

# Chapter 4. Urban Indigenous Organizing and Institution-Building in Norway and Russia: By and For Whom?

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This chapter explores historical developments as regards the organizational side of urban Sámi life, with a focus on two specific types of urban Indigenous “spaces” that Sámi activists have created: urban Indigenous NGOs and urban Indigenous culture houses. We compare developments regarding the establishment of such spaces in Norway and Russia, analyzing them through the lens of the concepts of *specialization*, *politicization*, and *partisanization*.

As discussed in preceding chapters, Indigenous peoples are subject to a strong association between rurality and “authentic” indigeneity— a pervasive notion that Indigenous people and their culture “really” belong in rural areas (Andersen and Peters 2013, 379-380, Denis 1997). This creates a sense of “out-of-placeness” for urban indigenes (Andersen and Peters 2013: 380), something that not only has an impact on urban Indigenous identities, but also on policy making. Indigenous peoples’ organizations and the governance of Indigenous affairs are in many states structured in ways that lead policy to focus on rural areas. However, as Indigenous peoples urbanize, it becomes ever more pressing for the survival of Indigenous culture and identity that there is space to live Indigenous lives in urban areas, and that key political and administrative institutions and organizations have urban Indigenous policies.

Indigenous NGOs have been created by urban Indigenous communities to provide a collective voice, a place to be, and necessary services for their community. As Andersen and Peters among others have noted, such organizations have often been *pan-tribal* or *big-tent*, i.e. they unite members of different Indigenous groups (Andersen 2013, 57–58; Peters and Andersen 2013a, 25; 2013b, 307-9; Andersen and Peters 2013, 381-385). In other cases, different groups of Indigenous people find it better to not work through the same organizations, or do not manage to do so, resulting in situations where the same urban area can have several Indigenous organizations that hold cultural events or represent Indigenous interests. Different ways in which Indigenous NGOs can be less than all-inclusive is what we describe through our concepts of specialization, politization, and partisanization.

Although NGOs are central to urban Indigenous political and social life, they are not the only actors on the stage. State-based actors such as urban municipal authorities and city-based provincial authorities have also come to be more involved. There can be different reasons for the presence of such actors on the arena. One is pressure from Indigenous civil society, who call on such actors to take responsibility—when it becomes clear that NGOs alone cannot address all the needs of the urban Indigenous population, or out from a philosophy that the state has the responsibility to address these needs. Legal obligations to ensure that the Indigenous population gets access to certain services may also push state-based actors onto the arena, and duties towards the Indigenous population may be bestowed on municipalities and provinces by higher levels of the state, such as for example in Russia where the provincial level has many responsibilities for the implementation of minority-related policy (Berg-Nordlie 2017, 13-14; 2018; Malakhov and Osipov 2006, 505). Actors within municipal or provincial systems (politicians, administrative personnel, employees responsible for implementation) may also take Indigenous policy initiatives out of a sense that it would be proper for that their institution should be active on the arena, or out of idealism. In

addition, private businesses have also gotten involved in urban indigenous affairs in many places—resulting from idealism, profit motives, or a combination thereof— particularly by offering Indigenous cultural experiences, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Cultural and educational institutions, whether state-owned or private, are also important actors in urban Indigenous cultural life.

Nevertheless, NGOs remain vital actors in urban Indigenous life. This chapter accounts for the structure of Sámi NGO life in Norwegian and Russian urban areas, the role of such NGOs as social spaces for the urban Indigenous population, and their role in the establishment and governance of a special type of Indigenous urban space: urban Sámi culture houses. These two types of urban Indigenous spaces—Sámi NGOs and Sámi culture houses—were underscored by many informants in the NUORGÁV project as being highly relevant when discussing the quality of Sámi cultural and social life in the city.

These two were not the only types of Indigenous spaces that were brought up as important: informants also discussed services to Sámi elders, Sámi-oriented health services, regularly recurring Sámi culture events, and different types of arenas for young urban Sámi to learn and use Sámi languages (cf. Berg-Nordlie 2018a). When it comes to young people, the existence of good urban Sámi kindergarten- and school system stands out as being particularly central. Services that enable young Sámi growing up in urban areas to familiarize themselves with Sámi language and culture are of incomparable value for the continuation of Sámi language, culture, and identity. They provide the next generation with an Indigenous network beyond the family from an early point in life, normalize language and other aspects of Indigenous culture that are invisible in the wider urban context, and provides youth with grown-up teachers and role models that possess Indigenous culture competence that their own parents may not always have due to the consequences of earlier anti-Sámi state policy that made cultural transfer difficult (cf. Chapter 1). Kindertgartens and schools also provide a

possibility for the parent generation to establish a community and useful networks—and even organize, as we see from the emergence of Sámi parents’ organizations in several urban areas across Norway. Nevertheless, this chapter delimits itself to Indigenous NGOs in general, and culture houses. These types of Indigenous spaces are, in principle at least, not limited to targeting specific generations or other subgroups of the urban Indigenous population but have the potential to be all-inclusive.

The current chapter is divided into four distinct parts. The first part takes us through some reasons for the creation of urban Indigenous spaces, and some benefits and drawbacks of having more and less inclusive. It also discusses some theoretical concepts of relevance for the study of urban Indigenous organizing, namely *urban Indigenous spaces*, *specialization*, *politization*, and *partisanization*. The second and third parts deal separately with urban indigenous organization- and institution-building in Norway and Russia. Both parts have the same structure: they begin with a brief history of urban Sámi organization in the state in question, and afterwards move on to a presentation of urban Sámi NGO activity and culture house establishment since the 1990s. Our focus lies on the extent to which the urban Indigenous spaces are characterized by specialization, politicization, and partisanization—or inclusiveness. How does the structure of Indigenous civil society in the two states impact NGOs’ potential to create and to be inclusive Indigenous spaces for the urban Sámi population? The fourth part concludes the chapter. Here we attempt to see if we can find any similarities in urban Sámi governance based on the cases we have gone through, and we point out some key differences, challenges, and potentials.

The front of this book contains a map that shows roughly where in Northern Europe the urban areas that are mentioned in this chapter are to be found (Figure 0.1: *Provinces and Key Urban Areas in Sápmi*).

## Space to be Indigenous

### Spaces of Inclusion and Exclusion

The analytical concept “urban Indigenous spaces” was present in the research project

*NUORGÁV — An Urban Future for Sápmi* (see Introduction chapter) from the beginning, but after project researchers encountered a similar concept being used among some of the urban Indigenous informants, the theoretical concept’s content was adjusted. It was when the project’s researchers familiarized themselves with Sámi politics in Trondheim (*Tråante*), South Sápmi’s major urban area, that they became acquainted with a concept coined by local Sámi activists—“Sámi space” (Norwegian: *samisk rom*)—which was similar to our notion of urban Indigenous spaces, but carried a much wider meaning:

It’s sort of an abstract concept. The idea is that Trondheim is also a Sámi place, a multicultural place, and that it always has been, but history is written by the winners, and they haven’t always given space to the Sámi. (...) **We are working to create space for being Sámi in Trondheim** [emphasis ours]. Not a physical house where you can go and be a Sámi for a couple of hours a day, but a tolerant climate, an attitude. (“Anita”, Tråante)

We see here how the Sámi activist illustrates how Sámi space is not only a physical place, but also a social and cultural place that reflects the social and cultural complexity of the city. The Tråante conceptualization of Indigenous space was informed by the experience of being made invisible in the city’s self-presentation and in urban politics—and also by a problem experienced by openly Sámi people: that they were met with contempt and suspicion by parts of the urban majority population. There is still a sense of “out-of-placeness” (Andersen and Peters 2013: 380) that restricts the space to be “openly Sámi” in the city.

By “openly Sámi”, we mean people who do not choose to attempt to “pass” as non-Sámi. People who do not refrain from using the language, traditional Sámi clothes, certain symbols, etc. Negative reactions to visible Sáminess can be linked not only to the way Sámi people have come to be associated with rural areas and as such are felt as “out of place” in

urban areas, but also to old racist notions about Sámi people and ideas about which places it is—and is not—*acceptable* to be openly Sámi. The discrimination of the Sámi pressured many to hide their Sáminess, some to the extent that their children grew up without knowing about their Indigenous heritage (Andreassen 2011; Aslaksen and Lian 2019; Minde 2005). The anti-Sámi attitudes exhibited by some people in the north are at least partly rooted in a type of self-covering aggression performed by Sámi who attempt to “pass” as Norwegians against people who are visibly Sámi. Later generations have learned this behavior, some without even being aware of their own connection to the Sámi people is the cause of it. This is what was noted by one of the informants from Chapter 3, who explained anti-Sámi sentiments in Alta (*Áltá*) as resulting from “shame of having another ethnicity than Norwegian” since many people in Alta “have actually changed their identity over the last hundred years” (“Martin”, Sámi earlier living in Alta, 2018). Another informant describes how he started down the path of discriminatory behavior towards his own people, but decided to leave that path:

I can't say I was proud of it when I was young. All the negative ideas about the Sámi made an impression on me (...). In my youth I got to hear it a lot. **I tried to distance myself, and because of that, I often became a part of it.** [emphasis ours] [informant points finger:] “Look at those *finns*...<sup>[1]</sup>” When I was about sixteen, I began to feel it wasn't right. So, I stopped doing that. (“Jon”, Alta, 2018).

