll Thrane serving as the seminar host. Psychological perspectives and specialized support were provided by the SANKS Sámi National Competence Service and the Uvja psychosocial support unit, both of which have mandates to serve the Saami population across national jurisdictions.

### 1.4 Event implementation

The event was structured as a two-day program to balance academic learning with community interaction. The first day, Friday, February 27, was held at the Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos in Inari. This venue provided a symbolic and professional setting for the academic presentations. The program began with welcoming remarks from the education and culture directors of both municipalities, who highlighted the seminar as a key achievement of the project's final stages. The lectures covered a broad range of topics, including Finnish national strategies in the Petsamo region, the historical "purge" of the Skolt Saami language in schools, and the long-term effects of state-driven assimilation policies.



Picture: Presentation "Drawing borders, silencing languages: The sociolinguistic history of Skolt Saami societies 1850s- 2020s " by Taarna Valtonen

Special attention was given to the psychological support instruments available to the community. Representatives from SANKS and Uvja discussed their specialized services and the importance of culturally adapted support. They presented support models tailored to the cultural and linguistic needs of Saami communities. The seminar concluded with a panel discussion focusing on the two hundredth anniversary of the 1826 border demarcation, exploring the future of the Skolt Saami as a cross-border people.

The second day, Saturday, February 28, shifted to the Youth and Holiday Centre Vasatokka to facilitate a more informal and community-centered environment. This day was dedicated entirely to a genealogy workshop, which is a highly requested activity within the Skolt Saami community. Facilitators from both Finland and Norway, including Irja Jefremoff, Jenna Gauriloff, and Brynjulv Grønvik, guided participants through the process of researching their ancestral lines. The workshop was designed to be interactive, with "genealogy circles" where participants shared family stories and photographs. This session was particularly successful in reconnecting relatives who live on different sides of the border, providing a tangible result of the project's mission to bring people together.

The practical arrangements included interpretation, meals and coffee breaks, transportation and transportation arrangements. Interpretation was an important accessibility measure, as the event gathered participants and speakers across linguistic and national borders. Online participation in the Friday seminar also increased accessibility for people who were not able to travel to Inari. The Friday seminar gathered over 110 participants altogether, including both on-site participants at Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos and online participants following the seminar remotely. The high

attendance demonstrated broad interest in Skolt Saami history, cultural heritage and language both within the Skolt Saami community and among wider expert and stakeholder networks.

The Saturday community programme at Youth and Holiday Centre Vasatokka gathered over 40 participants, of whom approximately half came from Norway. This strong Norwegian participation was especially important for the cross-border objectives of the Oummu rääst raaj project, as the genealogy workshop created a practical and community-oriented space for reconnecting family histories, strengthening cross-border relations and supporting Skolt Saami identity across national borders.



Picture: Irja Jefremoff giving a presentation on Saturday's genealogy workshop

## 2 Feedback

### 2.1 Description of the feedback survey

A digital feedback survey was conducted after the event. The survey collected a total of 18 responses. One response was from a person who had registered for the seminar by mistake and did not attend the event. This response was excluded from the analysis of numerical ratings. Therefore, the analysis is based on 17 participant responses.

Of the respondents, 9 participated only in the Friday seminar, while 8 participated both in the Friday seminar and the Saturday community programme. The Saturday ratings therefore reflect the views of those participants who attended both parts of the event.

The purpose of the survey was to collect information on how participants experienced the seminar and the Saturday community day, how well the event met their expectations, how successful the practical arrangements were, and what kind of events or activities participants would like to see in the future. The survey also included open questions where participants could describe what they personally gained from the event and provide free feedback.

The feedback survey was anonymous. This supported open and honest responses, including both positive remarks and development suggestions. The feedback provides useful guidance for planning future Oummu rââst raaj activities, especially events dealing with history, cultural heritage, genealogy and cross-border community building.

### 2.2 Results

The overall feedback was clearly positive. The Friday seminar received an average satisfaction rating of 4.59 out of 5. The Saturday community day received an even higher average rating of 4.75 out of 5 among those who participated in it.

