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**Research into minorities: between science and politics**<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The article examines the interplay between science and politics in minority research in the period 1979 to mid-1980s at the University of Tromsø. Research was influenced by different conditions at the time, such as political events and policy priorities and ideological of streams in academia. Three factors influenced the choice of theme, priorities and approaches to minority research in North Norway. The first factor was the damming of the Alta-Kautokeino river, followed by Sami rights struggle and political changes towards the Sami population in Norway. What consequences did the political case for the research for the academic environment in the Northern Norway? The second factor was the research program run by the Norwegian general scientific Research (NAVF). An analysis on the relevant themes and focus areas within minority research is undertaken on basis of the research program. Finally I will use the methodological and research political discussions on emic and etic research positions that took place in the 1980s. Was it the Sami themselves, or also the researchers belonging to the majority that had the right to pursue research on the Sami? Sources consist of internal documents, reports, research papers and oral sources from the UiT.

**Keywords:** *research on minorities, research politics, University of Tromsø, Sami and Kven research*

**Introduction**

The theme of this article is research on minorities undertaken in North Norway between 1979 and the mid-1980s. One principal aim is to illuminate the interplay between research and politics during this period. The University of Tromsø (UiT) was one of Norway's four universities at that time, and when it was established in 1972 it took on the responsibility of drawing forth knowledge that might be relevant and useful to the regional community, including the Sami and Finnish localities in North Norway.<sup>2</sup> Research on minorities was formed of political events, academic policy prioritization and ideological trends. The period I have selected illustrates how academic external and internal relations influenced researchers' prioritization of research themes, as well as disciplinary and ideological approaches.

This article is in three parts and addresses three issues. The first issue relates to the political community, characterized by a power development lawsuit in the county of Finnmark, known as the "Alta case", with a subsequent Sami civil rights struggle and central political changes concerning the Sami population in Norway. How did academia in North Norway handle the political action, and differentiate between political and academic roles?

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Mary Jones for translating the article into English, while it is the author who stands responsible of the remaining faults in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Since the term 'Kven' was the usual name of this group in academia during this period, I shall use it throughout this article. The term was an out-group name and not generally used by the minorities themselves.

The second issue is linked to the matter of academic policy, in which academia confronted prioritization in an abundant research programme, under the direction of the Norwegian General Scientific Research Council (NAVF). The argumentation that formed the basis of the research programme, which lasted for nine years, shows what were thought to be relevant themes and areas of focus within the research on minorities. The programme was aimed at two minorities: the Sami minority and a Finnish border minority (the Kven) which established itself in the region between 1700 and 1900. The Alta case had brought into being the theme of minority rights and the research programme was to contribute to preserving the minorities' language and culture — but could they be treated equally?

In the final section of the article I shall highlight various approaches to the research on minorities that emerged in academic theoretical discussions during the 1980s. Is it possible to detect a paradigm shift in the debate on cultural research? A central issue is how the research community constructed Sami as a “weak” group in relation to the Norwegian society, to underline the needs of research.

The article covers a small part of a doctorate spanning the period 1972–1990 on the same topic, which analyses the relationship between research and politics in Arctic research on minorities in Norway. Seminar papers, programme documents and evaluation reports are the principal sources that have been examined to follow up these questions. I have also made use of oral interviews. Prior to this, the theme has not been studied with such width and depth. Therefore, this article bears traces of fundamental research and methodologically the article is hermeneutic and contextualizing in grip. The sources are read with interest to the scholarly intentions strived for and the positions taken in the debate on the preferred scholarly direction. Interaction between the societal debate, the Sami and Kven struggle for their rights and the impact that these contextual developments had for the negotiations within the UiT are concentrated on.

### ***The political struggle for Sami rights***

The power development in the Alta Kautokeino watercourse (the Alta case) dominated politics in Norway during the period 1979–1982 and in retrospect achieved watershed status in the Sami political mobilization because of a shift in governmental policy concerning the Sami people. Part of the reason for these changes was probably because the case engaged the academic world just as much as it did the world of politics. Involvement in the case was comparable to the political culture of engagement during the 1970s, which had been coloured by the student uprising in 1968, the EEC campaign in 1970–1972, the environmental movement and

the women's movement, as well as a general focus on identity and roots. Ethnic political mobilization was part of this and also an international phenomenon. In Norway the link to the Alta case became the generator that provided the Sami political movement with legitimacy in the eyes of the national authorities. The University of Tromsø served as the arena for political mobilization and academic problematization of the power development and Sami rights. The Alta case was the single issue that most clearly created the link between politics and social sciences in the North Norwegian academic world.

### ***What was the Alta case about?***

The circumstances of the Alta case illustrate what the researchers were a part of, and what they had to relate to, so a short explanation is needed here. The timeline for the case stretched from 1968 to 1982 and was concerned, in broad terms, with the conflict regarding plans, acceptance and the completion of a power plant in the watercourse between Kautokeino and Alta in the county of Finnmark. On the one hand it was maintained that the power development would have negative consequences for the salmon stocks in the river and the reindeer herding in the region, whilst on the other hand it was argued that this would provide energy for an anticipated technological development in the county. Those who opposed the development included environmental activists, sectors of local government (the Labour Party, which was in power at the time, was split on this issue), organizations concerned with Sami interests and a people's opposition movement, while the Norwegian Water Recourses and Energy Directorate (Norges vassdrags- og energivesen, NVE) and national and regional authorities wanted the energy development that the dam would provide.<sup>3</sup>

Opposition to the plans made itself known in earnest during the summer of 1978 in Alta, when the "people's opposition movement to the development of the Alta-Kautokeino watercourse" was established, and escalated in November of that year, after Parliament gave its consent to the government's development plan, which was then ratified in June 1979. Disagreement about the legality of this agreement led to the case heard at Alta County Court.

