

# Place and Presence

Kjell Borgen's works in Sápmi

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The Norwegian architect Kjell Borgen enjoyed a successful career in the second half of the twentieth century as a partner in the Oslo architectural practice Borgen & Bing Lorentzen. Although he was based in Oslo, he also completed commissions in Sápmi throughout his career, from surveying vernacular Sámi architecture to designing works for Sámi clients. By focusing both on Borgen's works both as a scholar of traditional Sámi architecture and as an architect working for Sámi clients, this text sheds light on his attempts to define what Sámi architecture is.

**Keywords:** *Kjell Borgen, Christian Norberg-Schulz, vernacular Sámi architecture, modern Sámi architecture, Indigenous architecture, architectural phenomenology*

What defines Sámi architecture? The Norwegian architect Kjell Borgen (1928–2015) spent several decades attempting to answer this question, both as a scholar and as a designer, starting in his student years around 1950 and continuing as a distinguished architect until the 1990s. He was one of very few people in Norway with an in-depth knowledge of vernacular Sámi architecture, and probably the first architect (at least on the Norwegian side of Sápmi) to endeavour, when designing for Sámi clients, to create designs that were truly rooted in Sámi culture. Nonetheless, his work in Sápmi, both as an architect and as a scholar of traditional Sámi architecture, has mostly escaped the attention of historians of art and architecture.

In the following text, I present Kjell Borgen's scholarly and architectural work in Sápmi and discuss the influence of Sámi building traditions and, later on, contemporary architectural theory, on his architectural designs in Sápmi. In particular, I investigate how Borgen's scholarly endeavours enabled him to identify what he thought of as typical Sámi architectural signifiers and how he applied these in his own designs.

Borgen's work in Sápmi was diverse. As a young man, he made survey drawings and took photographs to document traditional architecture. Later in his career, he undertook architectural and scholarly projects. He studied Sámi culture and worked with Sámi clients throughout his career. The foundation for all his work was the surveys he completed in the 1950s. As well as introducing him to a vernacular architecture that he found endlessly fascinating, his work on these surveys gained him lifelong friends and connections and, as time went on, a range of commissions on very different scales.<sup>1</sup> Borgen's decades spent working with Sámi culture and Sámi clients are inextricably tangled with events in Sámi history, from the inclusion of Sámi

culture at the Norwegian Folk Museum to the self-confident Sámi cultural revival of the 1970s and onwards. There is no comprehensive list of Borgen's work for Sámi clients. Indeed, it is likely that some works are now lost, as the fragment of his archive that has survived (now at the National Museum of Norway) contains very little. For example, he completed a commission from the Sámi Reindeer Herders' Association of Norway to produce standard designs for summer dwellings, but whether these templates were ever used, or even still exist, is currently unknown.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1990s, Borgen conducted a research project funded by the Norwegian Research Council, for which he revisited some of the farms and settlements he had documented forty years earlier. He recorded changes that had occurred during the intervening years, while also developing a theoretical explanation for differences between traditional North Sámi farmsteads in Finnmark County and neighbouring farms that were characteristic of Norwegian and Finnish cultures.<sup>3</sup>

None of Borgen's architectural works in Sápmi has been discussed previously in the context of his scholarly writings. In fact, these works have not been discussed much at all. This probably reflects the lack of interest, at least until recently, that art and architectural historians have displayed in Sámi architecture, including historical, modern and contemporary Sámi architecture. The same is true of modern and contemporary Indigenous architecture more broadly; it is only in very recent decades that this field has received academic attention.<sup>4</sup>

1 Ole Magnus Rapp, "Gamme-arkitekten," *Finnmark Dagblad*, 22 February, 1991.

2 "Sekundærboliger i reindrifta," *Reindriftnytt/Boazodoallu-oddasa* 14, no. 1 (1980): 19; Rapp, "Gamme-arkitekten".

3 Kjell Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark: Naturtilpasning, form og kulturelle konvensjoner fra 1900 til 1990*, FOK-programmets skriftserie (Oslo: Norges forskningsråd, 1995).

4 Elizabeth Grant, Kelly Greenop, Albert L. Refiti & Daniel J. Glenn, "Introduction," in *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, eds. Elizabeth Grant et.al (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 1–22.

## Lávvu, Gohti, Giants

In Norway, an ongoing critical discussion about what contemporary Indigenous architecture in Sápmi can be was initiated by the architect and artist Joar Nango (b. 1979) in his diploma project, *Sami huksendáidda: The FANzine* (2007–2008). He has described how as an architecture student, he “gradually became aware of the lack of conversations, not only around Sámi architecture, but about Sámi culture in general.”<sup>5</sup> In the zine, and also in Nango’s subsequent practice up until today, one observation has recurred: “Almost without exception [- -] official Sámi institutions were designed by Norwegian architects without the input of Sámi people.”<sup>6</sup> Nango was not the first to note the tendency of non-Sámi architects, when commissioned to design official buildings such as museums, churches or even a parliament, to turn to the *lavvú* as an obvious symbolic motif. But it was Nango who dubbed this phenomenon *Giant Lavvú Syndrome*, neatly encapsulating the result of attempts to design Sámi-looking buildings by imitating the distinctive conical *lavvú* form.<sup>7</sup> By far the most famous giant *lavvú* is the Sámi Parliament in Kárásjohka (Karasjok).<sup>8</sup>

The traditional *lavvú* is a lightweight portable tent that was used by nomadic herders when travelling with their reindeer. In today’s reindeer husbandry, the *gumpi*, a small hut on runners that can be towed by snowmobiles, has long since replaced the tent. The use of *lavvú* motifs by non-Sámi architects in modern and contemporary architecture can constitute a form of architectural ethnographic present. As Nango explains:

We are still a colonised people – a minority that is often neglected. If we’re represented, it is through an essentially folkloristic lens, which presents us as a culture that belongs in a museum. As with other Indigenous cultures, that is not the case at all. Sámi society is a contemporary one that we have managed to build politically and culturally, despite the state’s historic – and often violent – efforts to ‘assimilate’ us.<sup>9</sup>

Traditional Sámi architecture encompasses a multitude of different building types, some permanent and some portable. The idea that the *lavvú* is *the* traditional Sámi dwelling is a common misunderstanding. The larger, more robust tents as well as the semi-permanent turf huts, have mostly escaped attention, as social anthropologist Ivar Bjørklund points out in an article exploring dwelling types associated with Sámi reindeer husbandry.<sup>10</sup> In a method unique to Sámi culture, larger tents are constructed using beams sourced from birch trees with naturally bent trunks. Two of these curved beams are joined to form an arch, which is then joined to a second arch using a ridge pole. The resulting structure is known as a *bealljegohti*.

5 Joar Nango, “In Practice,” *The Architectural Review*, no. 1494 (2022): 93.

6 Nango, “In Practice,” 93.

7 For a further discussion of Nango’s notion see: Martin Braathen, “Apropos the Giant Lávvu,” in *Huksendáidda: Architecture in Sápmi*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Stamsund: Orkana, 2022). The earliest discussion of the *lavvú* as a motif for contemporary architecture was probably in Sunniva Skålnes, “Det bygde landskapet i Sápmi – folkearkitekturen som mønster, minne og markør,” in *Samiske landskapsstudier: rapport fra et arbeidsseminar*, ed. Lars Magne Andreassen (Guovdageaidnu: Sámi instituhta, 2004).

8 Designed by Stein Halvorsen (b. 1953) and Christoffer Sundby (b. 1957) 1996–2000. For a thorough discussion of this modern monument, see Elin Haugdal, “Strategies of Monumentality in Contemporary Sámi Architecture,” in *Sami Arts and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal & Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen (Århus: Aarhus University Press, 2017).

