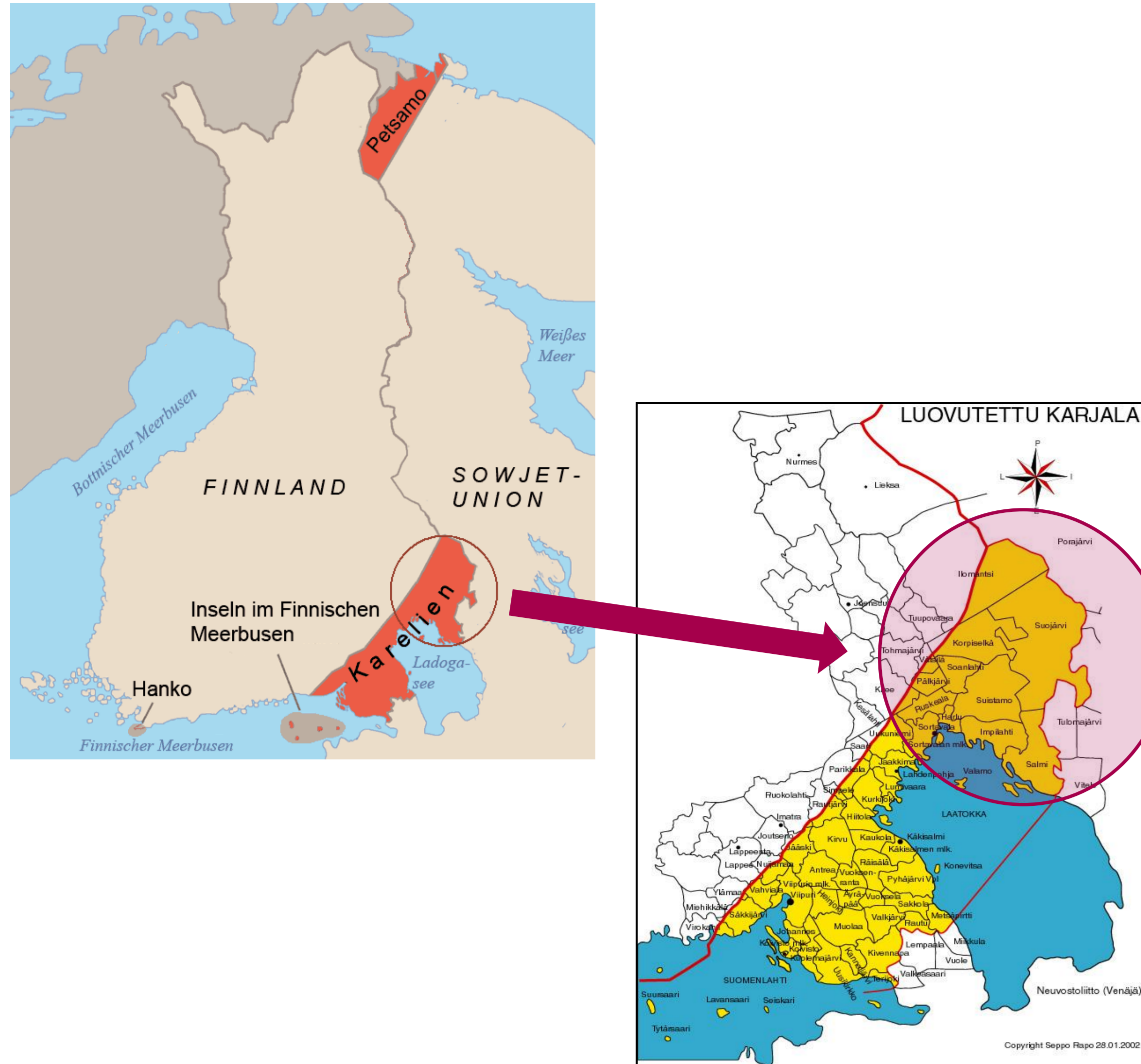


# Karelian in Finland

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## Short facts



**Karelian:** are estimated to number today roughly 5,000 people and up to 20,000 people who know some Karelian or understand it to some extent.

