

SÁPMI WAY – INNER FINNMARK

ENGLISH version

Comprehensive Summary

This comprehensive summary provides a systematized version of "**The Sápmi Næringshage Way.**"

This methodology is designed to bridge the gap between traditional Sámi practices and the national innovation system.

1. The Core Philosophy: Birgejupmi

At the heart of Sámi entrepreneurship is the concept of "**Birgejupmi**" (the ability to manage or provide a livelihood). Unlike Western models that prioritize rapid scaling, this is a long-term economic driver focused on:

- **Generational Sustainability:** Ensuring the survival and prosperity of the entrepreneur, their family, and the extended family (storfamilien) across generations.
- **Incremental Growth:** A "stone by stone" building strategy where financial resilience is prioritized over high-risk expansion.
- **Self-Sufficiency:** The primary motivation is often to create a sustainable local workplace that allows the entrepreneur to remain in their home region.

2. Methodology for Indigenous Counseling

The "Sápmi Way" moves away from standardized administrative procedures to a more **relational and process-oriented** approach.

- **The Advisor as a "Translator":** Counselors must bridge the "communication barrier" between the entrepreneur's vision and the "innovation language" of public institutions like Innovation Norway.
- **One-on-One Communication:** Preference is given to **personal meetings** over written correspondence or email, which fosters trust and clarity.

- **The "Safe Harbor" Concept:** Sápmi Næringshage acts as a "trygg havn" (safe harbor) where entrepreneurs can discuss strategies and ideas outside of their immediate social or competitive circles.
- **High Flexibility:** Counseling must adapt to the **eight seasons** and the unpredictable schedules of primary industries (such as reindeer herding or fishing), moving away from rigid booking systems to a "drop-in" friendly model.

3. Understanding the "Potato" Entrepreneur

Effective counseling requires recognizing the unique profile of the Sámi entrepreneur:

- **Multi-skilled ("Potatoes"):** Entrepreneurs are often "life-schooled" individuals with broad practical skills across multiple domains, though they may lack formal academic degrees.
- **Combination Operations (Kombinasjonsdrift):** Many businesses have "multiple legs to stand on," combining traditional primary industries with modern services like tourism or crafts.
- **Cultural Modesty:** There is often a cultural barrier toward self-promotion, with many entrepreneurs being cautious about sharing ideas or highlighting their own competence due to a fear of appearing boastful.

4. Navigating Internal and Systemic Barriers

A central part of the methodology involves identifying and mitigating specific barriers to innovation:

- **Social Pressures:** The **Jante Law** and "**Fuolkevuohhta**" (kinship/family relations) can create a fear of standing out or "doing too well," which may lead to community jealousy.
- **Systemic Mismatch:** Public support systems often focus on "tellekanter" (counting metrics) and rigid reporting that do not fit the fluid nature of Sámi business structures.
- **Historical Mistrust:** There is a documented skepticism toward the Norwegian support system, often rooted in past negative experiences or a perceived lack of cultural recognition.

5. Strategic Recommendations for Systematization (The "Future Path")

To evolve this into a research-ready methodology and a broader counseling tool, the following steps are integrated:

- **Development of a Sámi Entrepreneur-Pedagogy:** Formalizing learning models based on Sámi ways of sharing knowledge, prioritizing **process over results** to build the necessary trust (Verdde).
- **The Advisor's Resource Bank:** Creating a systematized guide for advisors that includes cultural specifics such as **time-perception**, the relationship between primary and secondary industries, and indigenous marketing strategies.
- **Theoretical Integration:** Connecting practice-based experiences from Inner Finnmark with **international research on indigenous entrepreneurship** to validate and refine the methodology for use in broader contexts.
- **Ethical Storytelling:** Teaching entrepreneurs to use **authentic storytelling** (especially in Duodji) as a tool for "ethical commercialization," ensuring products are priced according to their true cultural and craftsmanship value.