9 Nango, “In Practice,” 93.

10 Ivar Bjørklund, “The Mobile Sámi Dwelling: From Pastoral Necessity to Ethno-political Master Paradigm,” in *About the Hearth: Perspectives on the Home, Hearth and Household in the Circumpolar North*, ed. David G. Anderson, Robert P. Wishart & Virginie Vaté (New York: Berghain, 2013), 69.



**Image 1.** Joar Nango, Bealljegoahti structure, 2021. Installation shot from “Girjegumpi: Sámi Architectural Library”, The National Museum – Architecture, September 15, 2021–February 6, 2022. Photo: The National Museum / Ina Wesenberg, CC-BY.

The term bealljegoahti also denotes a turf hut built using the same type of structure. The structure needs to be able to support the weight of poles and turf, however, so the arched beams (*bealljit*) must be thicker and sturdier than those used for the cloth-covered tent.<sup>11</sup> *Goahti* can be used to refer to both a tent and a turf hut (*darfegoahti*). Björklund asserts that unlike the *lávvu*, the architectural potential of the bealljegoahti remains untapped.<sup>12</sup> But exploring the architectural possibilities of this unique Sámi structure was what Kjell Borgen did.

## Sámi and Norwegian Vernacular

Kjell Borgen is by no means an unknown name in Norwegian architectural history, even if his works have been little discussed. He established a practice with Ragnvald Bing-Lorentzen (1929–2022) in 1957; they had both finished training in 1953. They did well for themselves and even had branch offices in both Vadsø and Alta for a long time, as the practice had several clients in the northernmost part of Norway. The two founders stayed based in Oslo, however. They maintained their partnership throughout their long careers, but the practice’s Sámi architectural projects were Borgen’s alone.<sup>13</sup> In 1983, Borgen and Bing-Lorentzen achieved a milestone when they were awarded the highly prestigious Timber Prize in recognition of their innovative wooden architecture. Prominent examples included buildings

11 The bealljegoahti is an ancient structure, but there are numerous other ways to construct a *darfegoahti*. Randi Sjølie, “Fra gamle til trehus,” in *Arkitektur i Nord-Norge*, ed. Ingeborg Hage et al. (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2008).

12 Björklund, “The Mobile Sámi Dwelling,” 78.

13 Information provided by Ragnvald Bing-Lorentzen during an interview with the author, 14 September 2022.





**Image 2.** Borgen and Bing-Lorentzen, *Eengerdaelie Community House*, 1971. Photo: Teigens Fotoatelier. The National Museum of Norway, CC-BY.

for the tourism sector, such as Gaustablikk Hotel (1971) and Kárásjohka Hotel (1975–1983). Another main work is Eengerdaelie (Engerdal) Community House (1965–1970). These buildings are characterised by features found in most of the practice’s other designs from this period, such as the use of local materials (wood) and sensitive adaptations to the site.

Typical of their time, the practice’s designs can easily be described as critical regionalism, as defined by Kenneth Frampton in 1980: an architecture that “may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of the local light, or in a *tectonic* derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography

of a given site.”<sup>14</sup> Borgen and Bing-Lorentzen’s tectonic understanding of wood as a material was praised by the Timber Prize jury:

Norway is a country characterized by its wooden houses, and we gladly encourage this image abroad: The sprawling farm with its warm, inviting wood buildings. Through reinstating wood as a dominate [sic] building material under credible technical conditions, these architects have given many tourist buildings a Norwegian climate and regional character in

14 Kenneth Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, [1983] 1998), 23.

an area where an amorphous internationalism reigns.<sup>15</sup>

Untangling this jury statement, Borgen and Bing-Lorentzen's work was perceived as embodying a Norwegian tradition, even as preserving the tradition from threatening alien (international) impulses. The trope of foreign fashions compromising Norwegian architecture is an old one, dating back to at least the 1860s. Fears of corruption of the national tradition seem to have emerged soon after that tradition was identified in the first place (or, to phrase it with Eric Hobsbawm, "invented").<sup>16</sup>

The Timber Prize was established in 1961 to recognize architects who championed and further developed what was perceived to be a national tradition of building in wood. A book about the award and its recipients was published in 1988. It also included three essays on vernacular architecture. After essays on "The Norwegian tradition" and "The Western tradition", the book presented Borgen's essay: "The Polar tradition".<sup>17</sup> His text stresses how architecture and landscape can work together to create unique experiences of being:

A tent in a landscape without end. Here we find the simplest room of all: Man forms a ring of canvas around himself. The experience of this room is strong. When one sits around the fire, the room is given an atmosphere. The light

plays through the smoke. When the fire flares up the room changes its character.

Or ... Morning's darkness gives [sic] way to dawn's gray light.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, Norwegian architects placed significant emphasis on subjective experience, based on the powerful influence of the phenomenological theories of Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926–2000). As I show in this article, Borgen's reading of Norberg-Schulz's texts would come to shape his interpretation of Sámi architecture.

Borgen published his first text on Sámi architecture as early as 1954.<sup>19</sup> Although he had barely completed his training, he was already an authority on the subject. Using his own photographs and drawings as illustrations, he described different vernacular traditions through the ages with impressive efficiency. Published in *Byggekunst* (The Norwegian Review of Architecture), this pioneering feature was the first example in Norway of a richly illustrated piece exploring building traditions in Sápmi within an explicitly architectural context. It marked a significant departure from the previous derogatory treatment of these traditions as primitive and more suited to ethnographic and ethnological study.<sup>20</sup>

In Norway, the concept of a unified "folk" and the incompatibility of the nation-state model with the need to accommodate two distinct populations within a single entity exacerbated the marginalisation of Sámi culture during the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> In the first scholarly

15 Dag Rognlien ed., *Treprisen, Thirteen Norwegian Prize-Winning Architects* (Oslo: Arkitektnytt, 1988), 193.

16 For the formation of a 'national' architecture in Norway, see Bente Aass Solbakken, "A True Norwegian Style," in *Dragons and Logs*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet, 2023).

17 Kjell Borgen, "The Polar Tradition," in *Treprisen: Thirteen Norwegian Prize-Winning Architects*, ed. Dag Rognlien (Oslo: Arkitektnytt, 1988).

18 Borgen, "The Polar Tradition," 171.

19 Kjell Borgen, "Samenes bygningskultur," *Byggekunst* 36, no. 4 (1954).

20 Bente Aass Solbakken, "An Unnational Architectural Tradition," in *Huksendáidda: Architecture in Sápmi*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Stamsund: Orkana, 2022).

21 Astri Andresen, Bjørg Evjen, & Teemu Ryymin, eds., *Samenes historie fra 1751 til 2010* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2021), 131–137, 154–155.

account of Norwegian history published in 1852, two sentences were all it took to deny the presence of the Sámi people and the existence of their distinct building culture:

Norway has no historical presence without Norwegians, and the Norwegians have none without Norway. [- -] If there were perhaps some Finns or Lapps roaming the mountain plateaux with their reindeer, that cannot be described as any kind of settlement.<sup>22</sup>

Assertions that Indigenous peoples lack any architectural culture have been common, and are yet another legacy of colonisation, as is the denigration of Indigenous architecture as not “true” architecture.<sup>23</sup> The inclusion of Sámi architecture in *Byggekunst* and the book about the Timber Prize is significant because Sámi architecture had been (and to a large degree still is) more or less invisible in architectural culture in Norway, including in texts about architectural history. Art history was established as a discipline in Norway in the latter part of the nineteenth century, during a period when scholarly output was strongly influenced by nationalism. The art historian Monica Grini has vividly demonstrated the impact of nationalism on the development of Norwegian art history and its continued structural influence.<sup>24</sup> Recently, the law professor Kirsti Strøm Bull highlighted how scholars from the 1850s onwards contributed to shaping an image of Sámi culture as primitive and inferior,

and called for academia to acknowledge the substantial part it played in this process.<sup>25</sup>