- is an autochthonous minority language in Finland, where it has been spoken for as long as Finnish itself.
- was historically a territorial minority language spoken up to the Second World War in six Border Karelian municipalities, a few border villages in Finnish North Karelia and in the Petsamo region in the North-East (Map below).
- is today a non-territorial minority language spoken all over the country, especially in big cities.

### Karelian-speaking population in Finland

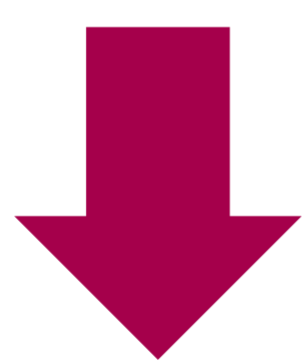
- are not represented in population censuses or any other administrative registers.
- may have constituted a minority of in total 60,000-70,000 people between the Russian Revolution and the Second World War.

**Today:** speakers primarily belong to the oldest generations but there also are more young speakers than has been assumed prior to ELDIA.

**Legal status:** since Dec 2009 included in the list of languages covered by the European Charter for Minority and Regional Languages; no legal status in Finland.

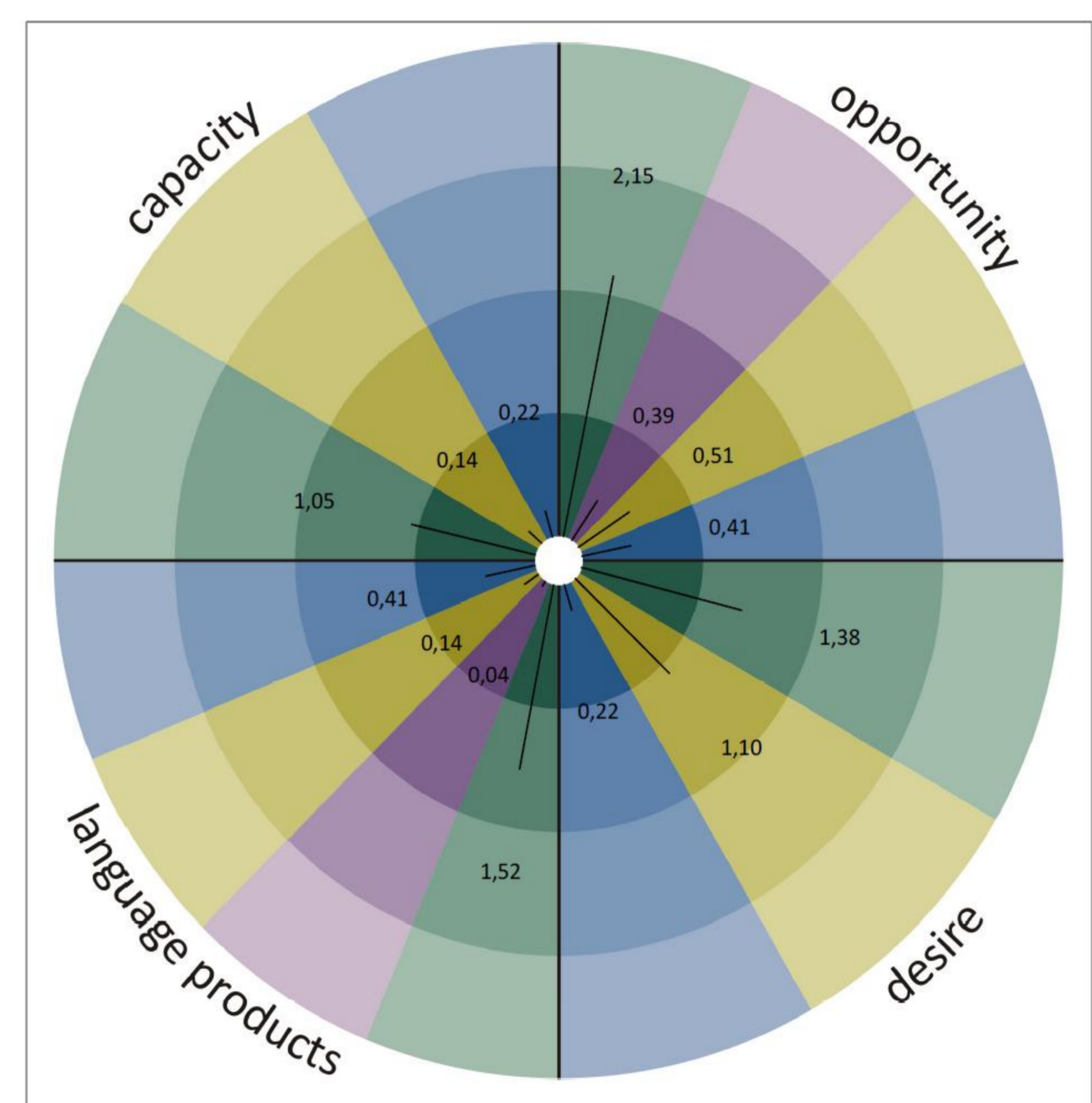
## ELDIA's results

- Karelian Finns have a very close and loving relationship to their heritage language and culture, regardless the level of actually knowing Karelian.
- Karelian is mainly used with relatives and friends; in nuclear families it has largely given way to Finnish and only a handful of children learn (some) Karelian at home.
- The main reason for the rapid post-WWII decay of Karelian is that in post-war Finland the cultural and linguistic Otherness of Karelian Finns was ignored and marginalized.