For some, it is not easy to “pass” as non-Sámi: they have names that give them away as Sámi, they speak Norwegian with an accent identifiable as Sámi, or they have physical features that match stereotypes about the Sámi. Such people are particularly at risk for being singled out as targets for people with racist attitudes towards Sámi. Another informant from Alta describes how in her youth she had changed her name, colored her hair blonde, and avoided sunlight so that her dark complexion would not be emphasized by tanning. After having gone back to her

natural appearance, she has again experienced unwanted physical attention from strangers and is often addressed with ethnic slurs.

They say, “Your cheekbones are insanely high, and you’ve got such dark hair, you’ve got to be a Sámi.” I don’t know, aren’t some Norwegians dark too? And some Sámi are blonde (...). Many times, I’ve thought, “Why couldn’t I have been born to this world blond and blue-eyed?” Not so dark, not with this *ffellfinn*<sup>[2]</sup> skin [pinches her own skin]. Whatever they mean by that. People walk over to me and grab my hair to see if it’s real. “You’ve got that *ffellfinn* hair” they say... (“Ruth”, Sámi in Alta, 2018)

The following passage from the anthology series “Sámi school history” edited by Svein Lund (2003-2013) is also an example of how people may be targeted by anti-Sámi racism solely due to their physical appearance—here, a Sámi man recounts his experiences as a school child in the town of Narvik, Nordland:

I remember two classes in the eighth grade where we were to learn about the Sámi (...) I sat staring into my desk for two long hours, wishing I was somewhere else, being afraid that my Sámi background would be revealed. I remember a girl in my class, she whispered to somebody else, touched her cheekbones and pointed at me. I’ve since thought about how the others in the class didn’t speak to me for some weeks after that. That same year I was at confirmation school [religious education]. One of the girls had pronounced cheekbones. I wished that she weren’t there, and I wondered how I could get the size of my own cheekbones reduced (Andreassen 2011, quoted in Svein Lund (Ed.). 2003-2013).

While attitudes to the Sámi appear to have changed for the better in the Nordic states, stereotypes like these are still not all that uncommon among non-Sámi people even today and still influence how Sáminess is hidden or shown spatially.

Such experiences are not unique to the Nordic part of Sápmi. Chauvinistic attitudes towards Indigenous peoples also have a long history in Russia. Discrimination based on popular ideas of “race” is most pronounced against Indigenous individuals that are of an

appearance considered to be more “Asian.” Such individuals may also be targeted by Islamophobes who mistake them for members of Russian ethnic minorities that are generally Muslim (Rohr 2014). The Sámi of Russia are not among the Russian Indigenous nations who are most physically dissimilar to the majority population, but derogatory attitudes exist also towards those Indigenous peoples that may more easily pass as majority Russians. This can be seen in relation to the traditional paternalism in the Russian relationship to its Indigenous peoples, where the state is seen by the majority population as a benefactor of the “small peoples” rather than a colonizer and exploiter (Berg-Nordlie 2017). The ills associated with the relative socio-economic depression that is prevalent among many Russian Indigenous groups have also given rise to prejudices that combine ethnic and class-based contempt. The IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) sums up the racist stereotyping of Russian Indigenous peoples in their home regions as follows: “They are seen as child-like, incapable of real work, entirely addicted to alcohol and overly benefiting from state welfare and support” (Rohr 2014).

Our Russian Sámi informants of different generations give different reports of their experiences of anti-Sámi sentiment. Those who were young in the 1960s describe experiencing racial slurs and violent conflicts in urban areas:

Well, they called us “Lapps, Lapps” [ethnic slur], of course, sometimes it can be offensive.

Well, because we were considered to be the lower class, the lowest tribe. Who took us for humans? “Lapps, Lapps.” You get tired of listening to it sometimes, and then it starts. The same people in the street attack us, so we are defending ourselves... (“Vladimir”, Murmansk, 2016, quoted in Afanasieva 2019,156.)

The Sámi people in Russia and other Indigenous peoples were racialized in a manner that legitimized and camouflaged the state’s paternalism towards the Indigenous peoples because they were portrayed as primitive and unable to take care of themselves. Younger Russian



Sámi informants have fewer negative experiences to share, and one claims that that the general tone in Russian Sápmi's main metropolis Murmansk City (*Murman lánn*) is one of “respect” and even “kindness”. This is likely to reflect an improvement in popular attitudes over time, something that is also observable on the Norwegian side of the border. It may also be noted that the informant who was most content with life as a Sámi in Murmansk City, who describes it as “pleasant, friendly and informative”, was born in the city, whereas Sámi who had moved to the city emphasized negative experiences more, such as the informant below who had encountered both negative stereotypes and supportive statements.

Stereotypes are constant. That we smell badly, that we are illiterate and stupid. Well, there are illiterate and stupid people in all nationalities. (...) In the city some people supported me, saying, “It is right that you are not embarrassed to promote your own culture and speak up about it”; but someone [else] said that I was a crazy person (“Sergej”, Murmansk City Sámi, 2016)

In Trondheim, the short-term desire of local activists was the establishment of Indigenous space in the sense of Indigenous *breathing space*. This illustrating how the marginalization of the Sámi are manifested through bodily manifestations of power structures in society (cf. Dennison 2018), and how bodies and sociomaterial spaces (cf. Massey 1994) are shaped through entanglements of power that restrict Sámi visibility in urban spaces—space for individuals to be openly Sámi (tolerance), but also for the city of Trondheim to be recognized as a place that also has a Sámi past and present (acceptance). Long-term visions for Sámi space in the city also included the creation of more concrete and physical institutions, such as a Sámi kindergarten—but it was seen as a precondition for achieving such gains that one first had to increase the space for “Sáminess” at the level of basic attitudes and popular consciousness.<sup>3</sup> This chapter concerns other types of Indigenous spaces—more concrete and organized spaces—but it is nevertheless a valuable insight that organized Sámi spaces do not just have the function of promoting culture and identity, but also to be “safe spaces”—they

constitute arenas where one is guaranteed not to experience discrimination when being openly Sámi.

When talking about organized and institutionalized urban Indigenous spaces, we must underscore that “institutionalized” does not necessarily mean “physical”. Informants also brought up the importance of non-physical arenas for urban Sámi: communication technology has made it possible to create Sámi “spaces” online, where people can get in touch, organize formal and informal events, and support each other. *Social media* is as an essential component of modern urban Sámi life. Many urban areas have at least one Facebook group intended to unite the local Sámi population. They are an important counterweight to the social atomization that many Indigenous peoples experience in larger urban areas. Those Indigenous groups that do not cluster voluntarily or involuntarily in certain parts of the city (a phenomenon that may produce problems of its own, cf. Moran 2013), instead live their lives as geographically scattered Indigenous individuals who often lack common social arenas unless such arenas are deliberately organized. Under conditions of urban Indigenous atomization, there are few opportunities for Indigenous individuals to meet and practice Indigenous language and culture. In cities of a certain size, such urban Indigenous individuals are not just poorly connected with each other but may not even know about each other at all. Through social media groups, the Indigenous “atoms” may connect into more social “molecules” – individuals find out about each other, share information about opportunities to use and learn language and culture, and coordinate and cooperate to make the city a better place to be Indigenous.

Other types of Indigenous spaces noted by the informants as important were those that are institutionalized not in the sense of continuously existing, but by being *regularly occurring*, namely annual Indigenous cultural events. Informants particularly noted the importance of publicly celebrating Sámi National Day (February 6<sup>th</sup>). In most urban areas,

this is the major Sámi cultural event on any year's calendar, or even the only major Sámi cultural event. The celebration may stretch over several days with contributions from NGOs, state-based actors, and private businesses. Cultural events of a certain scale serve not just as arenas for Indigenous social congregation and enjoyment of Indigenous culture—but also as a temporary symbolic reclaiming of space in the city, a “ritual” to remind both minority and majority of the Indigenous people's history and continued presence in the area (Berg-Nordlie 2018a, Johnson 2013). These events are often well-known among the majority population and may make it temporarily easier for people to be “openly Sámi” in public. This shows us how restrictions on expressions of Sáminess in public are not only of a spatial order, but also of a temporal order, where certain dates make it easier, and even generally accepted, to express cultural differences in public (cf. Olsen 2007, 75).

In sum, the final concept of urban Indigenous spaces that we utilize in this book is wider than our project's original idea of just physical places for Indigenous networking and culture – we instead refer to this specifically as *urban Indigenous culture houses* – but it is still narrower than the general concept that Indigenousness should have cultural space in the sense that it is tolerated and accepted.

We define an urban Indigenous space as an institutionalized (constant or regularly repeating) arena that enables Indigenous social congregation and the usage and learning of Indigenous culture and language.

