

In Memory of Matryona and Valerij Sotkayarvi of Jona



Tatiana Tsmykailo and Valerij Sotkayarvi creating the first traditional land-use and occupancy map of Jona, July 1996.

On 17 March 1998, we of the Arctic Institute heard—via fax from our colleague Leif Rantala in Finland—that two of our Sami research partners in the Kola Peninsula of Russia had been murdered. Valerij Sotkayarvi and his mother, Matryona Sotkayarvi, were both shot to death in their small apartment in the village of Jona. Our Sami friends report that a local gangster hired a professional killer to shoot Valerij in order to get his snowmobile and his hunting rifles. His mother was killed as she responded to her son's pleas for help. Two men were seen driving the snowmobile away from the scene, carrying Valerij's guns in their arms. No one expects the killer and his accomplice to be captured; even if they are captured, the local expectation is that they will bribe themselves out of jail, avoiding any punishment. This has happened before.

Only last summer, on 10 July, the Arctic Institute and the Russian Sami Institute celebrated the completion of the Russian Sami Co-Management Project. Canadian and Sami project partners presented our traditional land-use and occupancy maps to a joint meeting of Murmansk Administration officials, Duma representatives, Russian Academy of Science members, Kola Peninsula municipal politicians, and the media, held in the Duma chamber in Murmansk. At the conclusion of this meeting, Vice-Governor Vasili Kalaida stated: "The State has not served the Sami well, and our next steps must be concrete and pragmatic." He called for County legislation to ensure that the map details would be publicly held and to make their use compulsory in national planning for development: "Concerning co-management, I agree with Nina Afanas'eva [President of the Russian Sami Association]. Natural resources are meant for everybody, taking account of traditional places of the Small Peoples. These places have to be separated in another way, than [was] previously done in Russia....I acknowledge and respect those who made these maps." These words gave official power to the process of participatory action research used in the project, officially sanctioned co-management in the Kola Peninsula, and—for the first time—acknowledged the duty of the State to consult with the Sami before permitting development or allocating resource rights on their traditional homelands.

While the the meeting gave us cause for hope, and demonstrated that the Sami Co-Management Project partnership had achieved its major goal, the murders show that social and economic decay and destabilization continue in the Kola Peninsula. The Russian Sami are still waiting for capitalism to fulfill its promise, amidst the realities of missed pension and pay cheques, a meagre food supply, crumbling municipal infrastructure, a critical lack of antibiotics, and the ongoing environmental degradation of the tundra, home to their 160 000 reindeer. The deaths of Matryona and Valerij, both of whom worked on the Jona land-use maps, are evidence of a social system in turmoil and pain, and those of us who have worked alongside them these past three years can only hope that their example is not forgotten. They were both wonderful examples of the Sami way, and their generosity of spirit lives on in Jona, a small Sami village that has weathered the Russian Revolution of 1917, the purges of Stalin, the ravages of Nazi attacks, the collapse of Communism, and the arrival of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. I think Jona will continue as always, and the great forces of history will ebb and flow around and about Sami reindeer herders who have not lost either their courage or their stewardship relations with the land.

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