

Report of the Oummu rââst raaj Summer camp 2025



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1 Introduction

1.1 Camp objectives

Camp objectives are defined in the Interreg Aurora program application of funding and subsequent funding decision of the project. Camps are intended to create accessible and low-threshold opportunities for Skolt Saami people of all ages to meet across Finland-Norway border, spend time together in a natural environment and experience living as a community in line with traditions. Camps are designed not only as a language learning opportunity, but as immersive cultural experiences that strengthen Skolt Saami identity, intergenerational ties and cross-border connections. Camps allow participants of all ages to engage with Skolt Saami culture by singing, dancing, telling stories, preparing traditional food, practicing traditional crafts and following the rhythm of the traditional year cycle. Through these activities camps aim to rebuild lost or forgotten, and strengthen pre-existing cultural bonds, encourage the use of Skolt Saami language in a safe and friendly setting and contribute to the continuation and development of the Skolt Saami traditions and wellbeing of the Skolt Saami culture across the border.

1.2 Organizing entities

The camp was organized by the Oummu rââst raaj – People cross the borders project, funded by Interreg Aurora. Additional support was provided by Sámi Parliament in Norway, whose contribution was crucial in making the camp possible. The implementation relied on

close cooperation between several partners: NIBIO, the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy, Pasvik Folkehøgskole, Kukkolan Bussit Oy, and Boreal Bus Company. Ävv Skolt Saami Museum also contributed to the program by hosting part of the activities at their venue. In addition, number of Skolt Saami Specialist were actively involved in organizing traditional activities, ensuring authenticity and richness of the cultural content.

A challenge for the main organizers was that only one member of the project team, the project leader from Sør-Varanger Municipality was physically present in Norway to handle practical arrangements on-site before the camp began. Members from Inari municipality supported the organizing by planning the program and working with community members who led the activities on camp, preparing materials for pre-camp communication and for the camp itself, and managing registrations and shared transportation. This division of responsibilities made it possible to implement the camp successfully despite the geographical distance between the organizing entities. The realization of the camp was made possible through this combination of cross-border cooperation, institutional partners, and the contribution of Skolt Saami specialists, whose knowledge and skills were central to the camp's success.

1.3 Camp implementation

Camp took place on 28.7.2025-4.8.2025 in Pasvik, Norway, lasting a total of eight days including the transportation days. The decision on the length was a perceived risk by the organizers, taken at the request of the Norwegian partners to encourage as many Skolt Saami people living in Norway as possible to participate. However, this did not lead to the desired outcome. Instead, long duration made the camp feel stretched and lacking a clear, coherent structure with common beginning and ending. This was reflected in the fact that several people left early and only a small percentage of participants stayed the full duration of the camp and with only one participant from Norwegian side.

Accommodation was arranged in the Pasvik Folkehøgskole dormitories. Five dormitories were in use, each equipped with a common area, a kitchenette and a laundry room. The dormitories had rooms with a single bed and with twin beds. A sauna located approximately 1 kilometer away was available to participants most evenings. Sauna facility also had beach which was in active use of the camp participants throughout the duration of the camp during free time.

The strengths of the accommodation were its location in traditional Skolt Saami lands, its proximity to the restaurant, and its overall capacity to host the group. Weaknesses included an absence of a single shared common area for all the dormitories and the lack of family rooms. As a solution, families with more than two members

were given multiple rooms and flexibility was shown by allowing them to move beds between rooms as needed. In addition, all wishes noted on the registration form were carefully considered, and adjustments were made on the spot to achieve satisfying arrangements for everyone.



Picture: Dormitory common area

All meals were organized for participants. Breakfast supplies were delivered by the organizers to all dormitories, and participants prepared their own breakfast. Lunches and dinners were mainly served at NIBIO Svanhovd restaurant, located within walking distance of the camp venue. Dietary restrictions were taken into account, as the organizers provided the restaurant with detailed list in advance, ensuring that participants were able to eat safely and comfortably.