#### NGOs as Urban Indigenous Spaces – Specialization, Politicization, and Partisanization

NGOs have much potential to serve as urban Indigenous spaces. They can be arenas for Indigenous socialization and networking, and they can organize events where one may use, learn, or experience important aspects of Indigenous culture such as language, music,

handicrafts, cooking, etc. In addition to this, NGOs can provide a collective voice for the local urban Indigenous population.

Three phenomena can be noted as potential obstacles to NGOs' functioning as urban Indigenous spaces: specialization, politicization, and partisanization.<sup>4</sup> "Specialization" refers to when instead of having the above-mentioned "big-tent" model of Indigenous organization, i.e. one that transcends internal Indigenous cleavages, there are several Indigenous organizations that cater to more specific groups. In the Sámi context, such groups may, for example, be sub-ethnic (see Chapter 1) or generation-based. "Politicization" here refers to when Indigenous organizations do not unify the Indigenous population across the political spectrum but are movements that also reflect political divisions within the Indigenous population. "Partisanization" is an extreme case of politicization in which organizations compete for votes in elections.

These phenomena may also have positive aspects for the Indigenous population. Specialization can ensure that groups within the Indigenous community that may otherwise have been given less priority within a "big-tent" Indigenous NGO get a voice of their own and someone who works to provide for their interests. For example, in a situation where members of one Indigenous ethnos or sub-ethnos are locally outnumbered by another Indigenous group and perceive themselves as being given less priority by the "pan-tribal" organization, it may pay off for the internal minority to form a separate organization. Such specialization is not necessarily based on ethnicity or sub-ethnicity but can for example also be generation-based; e.g. young people may feel that their interests are not given priority by the older people who dominate the NGOs, and thus separate youth organizations can be of value in order to create events of interest for the younger generation. Other subgroups of the Indigenous community may also feel the need to organize separately in order to cultivate a common identity that exists in contrast not just to the majority, but also to other groups within the Indigenous

community. As for politicization and partisanization, one should keep in mind that internal political disagreements will happen also in Indigenous communities, and individuals who disagree can only work together politically up to a certain point. The organization of movements to express conflicting views within Indigenous communities can be seen as a healthy democratic phenomenon.

On the other hand, the fracturing of Indigenous civil society created by specialization, politicization, and partisanization has some clear disadvantages. One is that running an organization is time- and energy consuming, and it takes twice the time and resources to keep two organizations in existence instead of one. On the level of external political representation, specialization leaves the Indigenous population without an organization that represents *all* of them—an organization that can be recognized as legitimately speaking on behalf of the Indigenous community as such. The absence of a representative body recognized by the Indigenous population itself can make it difficult to achieve Indigenous political influence. In the absence of such a body, it becomes possible for the authorities to pick Indigenous individuals who are in agreement with their agenda and to treat this as providing an Indigenous voice in the political process. Even if the authorities are genuinely interested in getting an impression of the general mood among Indigenous citizens, specialization may frustrate their possibilities to gather such knowledge. Challenges like these may be ameliorated by establishing an umbrella organization or other common Indigenous space, a collective “node” to unite the smaller groups on a common arena. Such common nodes for Indigenous micro-communities may also have leaders or staff who ease the organizational burden of the smaller organizations or provide representation in cases when the Indigenous population needs to stand united across organizational divides.

## Urban Indigenous Organizing and Institution-Building in Norway

### Pre-Sámediggi Sámi Organizing in Norway

When modern Sámi organizing began in the early 1900s, it was more rural than urban, but nevertheless had some important aspects connected to urbanity. After a period of reduced activity, the post-WWII era saw Norwegian Sámi NGO life reinvigorate itself, a process in which urban Sámi had an important part. From the 1960s, Sámi civil society expanded in both rural and urban areas. The 1960s and -70s was a period of politicization: different responses to Norwegian policy towards the Sámi caused both mobilization and division in Sámi civil society. With the establishment of the Sámediggi in 1989, politicization developed into partisanization.

### Pre-War NGO Organizing

The earliest modern Sámi organizations tended to be rural, rather than urban—the first known modern Sámi NGO was founded in 1903 by, among others, Anders Larsen (see Chapter 2) in the hamlet of Seglvik, Kvænangen (*Silvetnjárga, Návuoatna*) where Larsen came from (Bjørklund 2017). Nevertheless, urban Sámi NGOs have been a part of Sámi civil society from the beginning: one of the very earliest Sámi NGOs, the Lappish Central Association (Swedish: *Lapparnas Centralförbund*) was established in Stockholm in 1904, the last year of the Swedish-Norwegian Union (Henriksen 1976, 14). The first border-transcending Sámi congress (1917) was for practical reasons held in the major urban area of South Sápmi—Trondheim (Johansen 2015), and some of the later major meetings were, likewise, held in urban areas, most notably in Östersund in 1918 (Henriksen 1976). It is notable that many of the organizational pioneers—while hailing from rural areas—had important formative years as students or workers in urban areas. Such people include, for example, NGO founder Elsa Laula Renberg (studied in Örebro and Stockholm), politician Isak Saba (laborer in Vadsø, studied in Oslo and Tromsø), author and newspaper editor Anders Larsen (studied in Tromsø), editor and organizer Daniel Mortensson (studied in Östersund, later settled in the

village of Røros), and politician Per Fokstad (studied in Tromsø, Oslo, Birmingham, and Paris) (Berg-Nordlie 2019, Berg 2020; Johansen 2015, Jensen 2020, Sandøy 2010, Skåden 2019, Stien 1976, Zachariassen 2012).

#### Post-War NGO Organizing

After a period of reduced activity during the late interwar and war years, the 1940s and 1950s saw a new spring of Sámi organizing in the Nordic states—both domestic and border-transcending, rural and urban (Berg-Nordlie 2013). The Sámi Reindeer Herders' Association of Norway (*Norgga boazosápmelaččaid riikasearvi*) was established during a series of meetings in 1947-48: the first in rural, southern Majavatn (*Maajehjaevrie*), the second and third in urban areas—Trondheim and Tromsø. Simultaneously, in 1948, the organization *Sámi Searvi* (“Sámi Association”) was established in Oslo.

Sámi students played a large role in the creation of Sámi Searvi (OSS, 1948; Otnes 1970). There were no universities in Norwegian Sápmi yet, so young Sámi who wanted the highest available education in Norway had to relocate to either Bergen or the capital. In Oslo, they formed a growing community of Indigenous academics in domestic diaspora who defied the assimilation policy and instead wanted to retain their connection to their homeland and its culture (Sapmi uit.no. 2020). The Sámi Searvi was initially an NGO specifically for Sámi living in Oslo, and part of a larger umbrella organization for the associations of people who had moved to Oslo from various parts of Norway—the Union of City and Country Associations (*By- og bygdelagsforbundet*) (Berg-Nordlie 2018b, nsr.no 2003). However, in 1951 the Sámi Searvi reorganized into a Norway-wide NGO for all Sámi (Nesheim 1955). Opinions began to be voiced that the organizational center should be moved from the urban diaspora to Finnmark County, where most of Norway's Sámi lived (Henriksen 1976, 10). In 1959 a Sámi Searvi chapter was established in the village of Karasjok (Kárášjohka), and more

rural chapters in Finnmark followed. In 1968, control over Norwegian Sámi NGO life was reclaimed by Sámi living in Sápmi: the Sámi Searvi was reorganized into the NSR—the Norwegian Sámi Association (*Norgga Sámiid Riikkasearvi*), the leadership functions were moved away from Oslo, and the Oslo Sámi Searvi (OSS) continued as just one of several NSR chapters (Berg-Nordlie 2018b, Henriksen 1976, 10-11, nsr.no 2003).

While the diaspora–homeland balance had now tipped drastically, the overall rural–urban balance was another issue—the northern urban areas very soon after got their first NSR chapters. Young Sámi with academic ambitions were now drawn to Tromsø, where the first university in northern Norway was established in 1968 (opened 1972), and in 1969 an NSR chapter was established in that city (*Romssa Sámi Searvi*). In 1972, an NSR chapter was established in Alta (*Álttá Sámi Searvi*), which the following year became home to Finnmark County’s first university college. By then, Alta had become the hotspot of the most salient political conflict in post-war Norway.

#### Politicization and Partisanization

During the Alta Dam Conflict (1969–82), Sámi and environmentalist activists protested the flooding of a large area on the inlands east of Alta, including the Sámi-language village of Máze (Minde 2005). The NSR opposed the dam project. During this period, the NSR underwent a marked politicization: the organization emerged as an advocate of the rights of the Sámi as an Indigenous people. While this position was popular among many Sámi, it was not universally supported. A rival organization was established in 1979, the SLF (“Sámi Countrywide Union”), which took more moderate political stances and discussed the Sámi as first and foremost a minority within the Norwegian citizenry and not an Indigenous nation. This group gained particular popularity in coastal areas of Sápmi (Berg-Nordlie and Schou 2011, 6, 11-12, Emanuelsen 2006). The Norwegian authorities’ Alta Dam project caused a politicization of Sámi civil society, in the sense that we use that term here: Sámi civil society



divided into different organizational spheres based on political affiliation. The Alta Dam Conflict made it clear that Norway needed a new system for Sámi representation in governance, and the Sámediggi was established—an Indigenous parliament, consisting of representatives elected by popular vote (see Chapter 1). This revolution in political representation also had the consequence that it paved the way for the existing politicization of Sámi civil society to develop into fully-fledged partisanization.