The largest-scale demonstrations took place in the summer and autumn of 1979, and at the beginning of 1981. The demonstrators pitched camp at Stilla, where the construction road would start, and a Sami activist group positioned themselves outside Parliament with a clear set of demands to the government, resulting in a hunger strike when the government denied them. The interest groups raised various points of view. Some demanded a halt to the development until its

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of the case, read Norges Offentlige Utredninger, nr. 13 om *Norske samers rettslige fremtid : samerettsutvalget med delinnstilling våren -84. Mennesker og rettigheter*, pp. 50–68.

legality was judicially clarified. Others demanded a halt to the development regardless of the legal decision, whilst a third section, including the regional authorities in Finnmark, felt that the development should go ahead.

In the aftermath of the development issue, the question of Sami legal rights was placed on the political agenda, and in October 1980 the government appointed the Sami Rights Commission (*Samerettsutvalget*) to sort out the question of the legal position of the Sami in Norway. The Alta case was heard in December 1980 at Alta County Court, which reached the decision that the government's resolution in November 1978 was legally binding. The case then went to appeal at the Supreme Court and the planned construction work was put into effect in 1981, in the new year.

The opposition had now become well-established and was ready to take action again at Stilla. The authorities countered this protest with a 600-strong police force and on 14 January 1981 they removed 800–1000 demonstrators from the construction road, witnessed by 150–200 media who were covering the case. Four hundred of the demonstrators were prosecuted. By the evening the roadway had been cleared of people, but Sami activists continued in Oslo with a new hunger strike in front of the Parliament building. A group of Sami women now also arrived in the capital to talk to Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The Sami women did not obtain her support and remained in the prime minister's office from 6–7 February. Media coverage of the protests in the government office building mobilized a large number of people who sympathized with the Sami political movement. The group was broken up by the police at the end of the day. The Alta case was settled in the High Court on 26 February 1982 — the development was legal.

The Alta case started as a struggle to protect the river and turned into a struggle for Sami rights and the Norwegian State's handling of the Sami as an indigenous people. One key question in the conflict which was relevant in an academic context was whether, and to what extent, Sami spokespersons could plead legal protection as an ethnic minority and indigenous people, or whether the Sami — according to the government — (only) had rights and obligations as Norwegian citizens [1, p. 64].

#### ***Academics involved in the Alta case***

The Alta case was a political event which influenced the academic milieu in North Norway to a great extent. Participation in the public protests, students' use of the university as an arena to spread the political message, as well as the arrangement of a large-scale seminar on the case, demonstrate both political engagement and a focus on an academic study of the issues relating to the politics of that time.

Many academic fields concerned themselves with the case. The Sami intellectual scene linked to the Nordic Sami Institute (NSI) in Kautokeino combined its research role with active opposition to the government's decision to build the power plant. From the institute's point of view, the case was a reminder of how weak the Sami people's legal position was, compared to that of the Norwegian people. Ever since the NSI had been established in 1973, researchers had initiated and participated in the Sami cultural movement and both local and international policies, based on the general aim of serving the Sami population in the Nordic lands in all areas [2, Kalstad J.K.H., p. 41]. There was close cooperation with Sami organizations nationally and indigenous organizations internationally through, amongst other things, Aslak Nils Sara's active role in international arenas of cooperation. Together with the Sami organizations, NSI had several meetings with the Sami Rights Commission and in this way the researchers were contributors in the work of compiling the public report. Here the researchers contributed to the definition of "ethnicity" and made suggestions concerning the composition and model of a Sami Parliament [3, Keskitalo A.I., p. 34]. Three aspects are evident from the start: direct involvement of Sami scholars, aim of direct implementation of knowledge on the Sami and showing the relation between the Sami and the Norwegian societies as asymmetric.

The researchers at NSI had become known for their engagement in public affairs since the 1970s and 1980s. The institute regulations show that they navigated according to a basic principle of playing an active role in the political development of Sami society. Their knowledge perspective pursued the idea that science was ultimately concerned with political values and could not claim to be ethnically objective [4, Keskitalo A.I.]. Thus, the scholarly struggle had received an epistemological foundation: all science was coloured by the scientific observer's perspective. Western science, which was steered by the political authorities to their own advantage, was an example of this. In the same way, knowledge production and its transmission from and about Sami society would promote a desire for political change. Scientific activity occurred in the form of communicating Sami society's needs and view of the world to the government authorities.

For the University of Tromsø, the Alta case offered the chance to put its academic competence to good effect. For the Sami studies/ethnic relations research group, which had been given special responsibility for research into Sami relations, the Alta case was extremely welcome.<sup>4</sup> "There was an ongoing feeling that "this is important", "about time, too"; here they

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<sup>4</sup> The Sami studies/ethnic relations research group was one of five interdisciplinary research groups organized by the Institute for Social Studies at UiT. Members of the group had research backgrounds in ethnography, geography and anthropology.

could contribute and be “useful””, according to anthropologists Saugestad and Ramstad [5, p. 100]. The group committed itself to both the scientific and the political plan.

There was a need to put the facts on the table about the state of affairs concerning Sami rights. Scientific engagement became evident in a concrete fashion in the form of a seminar on “Indigenous people’s rights — what about Norwegian legal practice?” in the autumn of 1979 at the University of Tromsø, held at the same time as the first large-scale demonstration in Stilla. Some of those invited were international researchers and the research group hoped that their analysis of indigenous groups in other countries might provide a basis for comparison to debate the Sami situation in the Nordic countries [6, Thuen T., p. 5]. The seminar was funded by the University of Tromsø and was open to the public. Participants included representatives from various Sami organizations in the Nordic countries, as well as from the offices of the prime minister and the attorney general. These last two attended the seminar as observers.