The general exclusion of the Sámi people from the national narrative during the nineteenth century led to the segregation of Sámi culture from Norwegian culture in museum collections. In Oslo, Sámi artefacts were displayed at the Ethnographic Museum, alongside artefacts from non-European cultures.<sup>26</sup> In 1951, a proposal to transfer the Sámi collections from the Ethnographic Museum to the Norwegian Folk Museum received official approval. The transfer was a strong political statement by both institutions and had the express aim of representing Norway’s Sámi and ethnic Norwegian populations on an equal footing.<sup>27</sup> The initiative came from the ethnographer Guttorm Gjessing (1906–1979), who had taken over as the director of the Ethnographic Museum in 1947. Gjessing’s radical politics and in-depth knowledge of Sámi culture led him to conclude that the Sámi collection belonged elsewhere and the director of the Folk Museum agreed.<sup>28</sup> The years around 1950 have been seen as a period of breakthrough for Sámi organisations, whose demands for recognition and justice were received more sympathetically in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>29</sup> The Folk Museum established a Sámi Department in 1951 and appointed the

22 P. A. Munch, *Det norske Folks Historie. Deel 1*, vol. 1 (Christiania: Chr. Tønsbergs forlag, 1852), 1. Original: “Norge har ingen historisk Tilværelse uden ved Nordmændene, og Nordmændene ingen uden ved Norge. [- -] Thi at der oppe paa Fjeldslettene maaske vandrede nogle Finner eller Lapper med deres Reenhjorder, kan man ikke kalde nogen Bebyggelse”.

23 Grant et al., *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, Introduction, 2–4.

24 Monica Grini, *Samisk kunst og norsk kunsthistorie: delvise forbindelser* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2021).

25 By analysing the celebratory and opulent two-volume work, *Norge i det nittende århundre* (1900) (Norway in the Nineteenth Century), authored by the nation’s most distinguished and renowned scholars, scientists, and artists of the time, she effectively demonstrates the presence of systemic racism. Kirsti Strøm Bull, “Vitenskapens rolle i fornorskningstiden,” *Nytt norsk tidsskrift* 41, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18261/nnt.41.2.1>.

26 Grini, *Samisk kunst og norsk kunsthistorie*, 44–56.

27 Leif Pareli, “‘Stilt på likefot’ Om samisk kultur ved Norsk Folkemuseum,” in *Forskning og fornyelse: By og bygd 70 år*, eds. Inger Jensen, Kari Telste & Jon Birger Østby (Oslo: Norsk Folkemuseum, 2013), 90.

28 Pareli, “‘Stilt på likefot’,” 93.

29 Andresen, Evjen & Ryymin, *Samenes historie fra 1751 til 2010*, chapter 8.



linguist Asbjørn Nesheim (1906–1989) as keeper. Nesheim had ambitious plans for an outdoor North Sámi exhibit, and dreamt of creating a “sametun” alongside all the other *tuns*<sup>30</sup> that already showcased the vernacular architecture of different regions of Norway.<sup>31</sup> Ideally, the “sametun” would include several turf huts, each intended for a different use (dwelling, cooking, livestock shelter, hunting, fishing), as well as a River Sámi farm, a Coastal Sámi farm, a *lávvu* ...<sup>32</sup> As Nesheim explained to the Norwegian press, the materials for the new exhibits were to be collected on field trips; the task was urgent, as so much was rapidly disappearing, not least the turf-hut dwellings.<sup>33</sup>

In the summer of 1950, even before the official relocation of the Sámi collections, the Ethnographic and Folk Museums collaborated to send four students north to survey Sámi architecture. The expedition was led by architecture student Kjell Borgen, who was making his very first trip to Finnmark.<sup>34</sup> The group sent accounts of their activities to the national newspaper *Aftenposten*, but these tended to be more about high-spirited canoeing adventures than building traditions.<sup>35</sup> Borgen did report, however, that their main task was to map whatever turf huts they could find. They did not expect to find much. When the Nazi regime that had occupied Norway during World War II was forced to retreat from Finnmark in 1944, it adopted a scorched earth policy. As a result, the students expected pretty much everything to have been

burnt to the ground. In rural areas, however, the military patrols had tended to target dwellings, probably for reasons of efficiency. Consequently, many turf huts on farmsteads, such as livestock shelters, had survived.<sup>36</sup> Borgen and his companions managed to survey about 40 turf huts in the areas around Kárášjohka and Deatnu (Tana) that summer.<sup>37</sup> Their success, however, does not diminish the devastation caused by the burning of Finnmark and Nord-Troms. Almost everything was in ruins, infrastructure was destroyed, and people were left homeless. As post-war reconstruction in Finnmark proceeded, the massive rebuilding projects also resulted in architectural Norwegianisation: the plethora of multicultural buildings that had gone up in smoke were for the most part replaced by monocultural Norwegian houses.<sup>38</sup>

During the 1950s, the Folk Museum despatched Borgen on several field trips to survey and document traditional Sámi buildings. There was a sense of urgency, as the surviving Sámi structures were rapidly disappearing. In the summer of 1952, Borgen and Nesheim collected buildings and other artefacts for the planned outdoor exhibit in Oslo. In July, the local newspaper in Finnmark reported that they already had shipped south a turf hut used for cooking animal feed from the village of Ánnejohka (Vestre Jacobselv) and were now travelling towards

30 Farmyards surrounded by clusters of farm buildings.

31 B. F., “Bort fra vidderomantikk og eksotiske naboer,” *VG*, 24 December 1952.

32 Pareli, “Stilt på likefot,” 97.

33 B. F., “Bort fra vidderomantikk og eksotiske naboer.”

34 The three others were Borgen’s classmates Einar Arnborg (1925–1995) and Kåre Strandskogen, and the artist Finn Strømsted (1925–2003), whose role was to study Sámi ornamentation. “Det er moro å se seg om i verda,” *Stavanger Aftenblad*, 21 June, 1950.

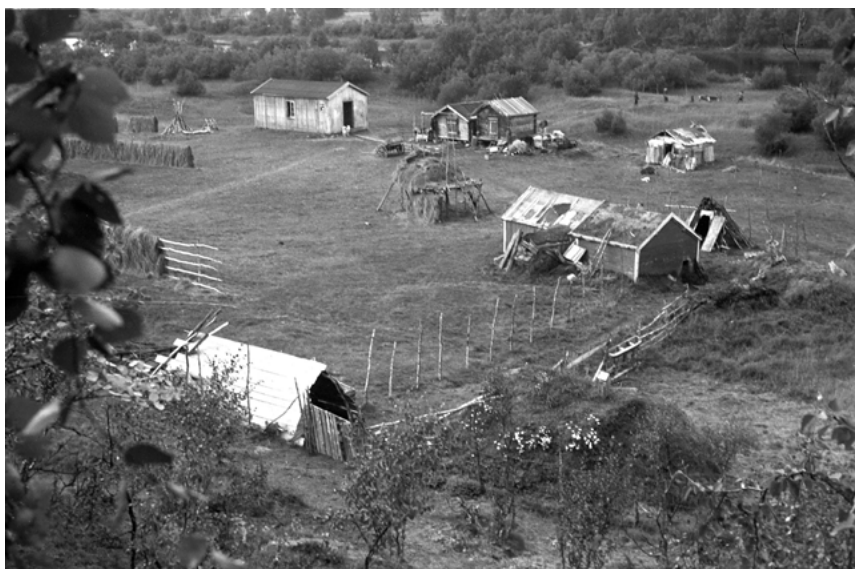
35 Kjell Borgen, “I kamp med mygg og gjenstridige stryk,” *Aftenposten*, 28 October, 1950.