The first Sámediggi elections were held in 1989. The SLF decided not to participate, because they were opposed to having a representative organ elected by registered ethnic Sámi. As a result of this, the SLF lost relevance in Sámi political and organizational life. It eventually fractured and faded into obscurity (Berg-Nordlie and Schou 2011; Emmanuelsen 2006). The NSR made the opposite choice. They considered establishing a separate party structure through which its members could run for office. This would prevent a situation where the NSR was simultaneously both a non-governmental cultural organization and a party potentially in control of a state-based political organ. However, the organization eventually came to the decision that the NGO itself should run as a party in Sámediggi elections. The NSR had always been political, but it was now involved in competitive elections with the Sámi of other party lists. The only remaining countrywide and would-be “big-tent” Sámi culture NGO had now become a political party.

The social-democratic Labor Party had a particularly long tradition for being a channel through which Sámi activists attempted to influence policymaking: this was the party of, among others, Anders Larsen, Isak Saba—the first Sámi elected to Norway’s parliament (1906-1912), and the anti-assimilation policy activist Per Fokstad (Zachariassen 2012, Henriksen 1976). There was originally some membership overlap between Labor and the NSR—Fokstad had, for example, participated at the NSR’s founding conference—but during the critical years of the 1970s, the two drifted apart. Labor supported the Alta Dam project

and gave voice to more moderate Sámi political sentiments than the NSR. When the Sámediggi was established, double memberships in the NSR and Labor rapidly became a thing of the past. The leader of the Labor Party Sámi, Steinar Pedersen, was an NSR member at the time of the first Sámediggi elections but left the NSR after that organization and its allies set down the first Sámediggi “government” (*Sámediggeráđđi*) without Labor representation (NTB 1989). The NSR and Labor now became the two main rival parties in the Sámediggi.

The partisanization of Sámi civil society was to become more pronounced in the Sámediggi Era. New Sámi organizations were established, and many of them competed with the NSR for votes in Sámediggi elections. Some of the parties also expressed Sámi organizational specialization: they appealed to the interests of specific Sámi subgroups, such as subethnic groups or inhabitants of certain geographic regions. Other parties reflected political differences and political rivalries within Sámi communities. There was also an increasing presence in Sámediggi politics of “mainstream parties”, i.e. parties like Labor that were originally formed by Norwegians, and which were mainly active in Norway’s non-Indigenous specific municipal-, county-, and national parliaments.

The partisanization of civil society had a not insignificant effect on Sámi social and cultural life. Politically active Sámi found themselves divided into different organizational spheres, and to a certain extent, the access of Sámi individuals to Sámi social and cultural arenas became predicated on their personal political affiliation. Local Indigenous spaces were often organized by the NSR in its capacity as a cultural organization, and some Sámi *de facto* experienced a loss of access due to not feeling welcome at, or not wanting to promote, a rival party’s events. The impact of partisanization was, however different from place to place. Some Sámi communities saw intense internal conflicts, while in other places, the Sámi leaders

managed to work across political divides and to cooperate on the establishment of non-partisan Indigenous spaces.

## Urban Indigenous Organizing in the Sámediggi Era

### General Tendencies

This section contains an overview of Sámi civil society in a selection of Norwegian urban areas that are considered important as hubs for Sámi urbanization (cf. Chapter 2): Alta, Tromsø, Oslo (first tier), Bodø, and Trondheim (second tier). The urban areas are presented from north to south (cf. maps in Chapter 1 and 2). The second-tier urban areas are less pronounced as Sámi organizational nodes in their districts: Alta, Tromsø, and Oslo (*Oslove*) dominate their districts while Bodø (*Bådåddjo/Buvdda*) and Trondheim are rivalled by strong rural Sámi settlements in their districts. In the case of Trondheim this has changed somewhat in latter years, as the organizational landscape has restructured itself around a growing urban Sámi population.

Partisanization is a feature in all the urban areas, since the cultural NGO, NSR, doubles as a party, and there are multiple other parties present in the urban areas that compete during Sámediggi elections. The extent to which the parties other than NSR are active as cultural organizers, varies from place to place, and there are also notable differences regarding their interrelations and structures for cooperation.

One may observe that the presence of specialized and non-partisan Sámi NGOs in these areas have been increasing—Sámi youth organizations, student organizations, and parents' networks have been established. Norwegian Sámi youth organizing has a tradition of being non-partisan, already from the 1996 establishment of the first such NGO in Norway, *Davvi Nuorra* (“Northern Youth”), which sought to unite Sámi youth independently of their “economic niches, geography, and political positions” (Hovland 1996, 113). The same can be said about student organizing. Before the Sámediggi was established, students were heavily involved in several urban NSR chapters, but after the partisanization of NSR—new, non-

partisan, NGOs have been created by Sámi students. The parent networks are a younger type of Sámi organization that are also always non-partisan, open for all parents of Sámi children and youth. They work for, among other things, improved Sámi school and kindergarten services.

Finally, one must mention the increased importance of social media in urban Sámi social life, particularly Facebook groups for local Sámi. These are non-partisan, non-politicized, and non-specialized — targeting the entire Sámi population of a given area. Since these are not NGOs, our chapter does not focus on them, but they nevertheless are so important for urban Sámi networking, socializing, discussion, and information-sharing that they must be mentioned.

#### Alta (Áltá)

A persistent assessment of Alta is that this town is, or at least has earlier been, plagued by particularly negative attitudes to the Sámi. One informant was, for example, of the opinion that in Alta, the hate against the Sámi had a unique “depth and durability” (“Jon”, Alta Sámi, 2018). Earlier in this chapter we have discussed the “policing” of visible Sáminess as part of “passing” as Norwegian, and as a form of behavior inherited from Norwegian-passing ancestors. Two other explanations were offered by informants: One of them is that Alta has a large population of people with Kven ancestry, and that unresolved tensions between this national minority and the Indigenous Sámi play a part.<sup>5</sup> Another explanation was residual tension from the Alta Dam Conflict. This conflict was summed up as “traumatizing” by a local informant (“Laila”, Sámi in Alta, 2015): it created and exacerbated divisions in the population when it came to Sámi-related issues, also within the Sámi population itself, and some of these divisions have yet not healed.

In this context, it may not be so difficult to understand why Alta’s politicians and bureaucrats have exhibited a certain reluctance to champion the creation of spaces to maintain

and promote Sámi culture. One municipal employee described the local culture in administration and politics as one that had earlier produced Sámi “invisibility” in all regulative documents and political decisions: Sámi interests are simply not taken into account, effectively ensuring that policy neglects the interests of the Sámi. While the production of Indigenous invisibility in politics is not unique to Alta, the extent of it was seen by some as particularly notable. There are signs that this is changing, however: there has been increased dialogue between the municipality and the Sámediggi since 2011, and in 2019, the Sámediggi and Alta signed a cooperation agreement that contains a framework for interaction, some points of agreement, and some subjects of cooperation (Oskal 2019).

Even so, the earlier absence of municipal commitment to Indigenous services made it necessary for civil society to take responsibility. The NSR chapter *Álttá Sámi Searvi* became a provider of organized Sámi spaces and services to the Sámi population. However, joining the NSR or frequenting the spaces established by them was not considered an option for everyone. The main reason for this has to do with the politicization and partisanization of Sámi civil society. In addition, the organization acquired a reputation among some as being primarily an organization for urbanized Sámi-speakers hailing from other parts of Finnmark, and not for the generally non-Sámi speaking local population. It must be said that Alta NSR does have members who are precisely the latter kind of people, but this does not change the fact that some informants did report feeling unwelcome on those grounds. On the other side of the coin, several Sámi-speaking Sámi in Alta feared the ascension of a type of Sáminess that does not value the Sámi language, but instead focuses on other aspects of Sámi culture (cf. discussions Nyseth and Pedersen 2014, Bjørklund 2016).

First and foremost, we Sámi have a desire to preserve our language. The municipalities don't necessarily understand this need. So, they don't set off enough means for, for example, the schools. (...) People are now conscious that to teach your child Sámi requires a kindergarten

that offers this language. As a minority in a majority society, the problem will be that our children do not get exposed to the language enough. (“Elle”, Alta 2016).

We get Sámi who moved here from the inland and know Sámi, but also Sámi who are raised here with Norwegian as their Sámi mother tongue. (...) the language is important, but if we end up with just the language and don’t care about the clothes, the handicraft, our nature usage—if we start using nature like the Southerners and city folk do... I don’t agree with those who say that the language carries the culture (“Marianne”, Alta 2016)

Indeed, many local informants brought up that for them the core aspect of Sáminess is not the language, but other parts of the culture like handicrafts, music, and cooking or certain fundamental ideas about the relationship between the individual, family, and nature – or simply genealogical heritage.