One main aim was to illustrate how the structure of Norwegian public administration formed restrictions for safeguarding Sami concerns that existed on the group’s own cultural and business economic terms.<sup>5</sup> Contemporaneous administrative fields included reindeer herding, local planning and business enterprise, housing schemes and the Sami enterprise and development fund. One subsidiary aim was to show the interaction between administration and ethnic minorities, which could be interpreted on the one hand as a domain for the distribution of public resources and on the other hand as an area of communication. The researchers wanted to analyse ways of thinking and raising issues which they felt were being communicated through signals such as speech, action, representational cases, hearings and settlements [6, Thuen T.]. The national press reported the seminar as an attempt to reveal the contours of Sami claims, as well as “shaping the debate on the extent to which legal measures should not be applied with respect to the Sami”.<sup>6</sup>

Externally, the seminar shows how the researchers engaged in a contemporaneous debate about society, but the researchers were not entirely unanimous concerning which approach would be the most productive to use in this inflamed political situation. It was known that the Labour Party was split both regionally and centrally regarding the power development. There was an internal discussion at the University of Tromsø concerning which strategy researchers should use to address views that did not coincide with the government’s attitude to the case. This discussion illustrates internal tensions in the light of the researchers’ role as intermediaries between the

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<sup>5</sup> Herstad J. Institutt for samfunnsvitenskap, Universitetet i Tromsø, Årsrapport 1978. 1979. p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Hjort-Larsen A. Seminar om same-rett. *Verdens Gang*. 07.11.1979.

majority and the minority, or as actors in bringing to light factual consequences of the state policy. On the one hand it was argued that focusing on the relationship between the workers' movement and the Sami movement might provoke the ruling Labour Party government. In an already heated conflict it could be strategically unfortunate to provoke the government, when it was hoped that academic evaluations of the case might get them to change their views. From the perspective of the students, some of whom were Sami, it seemed as though the researchers were adopting the role of advocate and were acting like guardians, speaking on behalf of the group, instead of Sami academics being able to present the case themselves [7, Stordahl V., p. 178].

The indigenous people's seminar received considerable coverage both before and afterwards and a deliberate publication activity followed the conference: The contents of the seminar were published in an anthology in 1980. A Sami bibliography was published as an appendix [6, Thuen T.; 8, Thuen T.]. Shortened versions of the lectures, adapted for a general readership, were published by Tromsø Museum in *Ottar*, a popular science journal, in 1981.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of the seminar, anthropologists Ivar Bjørklund and Terje Brantenberg wrote an account of the consequences the power plant would have for reindeer herding in the region. They were of the opinion that public discussion about reindeer herding in connection with the Alta case did not show a proper understanding of what was really involved [9, Bjørklund I. and Brantenberg T.]. The ethnography department of Tromsø Museum also instigated a written report linked to the law on cultural heritage in the region at that time.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Political work in academic disguise***

Students at the University of Tromsø used the academic community as an arena for mobilizing opposition in the Alta case.<sup>9</sup> This was achieved by spreading information and collecting funds. The university's copying machines were used to copy documents for the Sami political party Norwegian Sami Association (Norske Samers Riksforbund, NSR), which wanted to distribute academic articles on Sami relations written by people at the university. The work was carried out partly in secret. Academic staff at the University of Tromsø turned a blind eye and the students were allowed to do it on the pretext of copying academic articles. Money was collected on the NSR's behalf. The students used staff lists to distribute paying in slips. Academic titles were made use of to achieve things through political channels.

<sup>7</sup> Alta-sak - samesak - urbefolkningssak. *Ottar*, 1981, volume nr. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Storm D. "Ressursutnytting i Vest-Finnmark og Kvænangen", Samisk-etnografisk avdeling, Tromsø Museum 1977; Storm D. "Undersøkelse om samisk bosetting og ressursutnyttig i Kvænangen Tromsø" Samisk-etnografisk avdeling, Tromsø Museum 1978; Storm D. "Registrering av samiske kulturlevninger." Samisk-etnografisk avdeling, Tromsø Museum 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Vigdis Stordahl 2015.

Both students and staff took part in the demonstrations at Stilla. There were differing attitudes to how, as a member of staff, to take part in this political action. On the one hand it was argued that “impartial information to all the affected parties was the best contribution to support the Sami case”.<sup>10</sup> Taking part politically could potentially weaken the academic argument in the public’s eyes. Anthropologist Per Mathiesen claimed that making a distinction between expertise and politics would make expert opinion much stronger. He maintained that the whole point was not to be suspected of being “politicians in academic attire”, something which was particularly important as far as the Alta case was concerned. Other members of staff chose to travel to Stilla, maintaining that taking part in political action was not only legitimate but necessary to put the research into perspective in such a way as to create political implications.<sup>11</sup> The academic demonstrators were formally required to seek permission from the Sami studies/ethnic relations research group so that people outside the academic sphere would not regard their activity as part of their academic work.<sup>12</sup>

To sum up, it may be said that the academic community in North Norway contributed in three different ways: their scientific critique of the case, their political activity, and the production of public reports. The Alta case brought about a high level of engagement in academia, with a focus on understanding minority rights, including rights concerning the Sami section of the population. The academic and the political were tightly woven together, making it difficult to define researchers according to their political or academic roles. It was generally accepted that research had political implications, but there were different views regarding the extent to which one should engage with this.

### ***Knowledge of the minorities in the north***

The debate about Sami rights created the need for a more research based knowledge about the minorities in the north, including in the humanities. Among the historians at the University of Tromsø pressure was applied to the research council to grant funds for humanistic research on minorities. A humanities report published in 1975 had shown that cultural studies on ethnic minorities in Norway was in short supply. This justified an interdisciplinary research programme entitled “Sami and Kven language, history and culture” which ran from 1981 to 1990 within an economic framework of 18 million kroner.<sup>13</sup> A preliminary project dating from 1980, led by historian Narve Bjørgo, describes the prevailing research situation in this field and gives a

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Per Mathiesen 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Ivar Bjørklund 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Per Mathiesen 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Equivalent in 2016 to c. 64.8 million Norwegian kroner, i.e. US\$ 7,578,238.



picture of why it was necessary to invest in research on Sami and Kven relations [10, Baudou E., p. 10].<sup>14</sup>

The presentation of arguments centred on three factors. In the first place, the need to make use of new research perspectives; secondly, to recruit people from these minorities into academia; thirdly, to preserve research data before it disappeared.