36 Einar Niemi, “Byggeskikk og arkitektur i Finnmark,” in *Årbok for Foreningen til norske Fortidsminnesmerkers Bevaring* (Oslo: Foreningen til norske Fortidsminnesmerkers Bevaring, 1983), 57.

37 “Samenes bosetting i Finnmark studeres nærmere,” *Lofotposten*, 16 February 1951.

38 Ivar Bjørklund, “Reconstructon and Norwegianization,” in *Huksendáidda: Architecture in Sápmi*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Stamsund: Orkana, 2020). There were exceptions to this rule, however: some rebuilt dwellings were customised to meet Sami needs, see Ingeborg Hage, *Som fugl fønix av asken? Gjenreisingshus i Nord-Troms og Finnmark* (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1999), 255–260; Elin Haugdal, “Home: Learning from Sápmi,” in *Towards Home: Inuit & Sami Placemaking*, ed. Joar Nango et al. (Canadian Centre for Architecture / Váiz / Mondo Books, 2024), 96–97.





**Image 3.** Nils Mathis Gaup's farm in Máze. Photo: Kjell Borgen, 1953. Norsk Folkemuseum, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Karášjohka and Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino).<sup>39</sup> A historical account of the Sámi Department at the Folk Museum states that the ambitious plans for an outdoor Sámi exhibit failed for unclear reasons (an indoor exhibit opened in 1958.) The buildings dismantled and moved from Sápmi, “probably ended up amongst the museum’s disorderly heaps of materials and must be considered lost”.<sup>40</sup> This loss becomes even more problematic given the contemporaneous discussions about establishing an open-air museum in Finnmark. These discussions were initiated by the newly established Guovdageaidnu Museum Society, chaired by duojár and politician Lauri Keskitalo (1914–1989).<sup>41</sup> These endeavours to found a Sámi museum in Sápmi coincided with the Folk Museum’s exports of Sámi heritage to

Oslo, only to misplace it.<sup>42</sup> The buildings were not the only loss: Kjell Borgen’s many detailed survey drawings have been missing from the museum for more than 20 years.<sup>43</sup> All of Borgen’s photographs, however, are digitised and accessible.<sup>44</sup>

Borgen gained a large network of contacts during his summers spent surveying vernacular architecture, laying the foundations for his later works in Sápmi.<sup>45</sup> Borgen’s final assignment for the Folk Museum seems to have been completed in 1958, as this is the date of the most recent photographs in the collection, which include several from Finnish Sápmi. There is little information about any work by Borgen that related to Sámi culture in the following decade. Perhaps he concentrated on establishing his practice with Bing-Lorentzen during the 1960s, or perhaps he had assignments I have not been able to trace. He

39 “Samisk avdeling ved Norsk folkemuseum på Bygdøy,” *Finnmarken*, 8 July, 1952.

40 Pareli, “‘Stilt på likefot’ Om samisk kultur ved Norsk Folkemuseum,” 97 (author’s translation). Original: “havnet trolig blant museets uoversiktelige maetrialstabler og må i dag anses tapt”.

41 “Samisk landsmuseum til Kautokeino?,” *Vestfinnmark Arbeiderblad*, 10 February, 1954; “Den samiske kulturarven må bli reddet. Kautokeino muséforening søker om statsmidler til en fast utstilling,” *Nordlys*, 16 December, 1954.

42 Since 2012, the Folk Museum has been working with Sámi institutions on a repatriation program, “Bååstede”, see Káren Elle Gaup, Inger Jensen & Leif Pareli eds., *Bååstede: The Return of Sámi Cultural Heritage* (Trondheim: Museumsforlaget, 2021).

43 Archivist at Norsk Folkemuseum Else Rosenqvist, email, 14 June, 2021.

44 The photographs are available at [www.digitaltmuseum.no](http://www.digitaltmuseum.no), searchable by Borgen’s name.

45 Ole Magnus Rapp, “Gammearkitekten,” *Finnmark Dagblad*, 22 March, 1991.

supposedly studied the North Sámi language at the University of Oslo in around 1959.<sup>46</sup> In a 1973 interview in the Sámi newspaper *Ságat*, however, he is described as having followed planning policy in Inner Finnmark in both a professional and personal capacity for the past ten years.<sup>47</sup> For now, this period remains obscure.

## Sijti Jarnge, experimenting

In the early 1970s, Borgen was engaged as the architect for several projects in Sápmi. Then in 1976, Borgen & Bing Lorenzen won the competition to design a hotel in Kárášjohka. At the same time, they were working on designs for a primary school in Láhpoluoppal. Neither of these designs aspires to be Sámi architecture, however. Rather, their aesthetic is typical of the practice's designs: relatively modest wooden structures that adapt well to the site and surrounding landscape.

Further south, Borgen was operating in a more experimental mode. He had been engaged to design Sijti Jarnge, a South Sámi language and cultural centre, in Aarborte (Hattfjelldal) in Nordland County. Although the building was not inaugurated until 1987, it was more-or-less completed by 1984, with the design having been finalised many years previously. Borgen had already been involved in the project when financing for preliminary work was secured in 1975.<sup>48</sup> The project-planning committee consisted of duojár Lars Dunfjeld (1916–1980), language specialist Anna Jacobsen (1924–2004), and politician Odd Kappfjeld (1942–2011). Borgen worked with all three of them very closely while developing his drawings. Sijti Jange was probably the first attempt to design a building

with architecture that would hold meaning for a Sámi community.

Very few buildings for Sámi clients had been designed in Norway at this time. The first had been completed in Kárášjohka a year earlier, the Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat / The Sámi Collections, designed by Vidar Corn Jessen (1937–2013) and Magda Eide Jessen (b. 1938). This low, square building of wood and concrete features integrated artworks and exhibition design by Iver Jåks (1932–2007). As the art historian Elin Haugdal has argued, the inclusion of integrated artworks has been an important strategy throughout Sápmi to help Sámi people gain a sense of ownership over what could otherwise be perceived as alien architecture.<sup>49</sup> The Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat building is an acknowledged milestone in Sámi architecture. (Yet, in an unbelievably short-sighted decision, it is now slated for demolition in favour of a new building. The modern buildings created in the 1970s for Sámi cultural institutions are acquiring an unwelcome new status: buildings at risk.)

By 1976, the design concept for Sijti Jarnge was completed. The wooden building is shaped like a low square block, capped by a somewhat unexpected pyramid. The design was inspired by the South Sami *gåetie*, a traditional turf hut that is more conical than the northern *goahti*.<sup>50</sup> The exterior is subordinate to the interior, however, where the *gåetie* has inspired a layout centred around what Borgen called the 'heart' of the building: a large assembly room with skylights. The room aims to convey the feeling of being inside a turf hut. A sunken hearth occupies the centre of the space, with large circular steps providing three tiers of seating around it. The seating facilitates gatherings around the fireplace, which

46 Information obtained from Liv Borgen, Kjell Borgen's widow, in an interview by the author, 24 August 2022.

47 Johs Kalveino, "De samiske organisasjoner må få ressurser til å styre utviklingen, sier en samfunnsplanlegger for Indre Finnmark, arkitekt Kjell Borgen," *Ságat*, 17 October, 1973.

48 Sigbjørn Dunfjeld, "Samisk kultursenter i Hallfjelldal," *Kultur-kontakt* 21, no. 4 (1985): 207.

49 Elin Haugdal, "Å ta eierskap: Samisk bygningsrelatert kunst," *Kunst og Kultur* 105, no. 2–3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.18261/kk.105.2.9>.