Despite the challenges with length and structure, the camp can be considered a major success in terms of participation, atmosphere,

and cultural impact. With total attendance of 52 participants, ranging from 4-month-old baby to elders over eighty-year-old, it embodied the intergenerational spirit crucial to the vitality of the Skolt Saami identity. A particularly striking feature was the number of families who attended with their children and teenagers, creating a setting where learning and cultural participation happened naturally across the age groups. This dynamic made the camp not only a place of cultural transmission but also a celebration of Skolt Saami life as lived with families and communities.



Picture: Camp participants

The camp program offered wide range of traditional activities that appealed to all generations: net fishing in the river Sameti, collecting herbs and dye plants, dyeing yarn, bead embroidery and learning of traditional kadrill dance. Storytelling, lectures about local history, and excursion to traditional Skolt Saami settling areas deepened participants' sense of belonging to community, while informal activities like sauna evenings and shared meals provided time to relax and strengthen social ties. Skolt Saami language was woven into these everyday activities, providing participants opportunities to hear and even use it in authentic settings.

The wide geographical spread of participants also demonstrated the strong interest the camp generated. While many came from the border regions of Finland and Norway, some traveled from as far away as southern Finland, underlining the importance of such gatherings for the wider Skolt Saami community. Families and individuals were motivated to travel long distances to take part, showing both the need for and the success of creating these kinds of cultural arenas.

Altogether, the camp succeeded in bringing together a diverse group in a safe, inclusive and low-threshold environment. It strengthened the intergenerational bonds, provided families with meaningful shared experiences and renewed pride in Skolt Saami heritage. By sparking interest across distances and offering genuine cultural immersion, it fulfilled and clearly exceeded its objectives to enhance identity, cohesion and continuity of Skolt Saami traditions.



Pictures: Traditional activities during the camp

2 Budget

2.1 Budget Finland

Budget post	Sum, NOK	Sum, Euro
Transport costs (bus Ivalo-Pasvik-Ivalo)	18.343	1567
PR-material and merchandise	23.762	2029,99
Other (fuel, small purchases for the camp program etc.)	5.742	490,55
Consultancy fees (Skolt Saami masters: contribution to the program)	7.257	620
Personnel costs (salaries, during camp)	82.063	7010,43
Personnel costs (salaries, planning etc. before the camp)	80.733	6896,84
Total	217.902	18614,81

2.2 Budget Norway

Budget post	Sum, NOK	Sum, Euro
Accommodation, Pasvik Folk High School	58.800	5043
Meals (lunches, dinners) at NIBIO Svanhovd Center	57.951	4970
Meals (breakfasts at Pasvik FHS, welcome lunch at Amudsen Cafe, dinner by the fireplace)	31.106	2668
Meeting room at Nibio Svanhovd Center	13.448	1153
Interpretation Finnish-Norwegian	7.615	653
Transport costs (Pasvik-Kirkenes-Pasvik)	21.315	1828
Consultancy fees (Skolt Saami masters: contribution to the program)	44.765	3840
Personnel costs (salaries, during camp)	15.000	1286
Personnel costs (salaries, planning etc. before the camp)	50.000	4289
Total	300.000	25730,00

3 Feedback

3.1 Description of the feedback survey

A digital feedback survey of the camp was conducted with a total of 21 responses (survey was open during period of 11.8.2025 to 31.8.2025). Digital format was chosen to reach as many participants as possible, since people had joined different parts of the program and were present for varying periods of the camp. Feedback survey was provided in Finnish, English and Norwegian, though all responses were submitted in Finnish.