The report referred to the debate in general society during the 1970s about what perspectives researchers assumed, who the research should serve, who should guide it and who should determine the needs of research.<sup>15</sup> These aspects of research policy had to be taken into account so that “those affected should derive reasonable benefit [from the research] themselves. Research on minorities and research on ethnic groups should not just comprise research into development techniques for the majority”.<sup>16</sup>

The recruitment arguments were divided. Some maintained that “research [should be] taken over by the indigenous peoples themselves and [...] take place on their terms”.<sup>17</sup> Research had previously been carried out on terms dictated by society at large and the nation state, and the minority groups had the right to take care of their spiritual and material values themselves. This argument illustrates the attitude that the Sami and the Kven would possess the cultural competence and linguistic competence to carry out better research than individuals who did not belong to those groups. Others maintained that people with a Norwegian ethnical background should also be recruited to such studies and could be equally useful. The recruitment would also provide “new” society sectors, which came to have Sami and Kven culture as their principal or partial content, with individuals with research training.

The preservation argument implied that research data relating to these cultures had to be safeguarded before it was too late. It was necessary to procure sources systematically, store them and prepare them for cultural sciences research.<sup>18</sup> There was potential for collaboration between researchers in Norway, Finland and Sweden, something the research council should make use of. The field was to be entered in a sensitive manner: To avoid exerting unnecessary pressure on the

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<sup>14</sup> Bjørgo assembled the notes from information and views provided by 15 researchers covering many academic fields linked to the Sami academic environment, the museum sphere, the regional administrative system for cultural conservation and three out of the four national universities. Bjørgo N. “Fagleg utviklingsprogram for samisk og kvensk: språk, historie og kultur. Oppsummerande notat til Rådet for humanistisk forskning.” (A. 99.00.114) Tromsø, 1980. pp. 1–8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 12. Venke Olsen, citing Bjørgo.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 13. Ørnulv Vorren, citing Bjørgo

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

informants in the Kven and Sami societies, it was necessary to limit and regulate Norwegian research with the existing Nordic research already taking place in this field.

It was claimed that many aspects of Kven and Sami language, history and culture were under-researched compared to other forms of national culture. Many topics needed to be illuminated, such as: 1. Theoretical studies of general interest for research on minorities; 2. The registration, collection, preservation and negotiation for the use of documentary material for research; 3. Linguistics, including dialect investigation, textual analysis, name studies, sociolinguistics, language teaching, vocabulary, terminology and regulation; 4. History, religious history; 5. Cultural studies within academic disciplines such as folkloristics, ethnology and ethnography; and 6. Specific social science studies.

Funds were awarded and emphasis placed on three areas: a scientific theory section and Kven and Sami programmes.

The intention behind the scientific theory programme for humanities-oriented research on minorities was to open the way for collaboration with the social sciences through the use of social science theory in analysing the relationship between the minority and the majority. Social science research on “weak groups” and conflict research were also to be linked in [10, Baudou E., p. 55]. An orientation towards a wider scientific framework would result in a contribution to develop the basis required for humanities-oriented research on minorities, and the programme would have an irrigation effect on the other two sections.<sup>19</sup> This approach sustained the weak position of the Sami in relation to the state.

The research programme for Kven language, history and culture had a clear cultural preservation element and aimed to save, preserve and systematize research material within the fields of Kven language and popular culture. Through this section, researchers were able to seek funding for research projects. Funds were not earmarked for student scholarships for postgraduate students to begin with, but this was changed in the midway evaluation in 1985.

The research programme for Sami language, history and culture was a recruitment and research programme, and was much more comprehensive than the Kven programme. In addition to financing research projects, funds were earmarked for a recruitment programme, as well as a study programme for postgraduate students. The topics in the Sami programme were also more detailed, centred on dialect research, language preservation/practical language work and grammatical studies, the preparation of source collections for studies of Sami history, pre-Sami history and settlement history (archaeology/demography), as well as minority political studies,

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<sup>19</sup> This is discussed later in this article, in the section entitled “Research perspectives”.

cultural processes of change within Sami culture over the past 500 years (Coastal Sami settlement relations), religious history and religious sociology [10, Baudou E., p. 57].<sup>20</sup>

Researchers at the University of Tromsø were active in this national programme and were also entrusted with its leadership after the midway evaluation in 1985. In all, the programme generated just under 50 projects supporting research and education, over half of which were carried out with the University of Tromsø as the institution in charge.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Sami and Kven — together or separate?***

Since the programme went by the name of “Sami and Kven language, history and culture”, it seems reasonable to compare how Sami and Kven topics were handled. Both groups had been subjected to the same policy of Norwegianization (from the mid-nineteenth century until after the Second World War) and had thus suffered the same consequences: their particular, non-Norwegian culture had disintegrated and become either partly or wholly assimilated. The Sami and the Kven had been located in the same geographical regions for 150–250 years, merged together and in their own communities. From a religious perspective many of them could be categorized as a Lutheran apostolic Christian movement (Læstadianism) that crossed national borders and built up a common identity as Christians and “God’s children” [11, Niemi E., passim].

Despite similarities in the state’s treatment of the minorities, questions were raised during the planning of the research programme about whether it was right to use the same approach for the Sami and the Kven communities. Nor was Sami culture homogenous. There was a need for nuanced research arrangements.<sup>22</sup> There was an emphasis on recruiting Sami to research Sami relations and funds were allocated for recruitment ventures in the form of student scholarships in the Sami section of the programme. The justification for this was that “the issue has a different subject matter and a different scope for the “Sami indigenous people” than for the “Kven minority””, without it emerging what this scope consisted of.<sup>23</sup> Another reason to treat the communities differently was that the assimilation of the Kven settlements had advanced so far, and the research would therefore take the form of a “salvage perspective”, something which did

<sup>20</sup> In practice, the work took place in three phases. Phase 1 (1981) was devoted to inaugurating and profiling the detail of the programme. Phase 2 (1982–1985) was called the project support phase, the phase in which the research would mostly take place. In Phase 3 (1986–1990) the programme was evaluated and a programme of institutional support was established. This phase was called the institutional support phase.

<sup>21</sup> Of 48 projects, 26 were linked to the University of Tromsø. Research documentation service. *Forskningsdokumentasjonstjeneste O. f. H. Program for samisk og kvensk språk, historie og kultur Forskningsprosjekter 1979–90.* 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Bjørge N. “Fagleg utviklingsprogram for samisk og kvensk: språk, historie og kultur. Oppsummerande notat til Rådet for humanistisk forskning.” (A. 99.00.114) Tromsø, 1980. p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Attempts to recruit the Kven were initiated following the midway evaluation in 1985.

not have the same validity for Sami culture. Research topic proposals were thus more comprehensive in the Sami programme than in the Kven.