Two specialized cultural organizations were founded in Alta during the current millennium. The first, *Gula* (“Hear”, est. 2010), oriented itself towards local, coastal Sámi culture. The founders first considered establishing it as a movement within the Sámediggi political party *Árja* (“Commitment”), established in 2008 as a traditionalist party speaking for the interests of rural Sámi (Boine et al. 2008, Pettersen and Saglie 2019). This may seem an odd choice of party for an NGO based in Alta, but while Alta municipality has an urban center, it also has a rural hinterland of substantial size, and some of the leading *Gula* activists lived in such parts of Alta. In any case, *Gula* did not in the end “partisanize”, but instead established itself as a pure NGO. The other NGO, “Friends of the North Calotte” (est. 2014), focuses on Finnmark’s multiculturalism instead of exclusively on Sámi culture. While formally non-partisan, it was established by activists in the Sámediggi party “The North Calotte People” (Norwegian: *Nordkalottfolket*, NKF), which originated in the Alta area (est. 2009, called “The Finnmark List” from 2005 to 2009). NKF voices a position that northerners should organize across ethnicities, and tends to rhetorically invoke the equality of Sámi,

Kven, and majority Norwegian culture (Mörkenstam et al. 2017, 197-201, Nyysönen 2015, Olsen 2010, 116, 199-122).

We were very clear that we did not want this mix of politics and culture. If we were to run courses and such, then we wanted anyone to participate without it being connected to the North Calotte People as a party. So, we established the association Friends of the North Calotte. (“Olaug”, Alta 2016).

While non-partisan, Gula was nevertheless spawned from discontent with the NSR-based structures in Alta and was at the time of field work not an NGO that unifies people across the party divide. Likewise, the Friends of the North Calotte has a social, symbolic, and historical connection to the North Calotte People Party that may make it somewhat difficult to see as a non-partisan actor. Alta does, however, have one specialized Sámi organization that transcends party boundaries: the Sámi parents’ network (est. 2008).

While Alta exhibits more intense internal Sámi political conflicts than some other Sámi cities, the degree of internal division should not be exaggerated. Our interviews indicate that those who are not active in the organizations or parties but are inactive members or non-members who just attend the cultural events, may not notice the conflicts between the Sámi leaders much at all. Some informants were not even conscious of who exactly it is that organizes the courses, concerts, and other activities that they attend. It is also not unheard of even for leading activists to attend cultural events organized by others.

#### Tromsø (Romsa)

In this largest urban area of Norway’s north, no Sámi cultural NGOs have been established with the goal of competing with the local NSR chapter, *Romssa Sámi Searvi*. Other Sámi party movements such as Labor and *Árja* are present in the city, but no other cultural organizations. The absence of rivals to the NSR as a cultural organization may be partly explained by the presence of certain specialized Sámi NGOs.

The Sámi Students' Association of Tromsø (*Sámi Studeanttaid Searvi Romssas*) was established in Tromsø in 1983 as an open organization for all Sámi students. In the current millennium it has, like the University of Tromsø, changed its name and geographical field of activity: it is now the Sámi Student Association in North Norway (*Sámi Studeanttasearvi Davvi-Norggas*) and organizes students at UiT—Arctic University of Norway, which now also includes students in certain northern towns such as Alta (see Chapter 2). Like other Sámi youth organizations, the student organization has avoided partisanization—it neither runs for elections nor has it established formal ties to Sámi organizations that do. The non-partisan youth organization *Davvi Nuorra* had a Tromsø chapter, but this vanished upon the collapse of the mother organization in 2007. In 2009, a new non-partisan Sámi youth NGO was established—*Noereh!* (“Youths!”)—and in 2015, a local *Noereh!* chapter was established (Anti 2009). Tromsø also has a Sámi Parents' Network, which was established in 2002 (Nordlys 2002).

Thus, Tromsø has non-partisan NGOs that cater to significant parts of the urban Sámi population in Tromsø—but these are specialized, as they only include children, youth, students, and parents. In addition to these, though, there exists a Facebook group for Tromsø's Sámi, which is entirely open.

Finally, it should be noted that in Tromsø, the need for organized Sámi spaces may not be as pressing as in many other urban areas in Norway. Sámi culture has a notable presence in the city's vibrant cultural life and is not as “drowned out” by the majority culture as it is in f. ex. Oslo and Trondheim.

[Bodø \(Bådåddjo / Buvdda\)](#)

In the capital of Nordland County, an NSR chapter was established during the 1980s (Finnmarksarkivene 2020, nsr.no 2007), but unlike its Alta and Tromsø counterparts, this local organization was later merged with rural NSR groups into one chapter that also covers the wider district surrounding the town. This association, the *Sálto Sámesiebrre* (Salten Sámi



Association) has an area of activity that includes, among others, rural Lule Sámi cultural strongholds on the south-west coast of the Tysfjord (*Divttasvuodna*).<sup>6</sup> This makes the town itself less nodal the local NGO than it could have been. Even though *Sáltu Sámesiebrre* has members from all over the Salten region, the organization has traditionally been dominated by the Lule Sámi—which may explain a notable reluctance among Pite Sámi to join the organization (for more on Sámi subgroups, see Chapter 1). Instead, an independent Pite Sámi NGO has been established—*Salto bihtesamiid searvi*—which mainly organize people from Bodø and nearby rural areas. For a while, Bodø also had an NGO that aimed at being non-partisan and non-political—the Sámi Culture Club—and mostly arranged concerts and courses in Sámi cooking. Bodø also has two specialized Sámi organizations: a Sámi parents’ union (est. 2004), and union for Sámi students at the Nord University (est. 2019). The most open space for Bodø’s Sámi is found on Facebook, where a group has been established to share information and discuss events.

In sum, all Sámi organizations local to Bodø are specialized to specific groups of the Sámi. The only non-specialized organization is partisan, and also includes rural areas. One should note, however, that Sámi networking in Bodø tends to take an informal and group-transcending character.

#### Trondheim (Tråante)

Trondheim’s Sámi civil society life earlier had much in common with Bodø: There was no purely local NGO until recently, and the local NSR chapter covered not just the city, but also two large provinces (South Trøndelag and Hedmark<sup>7</sup>), including a village that rivals Trondheim’s Sámi cultural and organizational nodality (Røros / Plaassje). During the 2010s, Trondheim-based members of the regional NSR chapter and activists in the specialized Sámediggi party *Áärjel-Saemiej Gielh* (“South Sámi Voices” or ÅSG, est. 2009 to promote the interests of the Southern Sámi subgroup, Berg-Nordlie 2018a) worked together across

party divides to improve conditions for Sámi living in Trondheim city. In 2010, a network of such activists, with allies among Trondheim's municipal politicians, succeeded in persuading the municipal board to set down a formal governance network where the appointed members—NGO representatives and municipal representatives—should discuss and give advice on how to improve “Sámi space” in the city (Berg-Nordlie 2018a). This network became instrumental in organizing a major, full-year centennial celebration of the first border-transcending Sámi congress—*Tråante2017*—and the realization of a municipal Sámi kindergarten (see endnote 1).

The planning period and aftermath of *Tråante2017*<sup>8</sup> was accompanied by a rapid evolution in Trondheim's urban Sámi organizational structure. In 2016, a local non-partisan Sámi student union (*Saemien studeenth Tråantesne*) was established, and the next year a Sámi parents' association was registered (proff.no. 2017). In 2018, a non-partisan cultural organization was established under the name “Samisk Arena Trondheim” (proff.no 2018). This NGO began as an open Facebook groups for Sámi in the Trondheim area, but after a year resulted in the establishment of a formalized organization that uses the Facebook page as its discussion forum.

In 2018-19, the NSR divided its South Trøndelag and Hedmark County chapter into the Trondheim-centered *Tråanten Dajve Saemien Siebre* (nsr.no 2019) and the Røros-centered *Guevteli Saemieh* (nr.no 2018). Thus, the ascendancy of Trondheim as a nodal point in South Sápmi had become reflected also in the NSR's organizational structure. This restructuring is a direct consequence of Sámi urbanization and is evidence of the increased importance of the cities in Sámi organizational life.

In 2019, a structure to unify the new Sámi organizations of Trondheim was established under the name *Samisk Rom Trondheim – Saemien Sijjie Tråante*, which has a board

consisting of representatives from the organizations Tråanten Dajven Saemien Siebrie, Saemien Studeenth Tråantesne, and Samisk Arena Tråante (Saemien Sijjie Tråante 2019).

#### Oslo (Oslove)

In Norway south of Sápmi, the capital area of Oslo dominates Sámi politics and culture.<sup>9</sup>

However, local Sámi NGOs are also found in other parts of the South Norway region. The NSR has chapters in South Norway's second largest city Bergen (est. 1969); in the west-coast district Haugalandet which is centered on the town Haugesund (est. 2018); the Mjøsa Lake district of small towns and rural areas north of Oslo (est. 2008); and the rural and urban areas of Møre and Romsdal County (est. 1997). Nevertheless, all indicators point towards Oslo being one of the top three "Sámi cities" in Norway, and the only one among the top five that is outside Sápmi. Among South Norway's urban areas, we will hence focus on Oslo.