The seminar met participants' expectations well, with an average rating of 4.41 out of 5. The Saturday community day met expectations particularly strongly, with an average rating of 4.75 out of 5. Respondents were also highly likely to recommend future project events to others, with an average rating of 4.71 out of 5.

The seminar programme as a whole received an average rating of 4.53 out of 5, while the Saturday programme received 4.5 out of 5. Organizational matters and practicalities received an average rating of 4.41 out of 5. This result is positive and shows that participants were generally satisfied with the practical implementation of the event, while also identifying opportunities to further strengthen event structure and facilitation in future activities.

The statement that the event increased awareness of Skolt Saami history, language, culture and its status in Finland and Norway received an average rating of 4.47 out of 5. This confirms that the event succeeded in one of its main objectives: increasing knowledge and awareness of Skolt Saami history and contemporary cultural situation.

Communication from the project team was rated highly, with an average of 4.69 out of 5. This is an important result for a cross-border event where participants, speakers and organizers came from different countries and language backgrounds.

## 2.2.1 Programme, content and personal experience

The feedback shows that participants valued the combination of historical lectures, language-related content, community perspectives and genealogy work. The programme helped participants understand Skolt Saami history as a long and continuing process connecting border demarcations, cultural change, language loss, identity, rights and contemporary revitalization work. One respondent summarized the value of the seminar as follows:

*“Overall, the twists and turns of the journey from history to the present day. All the presentations and discussions were interesting.”*

Another respondent described the personal outcome of the event by writing:

*“I gained increased awareness of the Skolt Sámi in general and their importance.”*

Together, these comments show that the seminar succeeded in presenting Skolt Saami history not only as a historical topic, but as a living and continuing process connected to identity, language, culture and future revitalization.

The Saturday community programme and genealogy workshop were also highlighted in the feedback. Genealogy was experienced as meaningful because it connected historical knowledge with family histories, personal identity and cross-border relations.

One Finnish respondent summarized the most important personal outcome as:

*“Sukututkimus ja seminaaripuheet”*

*“Genealogy research and seminar speeches”*

Picture: Genealogy workshop 1



The same respondent also expressed a clear wish for future events:

*“Sukututkimusta lisää”*

*“More genealogy research”*

This feedback indicates that genealogy should remain an important part of future history-related activities. In the Skolt Saami context, genealogy is closely connected to community memory, belonging and the recovery of family connections across national borders.

The social and community-building value of the event was also visible in the feedback. One Finnish respondent described the most important personal outcome simply as:

*“Yhteisöllisyys”*

*“Sense of community”*

This short comment reflects one of the central achievements of the event. The seminar and Saturday programme were not only spaces for lectures and formal knowledge exchange, but also spaces for meeting, recognition, discussion and community strengthening.



Picture: Genealogy workshop 2

## 2.2.2 Cross-border relevance and accessibility

The feedback confirms that the event supported the project's cross-border objectives. Participants valued the opportunity to meet people from both Finland and Norway, to hear different perspectives and to take part in a shared discussion on Skolt Saami history and future development.

Norwegian feedback was especially important in evaluating the cross-border relevance of the event. One respondent wrote:

*“Fantastiske forelesere!!! Paneldebatten kunne vært lenger”*

*“Fantastic lecturers!!! The panel debate could have been longer”*

This comment reflects a broader message in the feedback: participants appreciated the quality of the lectures and expert content, but also wished for more time for discussion and dialogue. Another Norwegian respondent suggested that future events should strengthen the Norwegian-side historical perspective:

*“Flere forelesninger om historie på norsk side- om Skoltesamene å reindrift.”*

*“More lectures about history on the Norwegian side - about the Skolt Saami and reindeer husbandry.”*

This is an important development point for future cross-border activities. It shows that participants want to continue exploring local and regional Skolt Saami histories in Norway, including Neiden, Pasvik, reindeer husbandry, family histories and the effects of state borders and assimilation policies on the Norwegian side.