Several matters appear to have formed the basis for the different weighting between the two groups. The social science theorizing around the expression “ethnicity”, which manifested itself at the beginning of the 1970s, had contributed to an emphasis on the distinctiveness of the groups. The common identity relationships that had developed in the interplay between Sami and Kven over generations then became less visible. The Sami communities were generally better known than the Kven, partly because the Kven were rarely discussed by the central authorities and partly because the group itself did not at that time recognize themselves as Kven, but rather as Norwegian Finns, or of Finnish extraction, or as Finnish-speaking Norwegians.<sup>24</sup> From a Finnish academic perspective they were referred to as *Ruijan suomalaiset*, North Norway’s Finns, while the Norwegian public sector term and outgroup name was Kven (*kvener*).<sup>25</sup> Research on Sami relations had a longer tradition behind it and was far more comprehensive than research on the Kven [12, Minde H.]. Norwegian researchers carrying out fieldwork in North Norway after the war had an almost exclusive focus on Sami community relations, and much of this was to do with processes of assimilation and ethnopolitics.<sup>26</sup> The scale of research on Kven relations was modest by comparison [13, Niemi E., p. 11].<sup>27</sup>

The political status of these two groups probably affected the prioritization within the programme. The minorities debate of that time and the Sami political mobilization may have contributed to the prioritization of the Sami appearing more self-evident than that of the Kven. As early as 1965, the Sami Committee had worked towards the status of an “indigenous people” and during the Alta case this appeared as a hegemonic expression. The Sami ethnopolitical mobilization from the 1970s onwards, and the connections with the international indigenous peoples’ movement, redefined the Sami from being “Sami-speaking Norwegians” to being an ethnic group in their own right with the status of indigenous people. The differentiation was based on the fact that the Kven, unlike the Sami who constituted a minority under international law,

<sup>24</sup> The name *Kven* was interpreted as an odious label for an out-group by this minority.

<sup>25</sup> When researchers who themselves could represent this minority wrote dissertations, from the 1970s onwards, most of them chose less value-loaded expressions. In the encounter with the ethnicity paradigm circa 1980, more or less all of them went over to using the expression *kven*, having defined this as being an ethnic group in its own right which, as such, had a rights claim to preserve its language and culture. The Norwegian Kven Association (*Norske Kveners Forbund*) was founded about seven years later and sections of this minority then took up the name *kven* for their own use.

<sup>26</sup> In the fields of sociology (Vilhelm Aubert, Per Otnes), ethnology (Gutorm Gjessing, Knut Kolserud, Ørnulv Vorren), social anthropology (Harald Eidheim, Robert Pain), language research (Kondrad Nilsen, Knut Bergsland, Thor Frette and Asbjørn Nesheim) and pedagogy (Helge Dahl, Anton Hoëm).

<sup>27</sup> In the fields of Linguistics (Anna-Riitta Lindgren, Marjut Aikio), Immigration History (Terje Henninen, Einar Niemi), Politics (Einar Richter Hansen), Social anthropology (Ivar Bjørklund) and Local History (Hans Kristian Eriksen).

were in the same position as other immigrants, because they had chosen to leave Finland [14, Larsen C.B., pp. 97–98].<sup>28</sup> The Kven status was considered to be that of a distinct ethnic group, from a state point of view they were defined as immigrants, or “descendants of Finnish immigrants from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”.<sup>29</sup>

Researchers with an academic background in Sami studies dominated the group that took part in the preliminary project. Oral sources maintained that the weighting between Sami and Kven topics was not perceived as problematic at the time, but that this occurred for structural reasons: there were simply more Sami academics than Kven. And there were not that many Sami.<sup>30</sup>

Historian Einar Niemi subsequently thematized the hierarchical categorization between indigenous people and immigrants [15, Niemi E., *passim*]. This was not really discussed in connection with the planning of the humanities programme, but became an object of focus during the 1980s in a scientific theory seminar in which Professor Pekka Sammallahti participated. He legitimized the distinction between the Sami and the Kven belonging to different minorities categories. According to Sammallahti, “minorities” had come into existence as the result of the national state and the ideals of national Romanticism concerning a nation, a language and a culture. The Sami and the Kven minorities were different, firstly because the Kven had a motherland and the Sami were without a land [16, Sammallahti P., p. 129]. Secondly, the Kven represented an immigrant minority, whereas the Sami were an indigenous people in their own environment. Thirdly, the Kven language and the Kven minority’s culture were in the process of rapid assimilation, whereas these processes were not so evident in the case of the Sami. Fourthly, a determination was growing on the part of the Sami to take back and preserve the Sami language and develop their culture, whilst that of the Kven minority had already been relinquished. The consequences of this were that those who were doing research on Kven community relations tried to find out *what had happened*, while those who were doing research on Sami community relations, from a future perspective, tried to find out *what would happen*. For the Sami it was a question of life; for the Kven it was a question of death.

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<sup>28</sup> This was claimed as early as 1962 by Supreme Court Justice Terje Wold and repeated in the report of The Work of the Sami Rights Commission. Norges Offentlige Utredninger, nr. 13 om *Norske samers rettslige fremtid: samerettsutvalget med delinnstilling våren -84. Mennesker og rettigheter* p. 386.

<sup>29</sup> Overruling this status as immigrants was a principal aim of the Norwegian Kven Association from 1987 onwards, by this means satisfying the requirement for teaching in Finnish to be provided in schools. In 1998, the minority achieved the status of a national minority in Norway.

<sup>30</sup> Interview Einar Arne Drivenes 2015.