As in Alta, there are several culturally active Sámi organizations, but unlike Alta it is not just the NSR chapter that doubles as a political party. The Sámi People's Party (*Sámi álbmotbellodat*, SáB) was founded in 1999 with the involvement of NSR activists. It was initially intended to run for elections in the general political system of Norway (e.g. municipalities, counties, parliament), but SáB ended up also running for Sámediggi elections. Some places this happened in cooperation with the local NSR lists, but in Oslo, the SáB and NSR became political rivals. The NSR, SáB, and the Labor-affiliated group Sámi Social Democratic Forum (Aftenposten 1992) together constitute the "old firm" of Sámi political rivals in the capital area. In addition, there was the party *Sámit lulde* ("Sámi in the South", which first ran for elections in 2001 under the name "Sámi Settled in South Norway"). Despite having a name that appealed to a broader "diaspora Sámi" position, this party ran Oslo-centric election campaigns. *Sámit lulde* was present in the Sámediggi until 2017, when it did not run. That same year, Oslo's SáB chapter gained representation in the Sámediggi for

the first time after running a campaign that focused on the interests of urban Sámi, and especially targeting Oslo-based voters (see Berg-Nordlie and Skogerbø – forthcoming 2021).

The youth organization Noereh established an Oslo chapter in 2015—at present Noereh’s only local chapter in addition to Tromsø and Ávjovárri. The latter covers the rural inland municipalities of Kautokeino and Karasjok. Oslove Noereh constitutes a particularly large and active chapter in Noereh. It rapidly became an active organizer of Sámi cultural events in the capital area, such as the nightclub concept *Idja* (“Night”). The youth activists initially experienced a period of conflict with older leaders of the established NGO-parties. Informants related experiences that they were not given an equal voice in planning cultural events, but instead were treated as a “resource pool” for the projects of elder activists (Berg-Nordlie 2018a). Inter-generational relations have since become less conflictual than they initially were.

Finally, the parent segment in Oslo and its surrounding areas have organized into the “Oslo and surrounding areas’ Sámi parents’ network” (*Oslo og omegn samisk foreldrenettverk – Oslo ja biras Sámi váhnenfierpmádat*, 2019). The organization was established partly to work for cultural arenas for young Sámi, but the concrete reason for its establishment was dissatisfaction with Oslo’s Sámi school and kindergarten services and the lack of involvement of parents in decision-making concerning the school services in the future. The organizational structure was modelled after an existing Sámi parents’ networks in a more rural part of Norway – the North Nordland/South Troms Sámi Parent Network.<sup>10</sup>

## Urban Indigenous “Culture Houses” in Norway and the Language Center Model General Tendencies

In this section, we look specifically at the urban Indigenous space type *Sámi Culture Houses* in five different urban areas. First, however, we will explain two concepts that often surface in

discussions about Sámi culture houses — “Sámi Houses” and “Sámi Language Centres” — and discuss some general tendencies that we have observed in regard to the urban Indigenous culture houses in the Norwegian cities and towns where we have performed our field work.

When discussing “Sámi Houses” with informants, a concrete institution that is often referred to by them was “the Oslo Sámi House”, an institution in Norway’s capital that hosts and organizes cultural and political activities and is owned jointly by several Sámi organizations and institutions. This institution was, again, partly inspired by the House of Greenland in Copenhagen. As a more general concept in discourse, a “Sámi House” refers to a physical institution that works on a regular basis with Sámi culture and serves as a nodal point for members of the local Sámi community regardless of their individual political affiliation and subgroup membership—in other words, it is simply synonymous with what we call a “Sámi culture house”.

There’s something special about having somewhere to meet. To use the language. To work with handicrafts or have different events, for example, in connection with the Sámi National Day, February 6<sup>th</sup>. (Ellinor M. Jåma, politician, South Sápmi – Adresseavisa Fredag 8 September 2017)

As for a “Sámi language center”, this is not necessarily something else than a “Sámi House”, but rather just a slightly more concrete idea about how a Sámi culture house should be organized and what it should do. The origin of the “language center model” among the Sámi of Norway can be traced back to 1992, when the Sámi Language Administrative Area was established in Norway. A seminar on language revitalization was held by the Sámi University of Applied Sciences in the village of Kautokeino. The College at the time had a cooperation with Wales, and Sámi language revitalization activists had travelled there to observe measures taken to revitalize the Welsh language. The idea of importing the Welsh language center model to Sápmi was discussed, and in 1994 two rural, coastal municipalities in the Language

Administrative Area became Sámi testing grounds for the model: Porsángu (*Porsanger*) and Gáivuotna (*Kåfjord*) (Antonsen and Johansen 2013, Nygaard et al. 2012, regjeringen.no 2018). These centers offered teaching in the language and other aspects of Sámi culture.

The model was eventually used elsewhere, and in 2001 the Sámediggi established a system for regular funding of institutions that it recognized as “language centers”. These are institutions that, based on local needs and local dialects, work for the visibility, strengthening, and development of Sámi language (Antonsen and Broch Johansen 2013, Nygaard et al. 2013, sametinget.no 2020b, Welsh Government 2020). “Language centers” are increasingly seen as a desirable component of urban Sámi culture houses, among other reasons because of the stable funding that the model guarantees.

The governance of these urban indigenous spaces can be analyzed as a form of network governance, where actors from different sectors—state (f. ex. municipal, Sámediggi), Indigenous civil society, and even private business—come together (Winsvold et al. 2009, Berg-Nordlie 2017). How the ownership- and governance structures are organized from place to place, varies in accordance with local specifics, with important determining factors seemingly being the conflict- and cooperation-structure of local Sámi civil society, and the extent to which state-based actors are willing to involve themselves.

Earlier in this chapter, we mentioned that municipal bureaucracies and politics can produce Indigenous invisibility. Urban municipalities have often been less than eager when it comes to supplying the indigenous population with targeted services, although there is significant local variation in this regard (Berg-Nordlie 2018). However, a general tendency during the current Millennium is that urban municipalities in Norway commit more to Indigenous-oriented services, such as getting involved in the type of urban indigenous governance described here. Notably, an increasing number of urban municipalities have also signed cooperation agreements or joint declarations with the Sámediggi. These documents are

different from case to case, but tend to detail some points of agreement, set procedures, and establish some focal points for urban Indigenous policy. Agreements have been signed between the Sámediggi in Tromsø (2013), Bodø (2015), and Alta (2019), and a joint declaration was signed with Oslo in 2016 (sametinget.no 2020a).

A pertinent issue in regard to state-based actors' involvement in urban Indigenous governance is how to guarantee Indigenous control, or even significant influence when majority-dominated institutions become involved. As we shall see below, the issue of too weak Sámi influence has been raised in regard to some urban Indigenous projects, but generally the Norwegian state-Sámi civil society balance is not among the most prominent points of contention when it comes to urban Indigenous governance in Norway.

In the case of Tromsø, we shall delve into an example of local majority-based resistance to the establishment of urban Indigenous spaces. Earlier in this chapter we have explored some explanations for such resistance, namely the legacy of anti-Sámi sentiments stemming from assimilation policy-era racism and the internalization of antipathy to visible Sáminess by “passing” individuals and their descendants. There are many other explanatory factors in addition to these. One such explanation is the philosophy held by some that Sáminess and Norwegianness is at some level mutually exclusive, leading to the conclusion that increased Sáminess equals decreased Norwegianness, so that increased visible Sáminess is experienced as an attack on the identity of a place as Norwegian. Other reasons involve the notion that Sámi institution-building—or even just increased Sámi visibility—heralds increased Sámi political influence, coupled with fears that increased Sámi political influence must necessarily decrease the political influence of the majority nation.

The reader will note that in the below description of anti-Sámi rhetoric, urban Sámi are referred to as “guests” and “immigrants”, and the local non-Sámi population conversely constructed as more native than the Indigenous nation. This resembles what Patrick Wolfe

(2006) calls the settler colonial logic of elimination. While colonialism often is seen as an event, Wolfe claims that it must be seen as a structure which eliminates Indigenous people both in the past, present, and future—in order to legitimize the colonization of settler societies. The effect of the discourse on contemporary urban Sámi as “immigrants” is to legitimize desires to silence them. It is interestingly similar to a discursive pattern observed in America, by Nicholas Blomley (referenced by Smith 2019, 252):

- (1) Removal of the Indian people from urban space, which requires imagining them as in the past or in nature; and (2) emplacement of settler society, which makes the city into a white place.

Terms like “settler” or “white” are rarely used to describe the majority population in Sápmi. On most of the west coast of Sápmi, the historical presence of the Norwegians is also so old that direct comparison to settler colonialism in America is only applicable up to a certain point (see Chapter 1 and 2 for more on Sámi history). Nevertheless, the way of “talking the Indigenous people out of town” is strikingly similar: the historical reality of ancient, continuous Sámi presence in the urban area is discursively muted, and the fact that many of the “open” Sámi in today’s city have their roots from the city’s rural hinterlands or other parts of Sápmi, is used to portray the Indigenous population as belonging elsewhere, effectively leaving the city as a discursively white-painted “clean slate”, devoid of Sáminess.