The purpose of the survey was to collect information on how well camp succeeded in organizational and practical matters, how effectively the program was carried out, and how needed this type of camp is for the target group. An important aim was to gather perspectives for planning future camps, with an emphasis on receiving feedback on both positive and negative aspects to gain a broad picture of successes and areas for improvement. The survey was conducted anonymously, without collecting names or other identifying information, which ensured that participants could provide open and honest feedback, including remarks they might not have given otherwise. The survey link was shared directly with camp participants by email collected during sign-up and in the camp's WhatsApp Community. Despite the anonymity, no inappropriate or irrelevant feedback was received. The survey was divided into three main areas: program and activities, organizational matters and practicalities, and personal experience. There was also space for open comments on any matter related to the camp.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Program and activities

The average score given to the camp program was 3.75 out of 5. The highest rated activities were the visit to Ä'vv Skolt Saami Museum, the introduction to Skolt Saami history, herb gathering and dyeing yarn, and handicraft workshops. The feedback shows that practical, traditional activities led by competent community members were most appreciated.

Participant noted that being in a traditional Skolt Saami environment added great value, with one participant writing that the most important personal takeaway was:

"olla vanhalla koltta-alueella"

"to be on the old Skolt Saami land"

Social encounters were also meaningful, as another described the most valuable thing to be:

"nähdä muita ihmisiä"

"to see other people"

3.2.2 Organizational matters and practicalities

The organizational aspects received an average rating of 3.8 out of 5. While accommodation in Pasvik Folkehøgskole was generally considered good, participants pointed out absence of a single common area for all dormitories. Nevertheless, the capacity and location were appreciated, and the flexibility in room arrangements was recognized positively.

Food received mainly good reviews. Lunches and dinners at NIBIO Svanhovd were mostly rated as good, with dietary restrictions well taken into account. Some small details were raised, such as one comment noting:

"Aamiaisista puuttui tyystin kasvikset leivän päälle. Lounaat olivat turhan kevyitä ja päivälliset raskaita."

"Vegetables for bread were completely absent at breakfast. Lunches were too light, and dinners too heavy."

Although meals were generally appreciated, a few participants pointed out that the campfire dinner was poorly coordinated, suggesting that clearer planning for shared cooking events could improve future experiences.

Transport during camp received contrasting feedback. Bus connections from Finland to Pasvik and back were seen as successful

and convenient, but distances between some activities were considered long, and reliance on private cars caused problems for some.

Communication stood out as a recurring concern. Participants found that the official announcement of the camp came too late and that information before the camp was limited. Many wished the program had been available before registration closed. Communication during the camp was described as too slow with changes to the program not always clearly informed. However, the WhatsApp Community established during the first day of the camp was highlighted as a clear success. It was seen as an effective tool both for questions to the organizers and for communication between participants themselves.

At the same time, many participants praised the dedication of the organizers. Comments described them as approachable, supportive and highly committed with one writing:

"Järjestäjät saa arvosanan 10 – olitte ihania"

"Organizers deserve a 10 – you were wonderful"

While the majority of the participants praised the organizers' commitment and flexibility, a small share of responses reflected less positive experiences. Approximately 10% of the respondents rated the organizers' work as poor, noting moments where on-site coordination felt unclear or inconsistent.

Another point raised consistently was the length and timing of the camp. Feedback stressed that the camp was too long, with only a small percentage of participants staying until the end. Participants disliked that the camp extended across two separate weeks and its timing in late July and early August was considered too late. Comments about the timing stated:

"Viikkoa aikaisemmin olisi täydellinen"

"A week earlier would be perfect"

"Alkoi ja loppui tyhmästi tiistaina"

"It started and ended awkwardly on a Tuesday"

3.2.3 Personal experience

The overall satisfaction of the camp was rated on average at 3.95 out of 5. When asked if they would attend future camps organized by the project, 75% responded yes and 25% responded maybe, indicating a strong commitment and interest from the community.