Since these differences were so obvious, especially seen from Sammallahti's point of view, there are grounds for asking why research into Kven relations was included in the same programme as the Sami. The reason for this may have been trends in the field of history, as the previous decade had adopted a national perspective where history was viewed from below, in contrast to history seen from above. Local history and regional history were in opposition to the nation's history. Another significant element was the ratio of historians participating in the preliminary project, and Herstad and Bjørgo's central positions in the programme. It is probable that the attitudes of the history section contributed to the Kven being awarded a place alongside the Sami in the research on minorities. The votes of some individuals may have been influenced in that direction, such as local historians who felt it was relevant to look at the population of North Norway as a whole, as well as the Kven communities who, like the Sami, had experiences linked to minority status. While the programme was being established, a book by historians Knut Einar Eriksen and Einar Niemi, "Den finske fare" [The Finnish Danger] was published as a central contribution to the history of Norwegianization. The book received a great deal of attention and brought Kven community relations into the spotlight [17, Eriksen K.E. and Niemi E.].

There is reason to believe that research efforts in the fields of Sami and Kven language, history and culture were influenced by the contemporaneous situation, as well as the general focus on ethnicity from the 1970s onwards. The fact that the minorities debate related to Sami rights may have influenced research choices in such a way that research on Sami relations received more notice than research focusing on Kven relations. Sami political engagement may have contributed to more Sami individuals finding their way into academia than people from the Finnish minority did; this in turn affected terms, topics and weighting between the two groups. But that alone does not explain the differentiation. The Sami research tradition was and had been more comprehensive. The reason why research on Kven relations was also included may have had something to do with the rediscovery of minorities in the 1970s, and researchers talking this up as a topic during that period as one of the issues within the overall responsibility for local history with which the history milieu in Tromsø was concerned. The programme's intentions were wholly in accord with the university's wish to promote regionally-relevant research that would benefit society.

### ***Research perspectives***

New research perspectives, recruitment requirements and conservation enterprises formed the motivation behind the application to inaugurate the humanities programme. This undertaking was a way of placing research on minorities on an equal footing with Norwegian

cultural research which would, during the course of the 1980s, constitute the foundation research within the topic of Sami and Kven relations [10, Baudou E., p. 53]. Together with the scientific theory section, the hope was to illustrate a more conscious or explicit theory concerning humanities-oriented research on minorities, where the main question centred on the relationship between research and society. What function would or could the research serve for the population groups which would now be researched? The programme demonstrated a clear connection between social science and humanities research, something which to some extent was linked to the interdisciplinary thinking at the University of Tromsø, as well as a general tendency towards the national and international [18, Fulsås N., p. 144]. Social science theory and method, such as Fredrik Barth's theory of relational ethnicity and Hans Skjervheim's critique of positivism, were to be used in humanities subjects such as history, archaeology and language. The critique of positivism was central to the new university in Tromsø and students, even at a preliminary stage of their studies, were being introduced to a critique of objectivistic research.

The programme synthesis and programme philosophy for the research were not carved out beforehand, but were meant to be developed in due course.<sup>31</sup> One of the challenges linked to research on minorities was that a series of central and fundamental problems had not been clarified, and the scientific theory contribution was, amongst other things, intended to resolve them [19, Kallerud E.N., p. 3].<sup>32</sup> A series of scientific theory seminars were held, like that in Tromsø held November 1983, where 55 linguists, historians, social scientists and museum staff researchers took part to discuss the fundamental issues relating to research of Sami and Kven relations. The participants represented the humanities programme, but also the Sami studies/ethnic relations research group's own Sami research programme.<sup>33</sup> The topic was broad and allowed space for many perspectives and points of view of both an academic and a political nature. In what follows I shall present a selection of researchers who may demonstrate which perspectives could to be included in research on minorities.

History Professor Narve Bjørgo maintained that the humanities programme lay on the borderlands between research, research policy and cultural policy; he also felt that this was where

<sup>31</sup> Bjørgo N. "Fagleg utviklingsprogram for samisk og kvensk: språk, historie og kultur. Oppsummerande notat til Rådet for humanistisk forskning." (A. 99.00.114) Tromsø, 1980. p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> The scientific theory section of the programme was led by philosopher Alf Isak Kekitalo from NSI. His steering group included Professor Narve Bjørgo as chair, Professor Inge Lønning (Theology, University of Oslo), Senior Lecturer Knut Venneslan (University of Bergen) and Executive Officer Egil Kallerud as secretary.

<sup>33</sup> Sami studies had received funds for the research programme "Cultural variation and inter-ethnic processes", which lasted from 1983–1988, financed by the Council for Social Science Research (*Rådet for samfunnsvitenskapelig forskning*, RSF) at NAVF, KAD (*Kommunal- og arbeidsdepartementet*, Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Labour) and UiT.

it should be.<sup>34</sup> When cultural understanding was a topic, differing points of view were important. Bjørgo differentiated between an inner perspective and a comparative perspective, where both were central. Nonetheless, he made it clear that perspective from within had priority. A recognition that a small nation/group of people had “the same broad spectrum in total life expressions” as larger cultural communities was “in reality [...] nothing more than a claim for cultural justice”.<sup>35</sup> One condition of achieving this was to recruit minorities into the programme.

Culture was the chief analytic expression that functioned, according to Bjørgo, as an integrating element across the disciplines. He referred to history’s experience of research on minorities and was of the opinion that this had been a means of developing method, functioning as an “incentive” (*incitament*) in its own right in the objectivity debate that had been in progress since the end of the 1960s. One academic issue that was relevant for historians was the status of research on minorities in relation to traditional criteria for scientific quality.<sup>36</sup> This was felt to be of current interest at the meeting, with expressions such as “points of view” (*synsvinkler*), “terms” (*premisser*) and “value basis” (*verdigrunnlag*) becoming more evident in the research process. Development of meaning in this area had been useful and methodically liberating. He felt that academic and societal aspects of research did not need to pull against one another, but could “unite in an accepted norm system covering research ethics and research qualitative basic requirements.”<sup>37</sup> Research on minorities had essential theoretical impulses to inflict upon traditional research in established fields, a confrontation that should be encouraged.

