



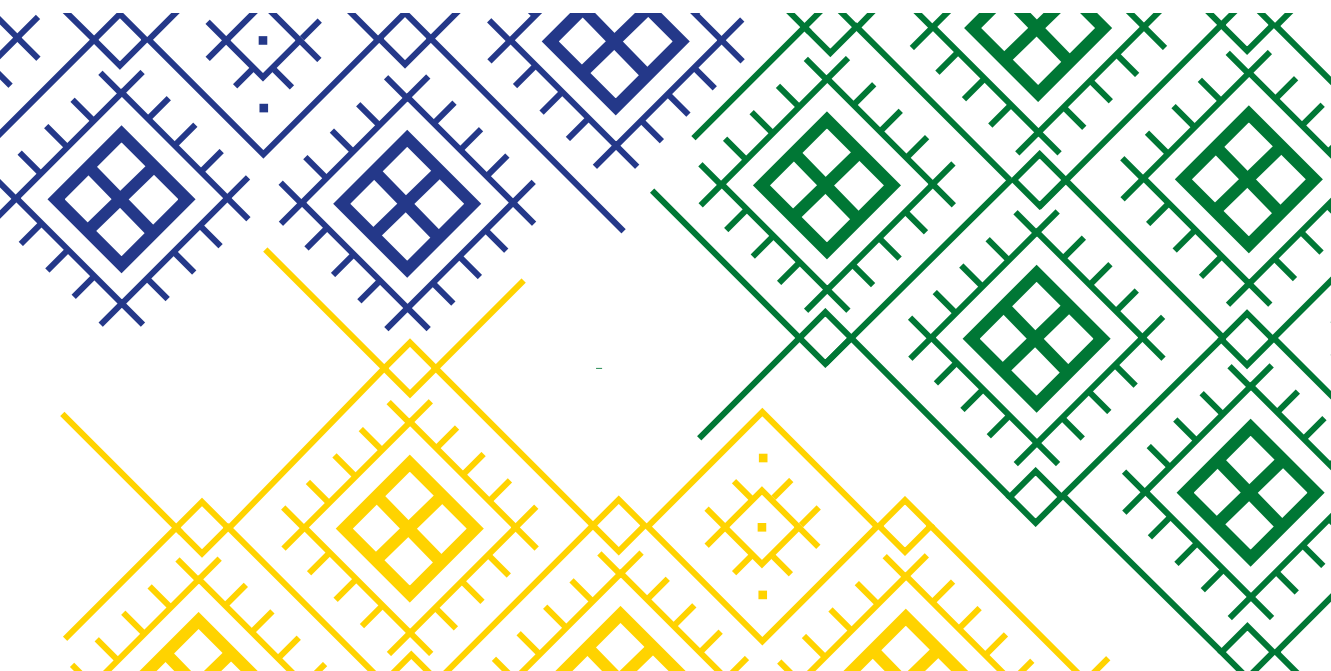
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Special issue

Indigenous knowledge and languages in interaction –
Amazonian and Arctic approaches

Guest editors

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Reflection on Indigenous Objects That Leave and Return to Their Territories

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Between May 20 and 24 of 2025, an exchange of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives took place between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in Helsinki, Finland. This exchange was part of a collaborative project involving the universities of Helsinki, UFAM, and UFPA, under the initiative: *Indigenous Studies, Traditional Knowledge, and the Environment in Amazonia-Finland Cooperation*, funded by TFK, program of the Finnish State Education Agency. The activities occurred in various university spaces, fostering engagement, interaction, and meaningful outcomes.

One topic that captured my attention was a presentation by Dr. Jelena, from the Sámi Indigenous people, about Indigenous sovereignty over research data, principles, and the spiritual and technological significance of objects produced in their territories.

Dr. Jelena spoke about her work at the Sámi Riddo Duottar Museum in Norway, particularly her efforts to negotiate with European museums to repatriate Sámi objects to their places of origin. While the goal is the physical return of the objects, in cases where this is not possible, digital repatriation serves as an alternative.

Her presentation highlighted musical instruments like the “drum,” which in Brazil is known by the same term. Many drums, vital to Sámi shamans’ work, have been taken by researchers and are now held in European museums. Dr. Jelena shared images of those drums, which she documented as part of an effort to bring them back to her communities, and she was visibly emotional as she emphasized their material and immaterial significance.

She referred to them as “sacred objects,” illustrating the profound connection between the objects and Sámi spirituality. This sparked a fascinating discussion, particularly when Dr. Justino, an Indigenous researcher from the Tuyuka people of the Rio Negro region in Brazil, questioned whether the objects, upon their return, might still feel “orphaned” due to the lack of people with the specific knowledge of how to handle them.

This issue resonated with my own Apurinã people, who traditionally live along the Purus River and its tributaries. One of our sacred instruments, the *kamatxi*, is held in a museum in Berlin, Germany. The *kamatxi*, made from the bark of the jutai tree and nearly two meters long, was used in a ritual also called *kamatxi*. The ritual, reserved for shamans (*myty*), involved a complex and sacred practice that connected humans with spiritual beings from other realms.

Today, this ritual is no longer performed, and knowledge of it has diminished due to various factors. The kamatxi served as a medium for inviting spiritual entities, whose arrival was marked by natural phenomena like rain and storms. The instrument, the ritual, and the spiritual beings themselves are all referred to as kamatxi, highlighting the profound interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms.

In reflecting on these stories, the return of Indigenous objects raises complex questions. While the physical repatriation of such objects is vital for cultural restoration, it also requires ensuring that the spiritual and traditional knowledge related to them is preserved. Without specialists to handle the sacred items, their reintegration into Indigenous communities could pose challenges.

Nevertheless, I believe it is worth fighting to bring such objects back to their original territories. Their return could restore a sense of belonging, reconnecting them with their rightful communities – both human and non-human.

So, dear readers, what is your opinion on this matter?

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