Local intra-Sámi conflict dynamics are an important aspect both of the conditions for the organizational structure of urban Sámi culture houses and language centres, and the conditions for their operation. Some of these conflicts are connected to the fact that urban areas are meeting points for Sámi individuals from many different Sámi areas, with different subcultures, different colonial histories, and different positions within present-day political Sápmi. While this heterogeneity is also a potential strength for urban Sámi communities, it also means that distrust between Sámi groups and within Sámi groups can be played out on the urban arena and can disrupt the creation or effectiveness of urban Indigenous spaces. In



urban areas, different types of Sámi congregate who have different foundations for their Sámi identity, and occasionally they perceive themselves as having different interests regarding what services for urban Sámi should be given priority.

Intra-Sámi conflict over urban Indigenous spaces may also be fueled by what is known as “Sámi melancholia” (Dankertsen 2014): negative reactions that result from a feeling of *affinity* to the Sámi community, but combined with a feeling of *exclusion* from it, a sense of bitterness towards those who “have more” in terms of Sámi language and traditions. This is similar to what Jean Dennison (2018) analyzes as a series of entanglements of “the affects of empire” and (dis)trust in the Osage Nation in the United States, where power structures constituted through governmental policies in the past and present are kept in place by emotional disruptions that create suspicion and distrust within the group and limiting the space available for creating a common future. Dennison’s analysis of the distrust and divide between the Osage “haves” and “have-nots” resembles the conflicts and distrust between different Sámi groups. Our understanding of internal conflicts surrounding urban Indigenous spaces may also be helped by Christina Åhrén’s (2008, 184) analysis that following the assimilation policies of the past, there exists a mechanism in Sámi society in which some people from non-assimilated families may exhibit intolerance towards those who chose to hide their Sámi background, and their descendants. Such families may be viewed by some as having been disloyal to Sámi society during hard times, and they may face negative reactions if they are seen as being inadequately humble when returning to the Sámi ‘scene’—for example by attempting to redefine Sáminess, decentre certain elements of Sáminess and promote other elements, alter parts of the traditional culture etc (see also Chapter 3). Åhrén argues that this behavior can be analyzed as a way of trying to “save” the Sámi culture: those responding negatively to Sámi who “centre” other aspects of Sáminess than they themselves

do, can be interpreted as attempting to enforce what they see as necessary symbolic boundaries between the Sámi and the non-Sámi.

Conflicts between those who are considered to be at the “centre” of Sáminess and those who are considered, or consider themselves, to be in the “periphery” of it, may be particularly “hot” because both sides see themselves as the underdog, the one defending the weak party. Both sides consider themselves as having a moral duty to stand their ground strongly against the representative of a repressive authority structure. From two different perspectives, the same chain of events could be seen as follows: Version One: Minority language-practitioners who hail from communities that weathered the onslaught of assimilation, are now defending the survival of the language against majority-language users that hail from the families who “gave in” and allowed themselves to be Norwegianized. Version Two: Cultural “have-nots” are trying to reclaim what is theirs after the trauma of assimilation but are facing resistance from an “elite” of people who are lucky enough to hail from areas that escaped the onslaught and are now in possession of a cultural wealth that they lack.

A final aspect of the culture houses and language centres described here, that the reader should note, is the relationship between rural centres and urban centres in Sámi society. Although the urban-rural divide is generally not considered any major political fault line in Sámi civil society and politics, we may observe some interesting urban-rural dynamics at play when it comes to some of the institutions described here.

#### [Alta \(Áltá\)](#)

In 2006, Alta became the first urban area to establish a Sámi language center. The previously established centers in rural areas had exhibited a wide range of organizational models, where some were integrated in the municipal administrative structures (Kåfjord, Porsanger, and Nesseby/Unjárga), while others had a mix of state-based actors, NGO representatives and

private individuals (in Tysfjord/Divtasvuodna, the Stuornjárga district, Tana/Deatnu, and Lakselvbukt/Moskavuotna in the rural outskirts of Tromsø) (Nygaard et al. 2012). The Alta language center introduced yet another organization form, which grew out of local Indigenous governance patterns. It essentially became the second “leg” of an already existing urban culture house structure. In the early 2000s, the NSR chapter in Alta had responded to an increased demand for services to the Sámi population by reorganizing and expanding its activities: In 2005, they set up a stock company to run a private kindergarten and to own the kindergarten building, which was also to serve as an arena for Sámi cultural activities. This stock company was named Álttá Siida—a very old word for a very modern organization form: the *siida* is a traditional Sámi political unit in which a community of people jointly owns and administers a set of resources. Álttá Siida’s statutes specified that Alta NSR should own 67% of the stocks. Others were invited to buy the rest, but none showed interest in being minority owners. The Alta Sámi Language Center became the structure that was to manage non-kindergarten cultural activities in the Siida building. Like the statutes of the Siida itself, the statutes of the Language Center specified that the local NSR chapter should own 67% of stocks. In this case though, Alta municipality owned the remaining stocks. This organizational model committed the urban municipality to the language center while simultaneously anchoring the language center firmly in the major local Sámi NGO.

However, this organizational model also cultivated a further sense of exclusion among some local non-NSR Sámi. In addition, five years into its existence, the Alta Language Center was subject to a much-publicized conflict, which highlighted different ideas about what types of Sáminess should be given priority by urban Sámi institutions. When the Center began to organize a weekly gathering for non-Sámi speaking Sámi children, this provoked negative reactions from some who felt that such activities were unfitting at the Language Center. Those in favor of the children’s gatherings argued that they constituted a space where non-Sámi-

speaking urban Indigenous children could develop a sense of community and become safer in their identity and culture, in addition to learning some Sámi words and phrases.

They just wouldn't accept that the kids in my group didn't know Sámi and weren't learning Sámi. [Anonymized] could suddenly come into the room and ask, "Doesn't anyone here speak Sámi"? That's horrible to hear for those children who hadn't had the opportunity to learn Sámi. Some were learning. Others didn't know the language at all. ("Kirsten", Alta 2016).

The gatherings were eventually discontinued. The Language Center's director did not seek a renewal of her position and was later a driving force in establishing the NGO *Gula* (see above). While this conflict resulted in the closing of a space for non-Sámi-speaking Sámi children, it needs to be underscored that the Language Center has also done work specifically oriented towards the interests of the local Coast Sámi population, for example, by documenting and publishing remnants of this population's largely lost Coast Sámi dialect.

#### Tromsø (Romsa)

A language center was established in Tromsø municipality before Alta, but their activities were focused on Lakselvbukt (*Moskavuotna*), a small village in the rural outskirts of Tromsø municipality. The municipality established the center in 1997, and it became a formal language center in 2004. In 2010, it was given the name *Gáisi*, which refers to a particular type of mountain that characterizes the topography of this part of Sápmi. This had from 2009 been the name of the Sámediggi electoral constituency that covers Tromsø and its surrounding municipalities. The Sámediggi requested that the center's governance structure should include a board with Sámi NGO representatives, and the municipality has since then set up such boards consisting of representatives from various Sámi organizations. Through this, two Sámi NGOs based in Lakselvbukt were given representation—Moskavuona NSR and Lakselvbukt Sameforening, a chapter of the SFF, a Sámi organization that split from the SLF in 1993 (Nygaard et al. 2012, sff.no 2020). There were also two open places on the board that were

filled by Sámi activists settled in the municipality's urban area: representatives of the Tromsø NSR and the Tromsø Sámi Parents' Network.

According to Nygaard et al. (2012), Gáisi had a challenging job covering the geographically large municipality and addressing the needs of rather different Sámi communities. The evaluation also noted recruitment problems: it appeared challenging to attract qualified personnel who wanted to live in rural Lakselvbukt. In 2009, a person living in the city center became Gáisi's director. Following this, the institution was administered from offices in the town hall. In 2016, Gáisi's other employee—the language worker—moved to the city (Nygaard et al. 2012). Following this, the language worker position was made vacant, and when the center attempted to fill the vacancy, they specified that the workplace was optional—rural Lakselvbukt or urban Tromsø. Simultaneously, the NGO structures in the rural areas began to experience problems participating in the management of the language center. When Gáisi's board was to be renewed, Lakselvbukt SFF did not submit a candidate. An informal arrangement was made in which a local handicraft association in Lakselvbukt instead sent a representative. The Lakselvbukt NSR chapter had formally ceased to exist because the necessary documents had not been submitted to the central organization. The city-based Sámi Student Union eventually filled that vacancy. Both management and most of the NGO representation in the board had now been *de facto* centralized to Tromsø, although the center continued to organize activities in both localities.

In 2018, the office of the Tromsø-stationed language centre worker was temporarily moved from the town hall to Tromsø's "old town" area, more precisely to a house situated on a small mound called Skansen ("The Fortification"), which is seen as an important historical landmark in Tromsø. Skansen is the remains of a medieval fortification that may be connected to the historical establishment of a Norwegian fortress and church on the island where Tromsø now is situated, to guard Norwegian interests in what were at the time contested lands. The

buildings still standing on the mound are also very old, dating from the establishment of Tromsø city during the late 1700s (see Chapter 2 for more on urban history in the north). Local media framed this temporary move as the language center being “moved to Skansen,” and referred to the Skansen house as having now become a local Sámi culture center “while waiting for a Sámi House” (nordlys.no 2018).