The objective of building up basic research within these various disciplines sprang from the political aim of providing the minorities themselves with the potential for taking care of, protecting and developing their own culture. Bjørgo maintained that Sami and Kven cultural research needed to be done over and above the situation-defined range of research that had been carried out up until now [20, Universitetet i T., p. 198].<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, he saw no problem in emphasizing the foundation research perspective, at the same time as seeking to accomplish special societal tasks in the shorter term against a background of research based insight. The longer term and general accumulation of knowledge (foundation research) and the concrete

<sup>34</sup> Bjørgo N. “Fagleg utviklingsprogram for samisk og kvensk: språk, historie og kultur. Oppsummerande notat til Rådet for humanistisk forskning.” (A. 99.00.114) Tromsø, 1980. p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15–16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> “Action research” (*Aksjonsforskning*) was a familiar term at the University of Tromsø, used especially by the social scientists, involving a type of research where the researchers extended their commitment beyond pure description and analysis of the area under consideration, taking steps to solve the problem and the need they came into contact with.



category of problem solution (applied research) were two dimensions of research. In addition, Bjørgo felt that a third dimension arose when the researchers ventured out from their framework of study and explicated constructivist empowering potential of research: “Research [is] in itself a cultural expression. Its very existence is culture forming and value forming. And it is power forming”. It was unfortunate that earlier research in this field had often been carried out by the majority. The feeling of belonging to a culture that, in a research perspective, had had first and foremost an object status for scientists outside the cultural fellowship had been a painful experience for many.<sup>39</sup> The Sami were to be emancipated and the societal power-relations were to be changed through research.

The seminar also revealed disciplinary positions, research institutional policies and tensions between humanities and social sciences. Representatives from the museum sector, professor of Sami ethnography Ørnulf Vorren and curator Dikka Storm from the ethnography department of Tromsø Museum, had encountered challenges relating to practical, disciplinary and academic policy in their cultural research. Their problem was that the museum’s activity was not recognized as research. The museum had a long research tradition, and yet the status of the research was considered to have been weaker [21, Vorren Ø., p. 50]. Vorren referred to a debate with NAVF in which was discussed the extent to which the collection of objects was scientific work, or not. The intimation from NAVF that this was not scientific was strange, since the object collections at the museum did comprise archaeological materials, interview materials, photographic and film materials. Vorren explained that the museums were documentation centres for scientific work and brought the objects to life so that they could be viewed in a meaningful context. The research implied knowledge of the material’s multiplicity, controllability and its functional context within its own cultural environment, and beyond, to that of other cultures. The new social sciences that had grown up during the post-war period had created problems for the museum’s research values as far as cultural historical subjects were concerned, which Vorren claimed were of a special nature in relation to institute research at the University of Tromsø. One problem was that there was no offer of education that could recruit people to museum positions, and this was because those in the teaching sector had moved “away from the traditional museum research, with comprehensive documentation material and a descriptive basis for analysis, and towards model thinking, and abstraction, problematization and hypothesizing within a synchronous perspective” [21, p. 52]. Vorren maintained that the trend that his predecessor Ole Solberg (1879–1946) had started during

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<sup>39</sup> Bjørgo N. “Fagleg utviklingsprogram for samisk og kvensk: språk, historie og kultur. Oppsummerande notat til Rådet for humanistisk forskning.” Tromsø, 1980. p. 21.

the 1920s and 1930s had not been able to develop because of a new “academic methodology” or “academic ethics” which had entered the field after the war “from the west” [the USA]. This implied that the historical perspective, the concrete museum materials and cultural documentation had lost their value. Such an education had previously been offered by the Ethnographical Museum at the University of Oslo, and now it was nowhere to be found.

Dikka Storm confirmed the need for the education of personnel. The department was pressed for time and needed qualified personnel to complete various tasks [22, Storm D., p. 62]. The research work comprised work with the collections and external activities, in addition to commissioned research work and documentation work [22, p. 63].<sup>40</sup> There were reports to be written for the Resources Commission for the Finnmark wilderness (*Ressursutvalget for Finnmarksvidda*), statements to rights authorities, supervision and preparation of materials for the Sami Rights Commission, investigations and the documentation of cultural heritage interests in connection with watercourse development, which were a drain on resources. Work duties in connection with the new cultural heritage law of 1978 were having a particularly detrimental effect on other activities. Storm advocated a greater emphasis on Sami cultural development as a teaching subject. She concluded that this would not only solve the practical challenges of cultural research but would also develop the field academically and theoretically [22, pp. 65–69].

The ethnographers’ criticisms mostly related to perceived ignorance, that their activity was not rated as research on a par with model thinking and social science theorizing within the synchronous perspective. From their standpoint, descriptive documentation was essential and its interpretation a presupposition for research. The criticisms were not directly addressed to the anthropologists at the University of Tromsø, but may be understood as such. Research on Sami relations had been going on uninterrupted at Tromsø Museum since the time of Lappologist Qvigstad. When the University of Tromsø was founded, the main responsibility for this topic was given to the Sami studies/ethnic relations research group, which identified itself with the new social sciences developed after the war, with new theories in the study of people and cultures.<sup>41</sup> Significant individuals who inspired this trend included, not least, anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1928–2016) who was the academic policy representative in the Academic Commission for Social

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<sup>40</sup> Documentation work was linked to a main research plan which had been formulated by the department as early as the 1950s. This was based on criteria such as who the research was for, which areas of Sami cultural development should be covered, how this should be arranged, and for whom. Themes included the old hunting and tracking community (hunting culture, in archaeological terms), pre-Christian religion and mythology, reindeer herding and nomadism, and Coastal Sami settlements.

<sup>41</sup> Researchers from Sami studies/ethnic relations were seminar participants but did not give lectures, even though the topic was obviously relevant to social sciences. The following scientific theory seminar, which was arranged in 1984 in Kautokeino, was organized in collaboration with the anthropologists.

Sciences during the planning process for the University of Tromsø, and who had introduced the relational perspective to the relationship between ethnic groups [23, Barth F.]. The Sami studies/ethnic relations researchers all had a connection with anthropology and adopted Barth's relational perspective as their main perspective in their analyses of Sami society. What was special about this research group was that they also analysed past societies using the same perspective, thus moving into traditional humanistic fields like ethnography and history.