50 Leif Pareli, "Sørsamenes byggeskikk," in *Foreningen til norske Fortdsminnesmerkers Bevaring Årbok* (Oslo: FNFB, 1984), 117.



**Image 4.** Kjell Borgen, Sijti Jarngge, 1975–84. Photo: Rana blad, 1984, all rights reserved.



**Image 5.** Interior of Sijti Jarngge, Photo: Ságat / Torstein Simonsen, 2021, all rights reserved.

is positioned below a skylight that resembles a smoke hole. A large glass painting by Oddmund Kristiansen (1920–1997), ingeniously mounted with birch trunks on the innermost wall, adds to the ambience of the space.

When financing for a preliminary project was secured in 1975, Borgen took the opportunity to advocate for a broad discussion on Sámi

architecture.<sup>51</sup> He even suggested that Sijti Jarngge could facilitate such a discussion, but as far as I know this never happened. I have not been able to trace any public debates about Sámi architecture at that time. Still, a dialogue took place between Borgen and the committee during the project-planning process, and the ground-breaking aspects of the design were

51 “Applaus for støtte til samisk kultur,” *Bygd og by*, 2 April, 1975.



acknowledged at the time.<sup>52</sup> The committee stated that the design “uniquely embodied a harmonious combination of a Sámi-inspired interior and modern architecture.”<sup>53</sup> The question of a contemporary Sámi architecture had suddenly become pertinent, and it is perhaps odd that there are so few traces of any broader discussion. This is especially true because it was in this decade that Sámi organisations and institutions started to build, or to look at it another way, it was in this decade that Norwegian architects started to encounter Sámi clients.

Sijti Jarngje was never presented in *Byggekunst*, a professional journal that remains one of the most important sources of texts about architectural history in Norway. Given the journal's status, absence from its pages is a surefire path to obscurity. The significance of Borgen's work in Aarborte seems to have escaped scholarly authors writing about Sámi architecture in Norway. What is unique about Sijti Jarngje is its explicit ambition and Borgen's close collaboration with his clients. A central problem with modern Sámi architecture is the extremely small number of practising Sámi architects.<sup>54</sup> In Norway at that time, it seems there were none at all, making the efforts of the project-planning committee and Borgen even more important in the history of Sámi architecture, as the project was designed and built in collaboration with the Indigenous community.

52 Bjørn Aarseth, “Kulturbygg for sørsamene,” *Ottar*, no. 116–117 (1979): 98.

53 Lars Dunfjell, Anna Jacobsen, Odd Kappfjell: “Samisk kultursenter i Hattfelldal,” *Elgposten* 8, no. 5 (1978): 9 (author's translation). Original: “Utvalget er av den oppfatning at det foreliggende utkast på en enestående måte rommer en harmonisk kombinasjon mellom et samisk inspirert interiør og moderne arkitektur”.

54 According to Nango, there are currently nine Sámi architects, plus some students. Nango, “In Practice,” 93.

## Authentic and symbolic ruins

The new building for Guovdageainnu gilišillju / Kautokeino Museum was inaugurated in December 1987, the same year as Sijti Jarngje, but the building itself had been finished the year before.<sup>55</sup> Borgen's first sketches were probably made in 1983 and were well received by the local community.<sup>56</sup> The museum complex is located in the village centre and occupies a large riverside site. The complex consists of an open-air exhibit of traditional buildings, showcasing the diversity of Sámi inland culture, and a museum building.

Both the exhibit and the museum building itself were designed by Borgen, who seized the opportunity to create links between the landscape and the two modes of architecture in play. The open-air exhibit consists of structures that were moved to the museum site and reconstructions based on Borgen's earlier surveys: “These are simple structures made from birch logs and peat, or timber and board walls. They illustrate the Sami people's traditional relationship with nature when they need to build something.”<sup>57</sup> The museum building is adapted to the scale of the open-air complex. Designed using the same palette of materials, it has a large, hipped roof of tarred wood that extends far down towards the ground.<sup>58</sup> Inside, in the exhibition space, the colour of the sloping ceiling shifts from light grey to a darker grey at the top, evoking the colouring

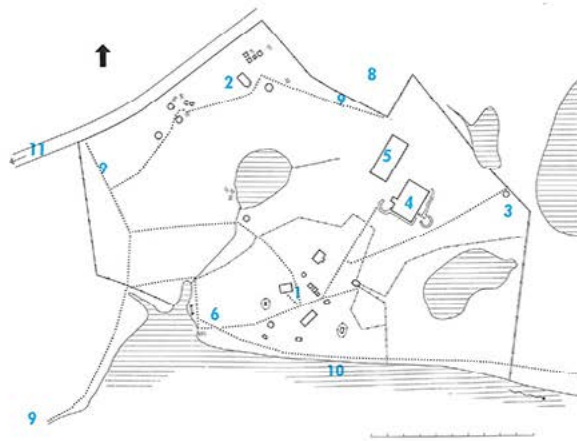
55 Kjell Borgen, “Gouvdageainnu gilisillju – Kautokeino bygdetun,” *Byggekunst* 72, no. 7 (1990).

56 Ellen Pollestad, “Enestående historisk anlegg skal reises i Kautokeino,” *Nordlys*, 26 March, 1983.

57 Borgen, “Gouvdageainnu gilisillju – Kautokeino bygdetun,” 392 (author's translation). Original: “Det er enkle bygginger utført av bjerkestokker og torv eller tømmer og sheltervegger. De viser samenes tradisjonelle forhold til naturen når en trenger å bygge noe”.

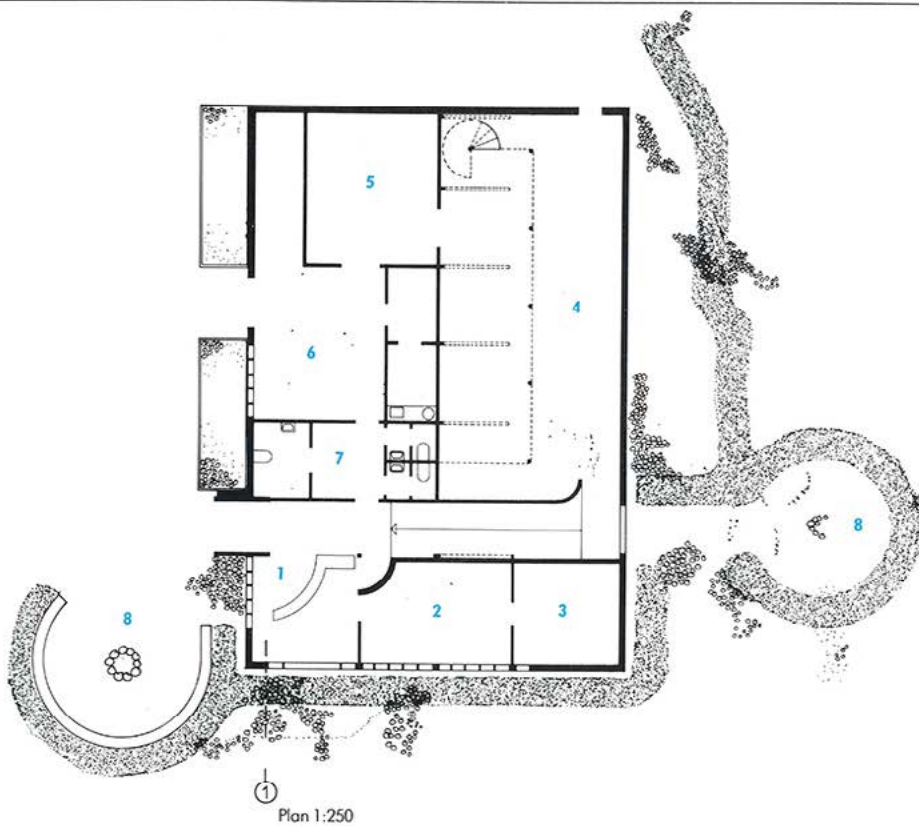
58 For more on the meaning of materials in this context, see Elin Haugdal, “‘It's Meant to Decay’: Contemporary Sami Architecture and the Rhetoric of Materials,” in *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, ed. Elizabeth Grant et al. (Singapore: Springer, 2018).