Participants emphasized the value of meeting new community members and getting to know new people, and the sense of community was a theme that came up frequently in the feedback in a positive light. Reconnecting with new and previously familiar



Picture: Drafting of a family tree

relatives was also seen important with one describing their personal highlight as:

"Uusien sukulaisten löytyminen"
"Finding new relatives"

Another highlighted the positive atmosphere by writing:

"Ihmiset oli ystävälliset ja hyvä henki ♥"
"People were friendly and there was a good spirit ♥"

Picture: Spending time together by open fire



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However, personal experience ratings also reflected the structural challenges noted in the other parts of the survey. Several participants indicated that camp's duration was too long and would have been better at around four to five days. Despite this, many still described camp as enjoyable, with one remarking:

"Leirille oli mukava osallistua ja siellä oli hyvä henki"
"It was nice to take part in the camp and there was a good atmosphere"

3.3 Conclusion

The feedback demonstrates that the camp was meaningful and successful in many aspects, while also revealing areas that call for more systematic planning and reflection. Participants valued the opportunity to engage in traditional activities, connect with one another across generations, and spend time in a culturally significant environment. The organization was generally praised, especially the responsiveness of the organizers during the camp, the quality of meals, and the success of WhatsApp Community as a communication channel. Positive remarks about the organizing team showed that their enthusiasm, friendliness and flexibility were noticed and strongly appreciated by the participants.

The main issues identified were the late and insufficient pre-camp communication, the length and timing of the camp, and the lack of a

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single common gathering area in the accommodation. Some participants also commented on the physical distances between certain activities, which made it harder for the whole group to stay connected throughout the camp.

While the organizers' responsiveness during the camp was highly valued, a few responders felt that coordination could have been smoother at times. These observations underline the importance of refining logistical and communication structures alongside maintaining the strong community spirit.

In conclusion, the survey confirms both the need for and the success of this type of camp. The fact that three-quarters of the respondents expressed a clear willingness to attend future camps is strong evidence of its relevance. At the same time, participants called for shorter, more clearly structured camps, with earlier information and more detailed planning, including contingency arrangements for changing conditions such as weather. Together, the results show that the camp strengthened community, fostered cultural pride, and provided valuable experiences, while also highlighting areas where improvements can make future camps even more effective and enjoyable for the participants.

3.4 Key lessons learned for next camp

The feedback makes clear that future camps should build on the strong foundation of community spirit and cultural content, while addressing certain structural and practical issues. The length of the camp should be shorter, ideally four to five days, with a clear

beginning and ending to support participation throughout. Timing should be adjusted, with an earlier date in the summer seen as more convenient for families and individuals.

Communication emerged as a central area for improvement. Earlier announcement and the timely publication of the program before registration closes will help participants plan better and feel more confident in joining.

Reflecting on the feedback, several points require closer consideration for future planning. The physical distance between some activities made it harder for participants to feel connected to the wider group during the camp. Organizing future programs so that key activities are located nearer to one another would help strengthen the sense of community and reduce the need for personal transport between venues.

While majority of participants described the organizers as approachable and supportive, about 10 percent of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the organization of the camp, mentioning unclear coordination at times. This suggests a need for a more clearly defined division of responsibilities and stronger on-site coordination, particularly during busy transition periods. Similarly, feedback about communication, both before and during the camp, indicated that information should be shared earlier, and changes to the program communicated more consistently.

The meal arrangements were generally appreciated, though few comments noted that campfire meals and some breakfasts and lunches were less successful. Reviewing these elements in advance

and clarifying responsibilities for meal logistics could help ensure a smoother experience in future camps.

Overall, the feedback confirms that the camp successfully created a welcoming and culturally rich environment, while also identifying several practical areas where the organization can be improved. Strengthening the structure and coordination of activities, improving communication, and reducing logistical distances will help ensure smoother implementation in the future.

The summer camp offered a meaningful step forward in fostering cross-border community and cultural continuity, but it also highlighted areas for improvement that will guide future efforts. Balancing strong personal commitment with clearer coordination and communication will ensure smoother implementation of the next camp of the project. By acknowledging both successes and shortcomings, the organizing team demonstrates a willingness to learn and evolve - an approach that will strengthen not only future camps, but the overall impact of the Oummu râast raaj project as a whole.



Picture: Strengthening community spirit by spending time and doing activities together

4 Acknowledgement

4.1 Acknowledgements to the funders

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