The hypothetical collaboration between the Sami ethnographic department at Tromsø Museum and Sami studies/ethnic relations did not materialize. Anthropology Professor Per Mathiesen explained that the reason for this was because they stood up for different knowledge perspectives. Vorren's documentary and descriptive approach to Sami society was different from the anthropologists' analytical approach to the Sami's position in Norwegian society.<sup>42</sup> The anthropologists in Sami studies/ethnic relations were in charge of the transition from Lappology to an analytical social science form of study. Implicitly, the ethnographers represented the Lappologist tradition. Mathiesen perceived knowledge as something that implicated the academic and the political simultaneously, while his impression of Vorren's view was that knowledge was in many ways based on objective facts. It is doubtful, however, that Vorren would have agreed with this description. The main points of focus of Lappology were the Sami language, history, religion and community relations; it had an interdisciplinary starting point, with linguistics and cultural history as a common denominator, and variants of history, geography, archaeology and ethnology in the curriculum [24, Niemi E., p. 197]. Researchers with elements of this tradition from the post-war period included Helmer Tegenren from Finland, Ernst Manker in Sweden and Knut Bergsland in Norway, but they had a stronger "monodisciplinary anchor" than their earlier colleagues. Vorren had an ethnographical affiliation, which was characterized by interpretation and hermeneutics, but probably more positivistic than the social science paradigm broadly supported by the institute researchers. There was also a difference in the forum, in which the Sami were to be salvaged and in which their weakness was framed: a shift from culture to the society was in process of taking place.

The relationship and weighting between the descriptive and the normative approach in cultural research was further politicized by the appointment of Samuli Aikio as leader of the NSI. He claimed that research on minorities could not be objective, but would always establish a perspective that would serve some political interests. Aikio directed his artillery towards earlier anthropological studies, which he claimed had flourished as commissions from the ruling powers

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Per Mathiesen 2014.

(usually colonial powers), thus influencing the research issue(s). These, he maintained, were actually representative of their own culture and their own intellectual circles [25, Aikio S., p. 72]. Aikio claimed that research instigated by the Sami and about the Sami ought to be able to serve the same purpose for the Sami as research on Norwegian everyday life and folklore had for Norwegian society. The assertion that research was free and in the general interest, as often advanced in academic circles, did not tally. It had been shown time and again that research assignments were decided by the powers that be, as for example the goal of creating a national identity. If the Sami were to carry out research on Sami relations, this must therefore imply that they openly and humbly acknowledged that their intention was to advance Sami interests over society as a whole, and not yield to a claim of objectivity which in reality concealed power interests [25, pp. 73–74]. Aikio reasoned, like Bjørngo, that research should have a beneficial effect, but was also specific with regard to who the research should serve: the Sami required their own research and their own researchers. Research did not necessarily need to be useful to society as a whole — it should be sufficient that the Sami's own requirements were covered. Also Historian Helge Salvesen from the University of Tromsø agreed with Aikio on that point that the need for the minorities to write their own history and create their own identity was no different to what the Norwegians had done throughout the nineteenth century [26, Salvesen H., p. 115].

There was broad agreement that Sami community relationships should also be studied from within. To what extent this should be done for the benefit of the minority alone was not as explicitly stated by everyone. Einar Niemi, historian and (at that time) county council curator in Finnmark, asserted that neither the approach that took its starting point with in--groups or with out-groups was unproblematic as far as community studies were concerned: what was essential was the *relationship* between the groups. The study of one culture would throw light on the other [27, Niemi E., p. 118]. Niemi observed that the cultures did not develop on their own terms, but in relation to one another. He was of the opinion that the Sami community should be studied from within or “on Sami terms” and in relation to other ethnic groups, the surrounding community, society as a whole or the nation state [27, p. 122]. In the same way, the Norwegian community should be studied in relation to the Sami.

The relational perspective linked to the theory on ethnic groups, introduced by Barth, was a leading means of approach in research on minorities at the University of Tromsø. The theory was initially developed for contemporary community analysis and the consequent paradigm change made the cooperation in Sami research difficult. At the University of Tromsø, anthropologists, historians and archaeologists adopted this perspective in the analysis of past communities,

something which in a Norwegian context was perceived as a new phenomenon. The seminar shows that research embraced politics as well from a new perspective. The lack of focus on the Kven minority was observed by ethnologist Venke Olsen [28, Olsen V.], but aside from her no one paid any attention as far as research on minorities was concerned.

### *Conclusion*

This article has shown that the Alta case was the most significant scientific external factor to create a link between politics and research during the period 1979–1985. Researchers permitted themselves to engage in the political action at Stilla, as well as in the academic problematizing of the case itself.

The contemporaneous political debate revived the need for knowledge of the minorities in the north, and from this was created the “Sami and Kven language, history and culture” programme. It may be assumed that the Sami rights struggle contributed to the Sami obtaining a prioritized position compared to the Kven. Scientific trends such as theorizing on ethnicity also promoted the perspective of treating the groups separately from one another and this can be traced to the influence of Fredrik Barth’s focus on ethnic boundaries, rather than cultural encounters.

There was a need for basic research into cultural knowledge within all the disciplines. The research programme produced scientific theory reflections, which laid the foundations for knowledge perspectives. Disciplinary tensions came to light between traditional humanistic-oriented research on minorities and social science perspectives. Also evident are obvious tendencies towards a mixture of these different perspectives.

It was felt that it should be feasible to make use of research and gain political relevance in the process. This then raised the question of who the research was meant to serve. The researchers operated according to a two-part model where, by virtue of being part of the minority or the majority, one was part of an asymmetrical power balance. One implicit norm, and sometimes an actively-created portrayal, was that the minorities were victims of the majority society and the hope was that research would right this imbalance. With the general understanding that the minority was subjugated to the majority, there was no one who could justify any perspective other than that Sami considerations should take priority over Norwegian ones. Using this model, the Kven were overlooked. Most people defended the attitude that culture had to be understood from within, in the same way that Norwegian researchers had produced knowledge for the Norwegian community. The relational perspective, to study communities (the majority and the minority) in relation to one another, shows how social science

method allowed itself to be made use of in humanistic-related research. The Kven minority was also discovered, using ethnicity theory, but tentative weakness of the Kven community did not attract attention to such extent as that of the Sami community. This might be partly because among those who researched Kvens there were less ethnopolitical bindings than in Sami research. Actually, there was no ethnopolitical focus concerning the Kvens at this time, and less need for identity politics.

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