- Until very recently especially the Karelian language has not been supported to any extent.
- Other Finns know very little if anything at all about the Karelian minority and its language.
- Today the minority itself is becoming increasingly active and has during the past years taken many important revitalization measures.
- The Finnish society is gradually becoming better aware of the rights and the needs of the Karelian minority and some promising steps towards concrete institutional support have been taken lately.
- Members of the minority were revealed to have a surprisingly positive view about the future of Karelian: Nearly a third believes that in ten years Karelian will be spoken in Finland more than today.

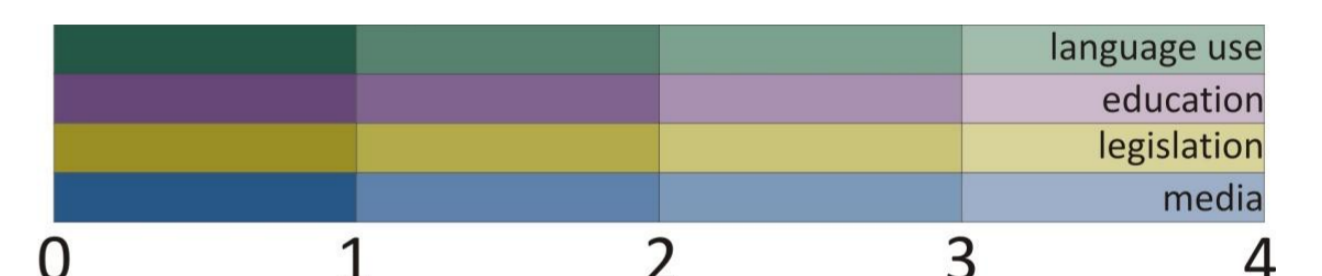


A lot still needs to be done to revive Karelian in Finland, most notably,

- an official revitalisation program must be created and implemented;
- long-span financial support to reviving and strengthening Karelian language skills is to be guaranteed;
- the societal visibility of the Karelian minority has to be decisively improved; and
- the Karelian language and identity have to be empowered to meet contemporary and future challenges.



## EuLaViBar



The EuLaViBar-based calculations indicate a very alarming state of language endangerment for Karelian in Finland: With respect to the Focus Areas **Capacity** and **Language Products** it is an **acutely endangered language** and with respect to the Focus Areas **Opportunity** and **Desire** it is a **severely threatened** one.



Young Karelian speakers getting ready for the ELDIA interview in Nurmes on March 3rd, 2011