Situasjonsplan 1:4000

1. Gårdsanlegg fra Hemmugjedde,
2. Vinterplasser for flyttsamer,
3. Fangstplasser, 4. Museumsbygninger,
5. Gammel skolebygning, 6. Fiskeplass,
7. Utslåtte, 8. Parkering, 9. Gangstier,
10. Kautokeinoelva, 11. Til kirkestedet.



Plan 1:250

1. Resepsjon, 2. Kontor, 3. Møterom,
4. Utstillingssal, 5. Lager, 6. Verksted,
7. Garderobe og toalett, 8. Gammetuffer,
9. Jordvoller med rullestein.

**Image 6.** Kjell Borgen, Plan of Guovdageainnu gilišillju / Kautokeino Museum. *From Byggekunst The Norwegian Review of Architecture*, 1990. ©Kjell Borgen / Arkitektur.



**Image 7.** Guovdageainnu gilišillju / Kautokeino Museum. Photo: Arvid Sveen, 1990. The National Museum of Norway, all rights reserved.

smoke rising from a fireplace eventually marks the inside of a goahti.<sup>59</sup>

Outside, by the path to the entrance to the museum building, there is a mound in which one can trace the outline of a fire pit. This mound is all that remains of a goahti, which like all turf huts has collapsed due to age and disuse. Made of natural materials, these structures decay and eventually vanish. Circles that mark where the walls once stood and the residues of firepits can be discerned (by a trained eye) for a long time, however, and read like ruins in the landscape. On entering the museum building, one finds a ramp leading down towards the exhibition space. Just on the other side of a window at the end of the ramp, another ruined goahti is visible, with the river in the background. Borgen deliberately nestled the museum building between the two ruined goahtis, linking them to the building and drawing attention to their presence. The distinction between old and new becomes blurred, not least by the grassy mounds surrounding the museum, which “are laid out to symbolize the

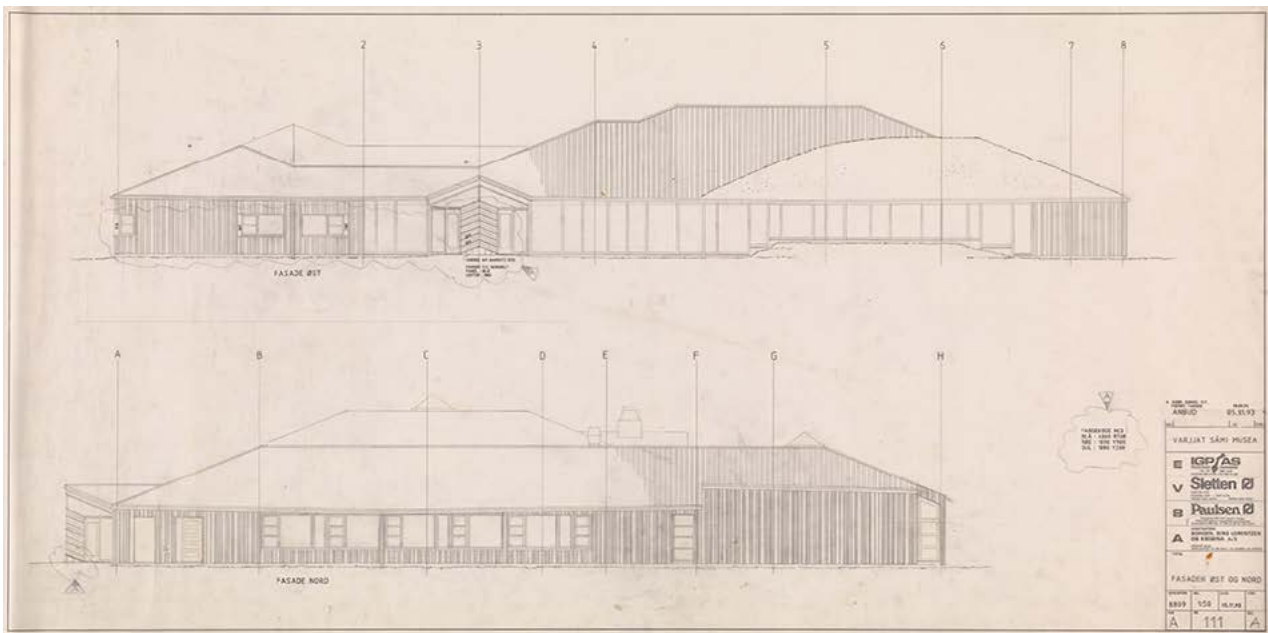
mounds of old turf huts”.<sup>60</sup> Actual ruins and symbols of ruins coexist in the landscaping around the museum.

Borgen employed the same strategy in his largest museum building in Sápmi: Várjjat Sámi Musea in Vuonnabahta (Varangerbotn). Completed in 1994, the museum had its official opening the year after. The museum is dedicated to the local Coastal Sámi culture. Years of project planning had preceded the start of construction. Initially, it was thought that a museum in the municipality of Unjárga (Nesseby) should be located at Ceavccageađe (Mortensnes), a site that is infinitely rich in cultural heritage. However, political manoeuvring resulted in the main museum building being located in Vuonnabahta, necessitating the construction of a separate visitor centre at Ceavccageađe. Borgen was asked to design both, and the first drawings were probably completed during 1991.<sup>61</sup> Later the site for the museum was moved again, still within

59 Anne-Lise Langfeldt, “Nytt museumsbygg,” *Altaposten*, 9 December, 1986.

60 Borgen, “Gouv dageainnu gilisillju – Kautokeino bygdetun,” 392 (author’s translation). Original: “[ - ] er lagt opp for å symbolisere torvgammetufter og trekke linjer tilbake til fortiden”.

61 Nils-Martin Pedersen: “Varanger Samiske Museum i Varangerbotn: Planer om storbygg til 23 millioner kroner,” *Ságat*, 30 October, 1991.



**Image 8.** Kjell Borgen, *Várjjat Sámi Musea*, East and North Elevations, 1994. Pencil on plastic, 599 x 1189 mm. The National Museum of Norway. Photo: Andreas Harvik, ©Kjell Borgen.



**Image 9.** Kjell Borgen, *Várjjat Sámi Musea*, 1994. Photo: Várjjat Sámi Musea / Bjarne Riesto, all rights reserved.

Vuonnaabahta but now in the village centre, along the coastline at the head of the bay. The museum building has its back turned to the village, while its front faces the open-air complex that extends towards the beach. A hipped roof resembles Borgen’s design for Gouvdayainnu, but here the boards are partly covered by grass. The complex was never presented in an architectural journal. Borgen’s declaration of his intent is available though, as he gave several interviews to the local press on the opening day. The *Finnmarken* journalist explained how “the architect Borgen’s

idea was that [the building] should contain elements of the landscape. He has used the traditional goahti, built of wood, turf, and stone, as a model. The same materials have been used in the museum building, and the building lies low in the terrain, without protruding from it.”<sup>62</sup>

62 “Storstua i Varangerbotn,” *Finnmarken*, 25 April, 1995 (author’s translation). Original: “Ideen arkitekt Borgen hadde, var at det skulle inneholde elementer av landskapet. Som forbilde har han brukt den tradisjonelle torvgammen, bygd av tre, torv og stein. De samme materialene er brukt i museumsbygget, og bygget ligger lavt i terrenget, uten å stikke seg fram”.



