

Activism on the intersections: Being part of the indigenous Sámi community and LGBTI

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February 6 is Sámi National Day, when indigenous communities from the Sápmi region in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia commemorate the first Sámi congress, which was held in 1917. LGBTI Sámi activist, Anne Olli tells us what it means to be at the intersection of two minorities –and what you can do to be a Sámi ally!

LGBTI and Sámi activist Anne Olli, or as she would introduce herself in Sámi language, Ville Ristena Pirkko Anne, is the vice-chair of the Finnish Sámi Youth Organisation ([Suomi Sámi Nuorat](#)) and a board member at the Finnish LGBTI rights organization, [Seta](#). Born and raised in Ivalo, in Finnish Sápmi, and living today in Oulu, the 26-year-old activist talks to us for Sami National Day about the double stress of belonging to two minorities, the milestones on her activist journey, and the challenges ahead.

Hei, Anne! Happy Sámi National Day! To start with, could you tell us about how you became an activist?

I think I've always been more or less of an activist, be it over environmental questions, indigenous rights or LGBTI rights. But when it comes to LGBTI rights, the story is that after Kautokeino's Sápmi Pride in 2016 I told the organisers that I'd be willing to help in some way in organising Sápmi Pride to Inari the following year. A few months later I noticed that I was actually the main organiser of Sápmi Pride! So that's how it started.

Tell us about any milestones on your journey so far, that you are particularly proud of.

Inari's Sápmi Pride turned out fine, even though there were many problems along the way. Almost 200 people showed up for the parade — that's a big number for a small village. Later, Seta's youth committee awarded me with the title of the Rainbow Youth 2018 and I won the category Activist of the Year at Finland's QX Awards. I was also proud to give a statement about Sámi LGBTI issues at the [United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues \(UNPFII\)](#) in April 2019.



Sámi version of the Rainbow flag. Credit: Anne Olli

What are the biggest challenges that LGBTI Sámi people face?

Loneliness is a big challenge for us, because there aren't so many of us, and the distances can be very large. We also have to deal with multiple discriminations, where we get discriminated for both our Sámi background and queerness. Belonging to two minorities can bring double stress — as Sámi, there are always threats to our culture and languages, which we need to react to, and at the same time we need to fight homophobia and transphobia and try to lead our normal lives at work or in school, and so on. So, it might not be a surprise that mental illnesses are usual and burnouts happen way too often.

What have been some of the achievements of Sámi LGBTI activists?

[Sápmi Pride](#) has been organised every year, since it started in 2014. This is a big achievement, because every year it has been such a big struggle. We activists have also raised the awareness about our existence and issues in Finland, Sweden and Norway. Not everyone knows about the Sámi, even in these countries, and when they hear that there are also LGBTI people among Sámi, they can be really surprised!

How can readers of this blog be good allies to Sámi LGBTI communities?

Educate yourself about Sámi people in general — [Say it in Saami](#) is an excellent source for basic information and also a great tool for learning some words and phrases! Follow Sápmi Pride and Sámi LGBTI organization, Garmeres on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). If you're visiting Sápmi, visit Sámi museums and avoid buying cheap

'Sámi' stuff at souvenir shops. Be respectful, give space and don't make assumptions — we are unique individuals with our own stories and experiences just like everyone else. Invite and include us, but do not expect us to be able to do everything for free.



Sápmi Pride 2017 in Inari. Credit: Tomi Guttorm