Analogy for Understanding

Western entrepreneurship is like a **highway**, designed for speed, clear signs, and a singular destination. The "Sápmi Way" is like **navigating the tundra**; there are no fixed roads, only seasons and landmarks. To succeed, one doesn't need a faster car; one needs a guide who understands the terrain, respects the rhythm of the herd, and knows that the goal isn't just to reach the end of the map, but to ensure the land and the people are sustained for the journey back.

What three elements define the concept of "The Sápmi Way"?

The concept of "**The Sápmi Way**" (or "The Sápmi Næringshage Way") is a methodology developed to support entrepreneurs on their **own terms** by documenting and systematizing tacit knowledge from the indigenous business environment.

According to the sources, this methodology is built upon addressing businesses with a **strong Sámi connection**, which is **defined by the following three elements**:

1. **Sámi Language Usage:** The business utilizes the Sámi language both **internally** among staff and **externally** in its communication with customers.

2. **Application of Sámi Culture, Nature, and Tradition:** The business actively incorporates Sámi cultural elements, a connection to nature, and the **further development of traditions** into its specific products and services.
3. **Social and Business Adaptation:** The business adapts its operations and societal role because its **customers and employees have a Sámi cultural background**.

Key Methodological Pillars

While these three elements define the connection of the businesses, the "Sápmi Way" methodology itself is further characterized by several practical approaches outlined in the sources:

- **Understanding "Birgejupmi":** Advisors must respect this economic driver—the goal of being able to manage and provide a sustainable livelihood—rather than focusing strictly on traditional Western growth parameters.
- **Cultural-Competent Counseling:** The method prioritizes **one-on-one meetings** over written or email communication and requires advisors to have specific Sámi linguistic and cultural competence.
- **Adaptation to the Eight Seasons:** The methodology accounts for an unpredictable everyday life governed by nature and **seasonal primary industries** (such as reindeer husbandry), requiring high flexibility in how and when counseling is delivered.
- **The "Safe Harbor":** It positions the business garden as a "trygg havn" (safe harbor) where entrepreneurs can discuss strategies and receive support from a "cheering squad" outside their immediate social circle.

By combining these elements, the methodology aims to bridge the gap between the entrepreneur's vision and the requirements of the national innovation system, effectively acting as a **translator** between different cultural and economic logic. entrepreneurship?

What does the term "Birgejupmi" signify in Sápmi entrepreneurship?

Understanding "Birgejupmi"...

The term "**Birgejupmi**" is a central concept in Sápmi entrepreneurship that signifies the **basis for a livelihood** or the fundamental ability to "manage" and survive. It represents a core economic driver and value system that differs significantly from traditional Western business metrics,.

Key aspects of "Birgejupmi" include:

- **Generational Sustainability:** The primary goal is to ensure that the entrepreneur, their immediate family, and the **extended family (storfamilien)** can manage and provide for themselves across generations.
- **Self-Sufficiency over Scaling:** Success is often defined by the desire to create a stable workplace for oneself and a small network of family members rather than pursuing aggressive commercial growth or export,.
- **"Stone by Stone" Development:** Even businesses with significant turnover often follow the "Birgejupmi" philosophy of building the enterprise "stone by stone" to ensure long-term resilience and independence.
- **Independence (Birgenláhki):** It is closely linked to the motivation to be independent and create a "**birgenláhki**" (a way to manage), allowing the entrepreneur to live off their culture, traditional knowledge, or local nature.
- The sources emphasize that for the national innovation system to be effective in Sápmi, advisors must **understand and respect "Birgejupmi"** as a legitimate economic driver, as it forms the foundation of the entrepreneur's motivation and decision-making.

Analogy for Understanding

If Western entrepreneurship is like a **rocket launch**—where the goal is maximum speed and altitude to reach a distant target—"Birgejupmi" is more like **tending a traditional hearth**. The priority is not how high the flames can reach, but ensuring the fire is steady, sustainable, and provides enough warmth to keep the entire family safe and fed throughout every season, year after year.