Another newspaper explained that Borgen was inspired by the *darfegoahti*, and only a part of the roof was covered in grass in an allusion to very old huts, where the turf is slowly sliding off the poles. Once again, Borgen positioned mounds of grass-covered earth around the museum. These mounds were both practical (shielding the museum from traffic) and symbolic: “The grassy heaps surrounding the museum symbolize turf huts that have fallen down and have returned to nature”.<sup>63</sup>

## Fleeting, remembered

At the same time as Borgen was designing Várjjat Sámi Musea, he was also working on a scholarly project. He obtained funding from the Norwegian Research Council in 1992 and 1993 as part of a larger programme on cultural heritage management.<sup>64</sup> The programme had started earlier in 1987, but I have not been able to trace Borgen’s application or find out when he first applied. One focus of the programme was Sámi heritage and how to identify built heritage as Sámi. Borgen thus returned to his scholarly work on traditional Sámi architecture while simultaneously experimenting with designs for contemporary Sámi architecture. Borgen’s scholarly work is important, as there were precious few studies of Sámi building culture at the time.<sup>65</sup> When he first started his work in the 1950s, he started nearly from scratch. And as I pointed out above, Indigenous building cultures were for a long time not accepted as architecture.

Borgen published his final report in 1995. Translated into English, the title is *Sámi farms in Inner Finnmark: Adaption to nature, form, and*

*cultural conventions from 1900 to 1990*.<sup>66</sup> Taking 1950 as his starting point, he proceeded both backwards and forwards in time. Going back into the past, he identified a Sámi architecture that had developed independently, without interference from official bodies. Going forwards from 1950, he declared that:

The period is characterised by Norwegianisation and a sharp decline in Sámi architecture. The Sámi was contrasted with the Norwegian through the use of terms such as “Norwegian wooden architecture” and “Norwegian wooden building traditions.”<sup>67</sup>

Borgen did not expand much on the precise nature of the “sharp decline”, instead concentrating his efforts on defining what was distinctly Sámi. With a few exceptions, the farms he had surveyed in the 1950s had disappeared by the 1990s. To identify traditional Sámi elements, he had to rely on his old surveys.<sup>68</sup> The one finding most often referenced is that the Sámi farms “are *organized* in a ‘topological/organic’ arrangement, in contrast to the neighbouring agrarian cultures which organize their farms in ‘geometric’ or other patterns.”<sup>69</sup> Another important overarching observation he did was:

The design of the Sami farm must also be viewed in the light of Sami tradition in which the concept of land ownership is different from that of agrarian cultures: for the Sami, their land is *the entire area of land used*, whereas in

63 “En stor veldighet!,” *Finnmarken*, 30 June 1995. Original: “Grasvollene symboliserer nedfalne gammer, som har gått tilbake til naturen”.

64 Programmet for forskning om kulturminnevern (Research on Cultural Resource Management – FOK).

65 Another important study on Sámi vernacular architecture produced by this program was Randi Sjølie, *Samisk byggeskikk* (Oslo, Norges forskningsråd, 1995).

66 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*.

67 Ibid., 10 (author’s translation). Original: “Perioden preges av fornorsking og et sterkt forfall av samisk arkitektur. Det samiske ble stilt opp mot det norske med begrep som ‘norsk trearkitektur’ og ‘norsk trebyggingskunst’”.

68 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 10.

69 Ibid., 65.



agrarian cultures the farm *is a limited area of land which is inherited*.<sup>70</sup>

Borgen's accounts of Sámi vernacular differ from traditional ethnographic accounts, as he acknowledged and admired Sámi building customs as a fine example of folk architecture. The first product of his scholarly work in the 1990s is a short essay that ends with a quote from Heidegger, translated into Norwegian.<sup>71</sup> There is no reference, but it can be traced. The architectural historian and theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz had published his essay "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture" in 1983.<sup>72</sup> The text was to become vastly influential and a few years later it was published in a Norwegian translation made by Norberg-Schulz himself. Borgen's quote from Heidegger is taken verbatim from this translated text.<sup>73</sup> In the original English it reads: "The buildings bring the earth as the inhabited landscape close to man and at the same time place the nearness of neighbourly dwelling under the expanse of the sky".<sup>74</sup> It is evident that Borgen's reading of Heidegger was through Norberg-Schulz, rather than the original Heidegger text, as the Norwegian translation of Heidegger's original text differs from Norberg-Schulz's translation.<sup>75</sup>

When reading Norberg-Schulz's Heidegger essay alongside Borgen's final report on Sámi farmsteads, it seems likely that Norberg-Schulz greatly influenced Borgen's theory about Sámi architecture. Norberg-Schulz emphasises how buildings *gather* the inhabited landscape. "The landscape is brought close to us by the buildings."<sup>76</sup> Further, he explains the nature of a landscape:

A landscape is a space where human life takes place. [--] Thus the building defines a precinct, or a space in the narrower sense of the world, at the same time as it discloses the nature of this space by standing there.<sup>77</sup>

Nearing his conclusion, Norberg-Schulz claims that "The primary purpose of architecture is hence to make the world visible. It does this as a thing, and the world it brings into presence consists of what it gathers".<sup>78</sup> These (somewhat opaque) notions and the emphasis on landscape and place can be recognised in Borgen's writings as when he states that the vaster the land, the stronger the symbols that mark the place, and presents the vertical form of the shadoof as an example.<sup>79</sup>

Borgen identified four specific elements that define place in Sámi culture: characteristic natural forms; myths; traces of use / the fleeting; and current use / the thing-like. "The fleeting" and "the thing-like" are Borgen's own notions that he seems to have evolved from the thinking of Norberg-Schulz. Examples of "the fleeting" were structures "which completely or partially connect with nature, but which in the process leave behind traces of great importance", such as a *stáhkká*, a characteristic rack used for hay

70 Ibid., 66.

71 Kjell Borgen, "Den samiske gård," *Fortidsvern* 19, no. 3 (1993): 30. "Bygningene bringer jorden som det bebodde landskap i menneskets nærhet og stiller samtidig naboskapets nærhet under himmelens vidde".

72 Christian Norberg-Schulz, "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture," *Perspecta* 20 (1983).

73 Christian Norberg-Schulz, "Heideggers tenkning om arkitektur," in *Et sted å være: essays og artikler*, ed. Gordon Hølmekvold (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1986), 284.

74 Norberg-Schulz, "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture," 65.

75 I am indebted to Gustav Jørgen Pedersen for first identifying this quote as from "Hebel, der Hausfreund" (1957), and also for pointing out that it differs from the Norwegian translation: Martin Heidegger, *Oikos og techne: 'Spørsmålet om teknikken' og andre essays*, ed. and trans. Arnfinn Bø-Rygg (Oslo: Tanum, 1973), 42.

76 Norberg-Schulz, "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture," 65.

77 Ibid., 65.

78 Ibid., 67.

79 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 16.



**Image 10.** From Johan Mikelsen Utsi's farm in Heam-mujavvi. Photo: Kjell Borgen, 1953. Norsk Folkemuseum / CC BY-SA 4.0.

storage.<sup>80</sup> The “thing-like” is “That which has the same property and symbolic value as a thing and is treated as such, such as a *giisa* (travel chest).”<sup>81</sup> A timbered house is thing-like, a goahti or a stáhkká is fleeting. In Sámi farms, Borgen found these categories coexisting side by side.