The feedback also showed strong willingness to participate in future project events. One Norwegian respondent wrote:

*“Khæmpe flott - kommer gjerne tilbake 🙌👍🙌👍🙌🙌”*

*“Tremendously great - I would gladly come back 🙌👍🙌👍🙌🙌”*

This response shows that the event was experienced as welcoming and meaningful, and that similar formats can support continued engagement among participants from Norway.

The use of English as the main language of the Friday seminar was also appreciated by some respondents, as it made the event accessible to a wider expert and international audience. At the same time, interpretation into Finnish and Norwegian remained essential for ensuring equal access for local and community participants. This balance between wider visibility and local accessibility should be maintained in future events.

## 2.3 Development points

Although the feedback was mainly positive, respondents also raised several constructive development points. These should be considered carefully when planning future events.

First, respondents expressed a wish for more Skolt Saami-led content and more direct community voices in future seminars. This is a valuable development point for future events. The seminar brought together researchers, institutions and community representatives, and future programmes can build further on this by making the role of Skolt Saami voices even more visible throughout the event. Because the research field connected to Skolt Saami history, language and culture is small, it is important to combine academic expertise with community-based knowledge in a thoughtful way. This could include more contributions from Skolt Saami cultural workers, language revitalization workers, elders, young people, community representatives and people with lived experience, alongside researchers and institutional experts. It could also include Skolt Saami-led or co-led moderation, especially in discussions directly concerning Skolt Saami history, rights and future development.

Second, the feedback showed a need for more interaction. Some participants wished for more discussion during the programme, and the comment that the panel discussion could have been longer supports this. Future events could include structured small-group discussions, facilitated dialogue circles, workshops or more time for audience questions.

Third, the panel discussion at the end of the Friday seminar received both appreciative and constructive feedback. Participants valued the opportunity to discuss the 200-year perspective after the

1826 border demarcation and the way forward for the Skolt Saami community. At the same time, because the topic was complex and sensitive, the feedback suggests that future panel discussions could benefit from an even clearer framing of the topic, purpose and discussion format. For future events, the organizers can support the panelists and audience by defining the main questions better in advance, ensuring balanced speaking time and considering Skolt Saami-led or co-led moderation when the discussion focuses directly on Skolt Saami history, rights and future development.

Fourth, the feedback shows continued demand for genealogy work and cross-border meetings. One respondent specifically requested more cross-border meetings, which confirms the importance of the project's core objective: creating shared spaces for Skolt Saami people in Finland and Norway to meet, learn and strengthen community ties. The strong participation in the Saturday programme and the positive feedback on genealogy suggest that this format should be continued and developed further.



Picture: Participants of the seminar

## 2.4 Feedback conclusion

The feedback confirms that the seminar and Saturday community programme were successful and meaningful for participants. The event strengthened awareness of Skolt Saami history, language and culture, created opportunities for cross-border encounters and supported community connection through the genealogy programme.

The most valued aspects were the high-quality lectures, the historical and language-related content, the possibility to meet community members and specialists, and the genealogy work. The feedback also shows that participants want the project to continue organizing similar events, especially those that support cross-border meetings, history learning, genealogy and community dialogue.

The main development areas are also clear. Future events should include more Skolt Saami-led content, more history from the Norwegian side, more time for interaction and discussion, and clearer facilitation of panel discussions. These improvements would further strengthen the project's goal of creating accessible, respectful and community-oriented arenas for Skolt Saami cultural revitalization across borders.

## 3 Conclusion

The seminar had clear impact on both project implementation and future cooperation. It increased awareness of Skolt Saami history, language and culture among a large cross-border audience, gathered participants from both Finland and Norway, and created a practical setting for community dialogue and genealogy work. This Saturday program was especially important in supporting family history work and reconnecting community members across national borders.

The event identified concrete needs for future activities: More Skolt Saami-led and community-based content, stronger attention to Norwegian-side Skolt Saami history, continued genealogy work, and more structured opportunities for interaction and discussion. These findings provide useful guidance for the remaining Oummu r  st raaj activities and for possible follow-up cooperation after the current project period.