What three factors define a strong Sámi business connection?

According to the sources, a strong Sámi business connection is defined by three primary factors. These criteria are used by Sápmi Næringshage to identify and categorize the businesses they support in Inner Finnmark.

The three factors are:

1. **Sámi Language Usage:** This includes the use of the Sámi language both **internally within the company** and **externally in communication with customers**.
2. **Application of Sámi Culture and Tradition:** This involves the integration of **Sámi culture, nature, and the further development of traditions** within the business's specific products and services.
3. **Social and Business Adaptation:** This refers to how a business adapts to its environment because its **customers and employees have a Sámi cultural background**.
4. The sources note that many businesses operate with a **mix of all three elements**. Furthermore, while some entrepreneurs consciously utilize these factors, for others, this connection exists as **"tacit knowledge"**—an inherent part of the business that is not always explicitly documented or promoted.

Regarding the "Sápmi Way" of counseling, it is important to note that businesses meeting these criteria typically prefer advisors who possess specific **Sámi linguistic, cultural, and professional competence** to bridge the gap with the national innovation system.

How does the support system's terminology impact Sámi entrepreneurs?

The terminology used by the national innovation and support system has a significant impact on Sámi entrepreneurs, often acting as a **barrier to communication and inclusion**. Because the "innovation language" is frequently academic and geared

toward Western business ideals, it can alienate indigenous business owners whose values and daily operations differ from these norms.

Based on the sources, the impact of this terminology manifests in the following ways:

1. Alienation and Loss of Confidence

The specialized "innovation language" used by public support agencies is often difficult for Sámi entrepreneurs to understand. When entrepreneurs feel they cannot navigate this terminology or methodology, they frequently **lose faith in their own abilities and opportunities**. This linguistic gap can lead to a sense of not being "innovative enough" or "Sámi enough" to qualify for assistance.

2. Conceptual Mismatch in Success Metrics

The support system heavily emphasizes terms like "**growth,**" "**scaling,**" and "**export**" as primary success factors.

- **Contrasting Values:** These terms often clash with the Sámi economic driver of Birgejupmi (the ability to manage and provide a sustainable livelihood), which focuses on long-term survival and providing for the family rather than rapid commercial expansion.
- **"Tellekanter" (Counting Metrics):** Public funding models often require entrepreneurs to use rigid terminology regarding "effect goals" and "results". This forces a focus on **metrics and counting** rather than the dialogue-based and creative processes that are more natural to the Sámi entrepreneurial environment.

3. "Talking Past Each Other"

In professional settings, such as meetings with private investors or financial institutions, the two parties often "**snakke forbi hverandre**" (**talk past each other**).

- Investors speak the language of high-stakes investment and self-promotion, while Sámi entrepreneurs—who are often culturally modest—may not highlight their own competence or vision in the same aggressive terms.
- The lack of shared terminology leads to a **communication barrier** that can result in missed investment opportunities or a lack of risk capital for those wishing to scale their businesses.

4. Practical Barriers in Applications

The terminology used in **rigid and heavy application portals** is a major deterrent. Entrepreneurs report that the "administrative burden" and the way questions are phrased in these systems make the application process feel overwhelming. This is exacerbated by a lack of guides or templates that use **Sámi-specific values** as success parameters instead of standard Norwegian ones.

5. Role of the "Translator"

Because of these terminological hurdles, Sámi entrepreneurs often require a **mediator or "translator"** within the innovation system. Organizations like Sápmi Næringshage fill this gap by having the cultural and linguistic competence to translate the entrepreneur's vision into the "innovation language" required for formal applications and reporting.

Analogy for Understanding

The impact of the support system's terminology is like a **mismatched navigation system**. While the entrepreneur is navigating a complex forest using a traditional understanding of the landmarks and seasons, the support system provides a map written in a foreign script that only recognizes paved highways. Even if both parties are in the same forest, the different "languages" of navigation make it nearly impossible for the mapmaker to help the traveler reach their destination.