There are two types of landscapes, Borgen explained, the remembered and the inhabited. It seems he was trying to make Sámi culture and architecture fit into Norberg-Schulz' theory of place and architecture. Since many Sámi structures vanish, instead of becoming noble ruins that will stand forever and gather the place, he needed to find an alternative notion. He found it in the idea of a hidden, secretive landscape that exists in the shadows of its inhabited counterpart: “A stranger walking in the Sámi landscape must ask those who use the land about the traces of the fleeting architecture.”<sup>82</sup> This remembered

landscape is as important as the inhabited landscape; the two convey meaning together.

## To make the Place come into Presence

Borgen's theories of the fleeting and the thing-like, of remembered and inhabited landscapes, gave him categories to work with in his own designs. Norberg-Schulz believed his theory to be universal, but in Borgen's writings, the reading of place developed into a very specific and concrete theory on Sámi culture and architecture that applied in architectural practice. For the visitor centre at Ceavccageadge he designed a simple structure, a building with large panoramic windows that rises like a natural elevation in the landscape. Once again, Borgen appears to have drawn inspiration from traditional building techniques: wooden beams placed rhythmically along the window wall resemble the bent birch trunks used in a bealljegoahti. The windows offer stunning views of the cultural heritage site, or as Borgen probably would have described it, the remembered landscape. The new building and the ancient landscape form a unified whole: the fleeting and the thing-like, the inhabited and the remembered.

80 Ibid., 13 (author's translation). Original: “som helt eller delvis forbinder seg med naturen, men som under prosessen etterlater seg spor av stor betydning”.

81 Ibid., 13 (author's translation). Original: “Det som har den samme egenskapen og symbolverdi som ting og behandles som det, som giisa (reisekiste)”.

82 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 13 (author's translation). Original: “Den som går som fremmed i det samiske landskapet må spørre dem som bruker landet om sporene etter den flyktige arkitekturen”.



**Image 11.** Kjell Borgen, *Information Hall at Ceavccageadge*, 1992. Photo: Probably Kjell Borgen. The National Museum of Norway, all rights reserved.

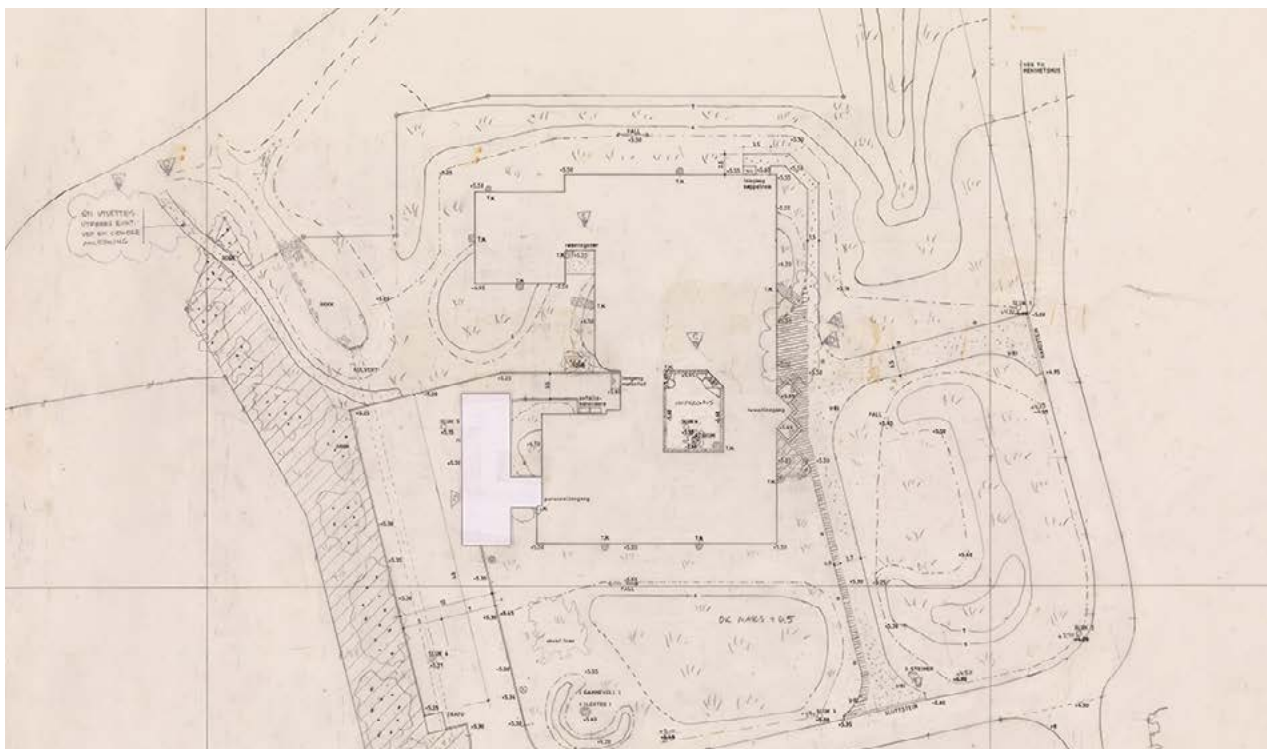
Várjjat Sámi Musea, with its partly grass-covered roof resembling the exterior of a decaying *darfe-goahti*, seems to be a strange case of a thing-like building symbolising a fleeting one. Perhaps Borgen intended to fuse the two categories. The site finally chosen for the museum was, according to a former director, scandalously inappropriate, in that it was almost the only area in the whole municipality with no relevance to Sámi cultural history.<sup>83</sup> Borgen's response was for his design to integrate history and traces of use, as is evident in the drawing of the outdoor plan. He designed a *goahti* ruin, with traces of the fireplace and a ring of sunken walls. But he also designed less literal ruins – symbolic ruins, as in the mounds surrounding the museum building. Both kinds

were adding a remembered landscape to the inhabited landscape, aiming to make the place come into presence.

Borgen's work with Sámi architecture spanned decades. He aimed constantly to find specific characteristics that could identify Sámi architecture, even though this quest took on different forms at different stages in his career. As a young architect, he worked solely with traditional Sámi architecture and seems not to have thought much about what would constitute a contemporary Sámi building. This is a question he may have pondered for the first time while designing *Sijti Jarngé*. In the 1990s, his work as a scholar and as an architect finally merged as he developed a theory of what constituted Sámi architecture at the same time as he applied this theory in his own designs. The influence of Norberg-Schulz is

83 Audhild Schanche, "Lokalisering av Varanger Samiske Museum," *Ságat*, 21 November, 1992.





**Image 12.** Kjell Borgen, *Várjjat Sámi Musea*, Outdoor Plan, 1994. Pencil on plastic, 842 x 1189 mm (the image is cropped). The National Museum of Norway. Photo: Andreas Harvik, ©Kjell Borgen.

certainly apparent in his language and phrasings as he ended his report as follows:

And we see the architecture in the light of the seasons. The Nordic sun is different from the sun of classical cultures: in summer, the nights take on another dimension, the night is not there but *is* nonetheless. Backlit, the architecture is outlined and the hills, wooden racks, shadoofs, rows of storehouses, and the house stand in silhouette. In winter, everything flows together in the faint light from the sky, moonlight or the Northern Lights reflected by the snow. Here is the work of man, the built Sami.<sup>84</sup>

84 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 64 (author's translation). Original: "Og arkitekturen ser vi i årstidenes lys. Nordens sol er en annen enn den klassiske kultur sol: Om sommeren får nettene en annen dimensjon, natten er ikke der men er likevel. I motlys tegnes arkitekturen, i silhuett står åsene, vedreiset, brønnvippen, rekker at stabbur og huset. Om vinteren flyter alt sammen in det svake himmellyset, månelset eller nordlyset som sneen reflekterer. Her er menneskeverket, det byggede samisk".

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