The Past and Present of the Skolt Saami seminar can be considered a successful event that fulfilled both the academic and community-oriented goals of the Oummu r  st raaj project. By providing a space for high-level historical analysis alongside practical heritage work, the event addressed the multifaceted needs of the Skolt Saami people. The collaboration between the municipalities of Inari and S  r-Varanger demonstrated the power of cross-border cooperation in tackling the challenges of an endangered culture. The high participation rates and the emotional weight of the genealogy workshop indicate that the project is addressing a deep-seated need for reconnection and identity strengthening within the community.

The lessons learned from the feedback, particularly the suggestion for more community-led participation in panels, continued genealogy work, more Norwegian-side historical perspectives and more interactive formats, will be integrated into the remaining activities of the project. As the project moves toward its conclusion in August 2026, the focus will remain on maintaining the momentum generated by this seminar. The upcoming winter and summer camps will provide further opportunities to build on the connections established in Inari.

The seminar also provides evidence for the need to continue cross-border Skolt Saami cooperation beyond the current project period. The feedback and participation figures show that there is strong demand for shared arenas where Skolt Saami people from Finland and Norway can meet, learn, discuss and strengthen cultural continuity together. The knowledge and experience gained from this event can therefore support future project planning and possible follow-up funding applications.



Picture: Panel discussion

# 4 Acknowledgement

The project team and the organizing municipalities wish to thank all researchers, specialists, interpreters, technical staff and community members who participated in the seminar. Special gratitude is extended to the Skolt Saami community members who contributed by attending, asking questions, sharing reflections, participating in genealogy work and strengthening the atmosphere of dialogue and mutual learning. Their participation is central to the purpose of the Oummu r  st raaj project.

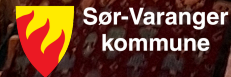
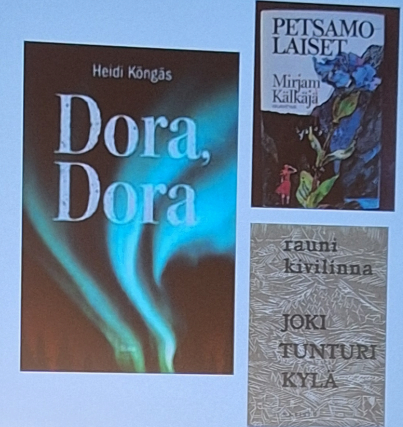
Special thanks are also extended to the S  mi Cultural Centre Sajos, Restaurant   aiju and Youth and Holiday Centre Vasatokka for their hospitality. This event was made possible through the funding and support of Interreg Aurora and the European Union, whose commitment to cross-border cooperation remains important for supporting the strengthening of Skolt Saami language, culture, identity and community connections across the borders.

Picture: Presentation "Crossing Borders in the Finnish Literary Representations of Pechenga" by Elina Arminen



## Pechenga in Finnish literature after World War II

- Representations of Petsamo lost in the war: literature from the 1960s to the 1990s
- Roots, identity, evacuation
  - Detachment from pre-war nationalist discourses
  - Rauni Kivilinna (1962) *Joki, tunturi, kyl  * / River, fell, village; Mirjam K  lk  j   (1977) *Petsamolaiset* / The people of Petsamo; Tuulikki Soini (1985) *Petsamo, tuullen kotimaa* / Petsamo, land of winds; Joni Skiftesvik (1991) *Petsamon kultatynnyri* / The Gold Barrel of Petsamo
  - Skolt S  mi literature: Kati-Claudia Fofonoff's poetry and prose works
- Historical novels of the 2000s
- The role of Petsamo in World War II
  - Transnational perspective
  - Katja Kettu (2011) *K  til  * / *Midwife*; Heidi K  ng  s (2012) *Dora, Dora*



# PAST AND PRESENT OF THE SKOLT SAAMI

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heritage and psychological support

Content of the report:  
Joni Gauriloff

Layout:  
Lempi Lehtinen

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