The issue of a Sámi culture house in Tromsø had been discussed for a long time, but in 2018 these discussions took a new turn: A company had been commissioned to work out a proposal by the Sámediggi, Tromsø municipality, Troms county, and a regional bank. This company now proposed not just a Sámi House, but a much larger “Arctic Indigenous Center” with a target audience that was expanded from the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous population to also be heavily business and tourist oriented. Local Sámi civil society expressed skepticism towards the scale, the target audience described in the proposal, and the lack of Sámi NGO involvement in the early stages of the project. This process was entirely separate from the relocation of the language center’s office to Skansen, but local media nevertheless connected the two issues, and hence made it easy to get the impression that Tromsø’s oldest building had now been turned into a Sámi culture house. This caused controversy. To understand why, some context is needed about the politicization of Indigenousness in Tromsø.

Some years earlier, in 2011, a conflict emerged over the project to include Tromsø’s in the Sámi Language Administrative Area (see Chapter 1 for more on this administrative area). The majority of the municipal board’s members voted to apply for inclusion, and it hence appeared as if Tromsø was on its way to become the first urban municipality ever to join the Language Area. This was an election year, however, and an alliance of three right-wing parties (the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, and the Left Party)<sup>11</sup> counter-mobilized to withdraw the application if their coalition won the upcoming vote. The ensuing political conflict, which has been discussed in detail by Pedersen and Nyseth (2015, 290), polarized the

population around the “issue” of the city’s Sámi population. Sámi citizens of Tromsø reported increased harassment, and the image of Tromsø as a city that is particularly welcoming towards the Sámi population, received lasting damage (Lian and Doksæter 2016, Olsen 2011). The right-wing coalition eventually won the election, and upon taking over the leadership of the municipality withdrew Tromsø’s application to enter the Language Area. Instead of pioneering the inclusion of urban areas in the Language Area, the experience of Tromsø has probably contributed to the fact that no other city has since applied.

The 2011 Tromsø Conflict established in the public debate a discourse describing the Sámi presence in Tromsø city as new, invasive, and unwanted. What happened in 2018 was that the issue of the “Sámi House at Skansen” became embedded in this anti-Sámi discourse. In 2018, senior Conservative Party members and other political activists – including the organization EDL, “Ethnic Democratic Equality”,<sup>12</sup> an NGO founded on the coast of Finnmark to protest the Norwegian state’s measures to protect Sámi culture and language (Nyyssönen 2015, Berg-Nordlie and Schou 2011)—began a media campaign where they accused Tromsø’s municipal authorities of having “given to the Sámi” the symbolically important Skansen area, and claimed that this was against the interests of the ethnic majority (Sirkka 2017, West and Andersen 2017). The rhetoric utilized against the urban language center included utilization of words like “guests” and “immigrants” about Tromsø’s Sámi population. This discourse was partly based on the observation that many—although far from all—of the people who openly self-identify as Sámi in Tromsø, hail from other parts of Norway and Sápmi, but it also included nods to a discourse of historical revisionism that - (against all research-based knowledge) portrays Norway’s Indigenous population as immigrants from the east. The rhetoric also made use of the Sámediggi Electoral Registry to portray the urban Sámi population as relatively small, disregarding the fact that the SER is not by any means a complete registry of all the Sámi (see Chapter 2).

There are only about 1,400 registered Sámi in Tromsø with its about 75,000 inhabitants. The Sámi—most of them immigrants—speak Norwegian fluently and are Norwegian citizens. They have the same rights as all other citizens of Tromsø. But this is not enough for them, they want Tromsø's identity to change. They want to put their Sámi mark on the city and its surroundings, and now they want 20 Sámi [road]signs put up. (Bodil Ridderseth Larsen, Tromsø Conservative Party's Senior Branch, itromso.no 2018).

During the fall of 2018, the local newspaper *iTromsø* also ran a series of articles that effectively portrayed the language center as having been “stolen” from the rural Lakselvbukt. This was based on the above-mentioned *de facto* concentration of staff and NGO involvement in the Language Centre to the urban part of the municipality. Right-wing politicians utilized the opportunity to suggest that the center should be “shut down or moved back”, i.e. from urban Skansen to rural Lakselvbukt (Johansen 2018, Pedersen 2018, Sagat.no 2018). At the moment of writing, the center is still temporarily housed at Skansen, and still organizes activities both in Lakselvbukt and Tromsø. As for the actual project for a “Sámi House” in Tromsø, the municipal board voted in favor of such an institution during the fall of 2019, on the condition that the Sámediggi and the county also provided financing for it.

#### Bodø (Bådåddjo / Buvdda)

In the year of the language center controversy in Tromsø, Bodø began to establish its own Sámi language center (nrk.no 2018).<sup>13</sup> This center is currently in a three-year establishment phase, during which it is to gradually scale up its activities and eventually become a formal language center. The Bodø Sámi Language Center was established as part of the municipal structures, but financed by both the municipality and the Sámediggi. Its offices were put in the new and central multi-functional culture house “Stormen” that hosts a library, café, event venues, etc. The increasing visibility of Sámi culture has been subject to controversy also in Bodø, but not to the same extent as in Tromsø. While writing this book, Bodø also was named



Cultural Capital of Europe for 2024, and this has boosted the focus on Sámi culture in the city even further.

While Bodø's Language Center has not faced the same onslaught from critics that the center in Tromsø has had to endure, there have been some internal Sámi disagreements—with aspects of both internal minority dynamics and urban-rural conflicts. The Bodø area is variously claimed to be part of the Lule Sámi area, the Pite Sámi area, or both. The cooperation climate between representatives of these groups has not always been optimal. The Pite Sámi are a much smaller community whose near-extinct language until recently had no official orthography, with the effect that it was impossible to give Pite Sámi toponyms official status, and Lule Sámi orthography was often used to represent Pite Sámi place names (Andersen 2019). Representatives of the Pite Sámi have earlier argued that the Lule Sámi are given priority over them, among others, in the choice of the town's Sámi name—Lule Sámi Bådåddjo, but not Pite Sámi Buvdda.

The Pite Sámi community has its own culture center – Duoddara Ráfe (“Peace of the Plains”)—in Beiarn (*Bájjdár*), a rural municipality near Bodø, while Lule Sámi tends to be the language in focus in the urban center of the district. One reason for this is that the urban area is on the Lule Sámi side of the fiord that is often seen as dividing the two language areas, but it is also because many Sámi have moved to Bodø from rural Lule Sámi cultural strongholds farther north in Nordland County (Andersen and Paulsen 2017). The linguistic orientation of the Bodø language center was discussed in light of this, and it was concluded that while it was to focus on the Lule Sámi language, it should also “include” the other languages historically present in Nordland County – Pite Sámi, South Sámi, and North Sámi.

#### Trondheim (Tråante)

In Trondheim, a “Sámi House”, language center, or similar Sámi culture institution was considered to be far down on the priority list by activists interviewed prior to 2017, for several

reasons. Chiefly, the activist *milieu* gave priority to the organizing of a centennial celebration —*Tråante2017*— of the first border-transcending Sámi congress, which was held in Trondheim in 1917. The one-year-long festival would fill 2017 with Sámi events centered on this main city of Norwegian South Sápmi.

The celebration was an event of importance for the entire border-transcending Sámi people, but also very important for the Sámi of Trondheim specifically. Some activists described *Tråante2017* as a symbolic reclaiming of the city, in the sense that it served to educate the urban population that Trondheim is also a part of Sápmi, and a historically important part, at that. Another reason for the noted absence of desires for a Sámi culture house was that the Sverresborg Folk Museum at the time had some of the functions associated with such an institution – it served as a non-politicized nodal point for Sámi activists and as a venue for Sámi events.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, following the *Traånte 2017* celebration, the establishment of a local “Sámi House” was suggested by a politician from the South Sámi Sámediggi party *Áarjel-Saemiej Gielh* (Adressa.no 2017). Through a long process involving among others the municipality, and the umbrella organization *Saemien Sijjie*, a municipally owned house was located and a process began to convert it into a Sámi House for Trondheim (Sagat.no 2020). As for a language centre, there already exists a center with such responsibilities for the South Sámi—*Aajege*. This institution was established in 2005 in the small, eastern village of Røros. However, it has no responsibilities for the Trondheim area (Aajege.no 2020).

#### Oslo (Oslove)

The Oslo Sámi House was established in 2004 as a venue and organizer for Sámi cultural events, which also had office space for the Sámi NGOs/parties that owned it (Samiskhus.no 2020a). While inspired by Copenhagen’s Greenland House, the Oslo Sámi House was not provided with the same high status and large facilities but has instead rented various localities

in central parts of Oslo. The first incarnation of the House was a foundation co-owned by the three traditional Sámi political rivals in Oslo—the local NSR chapter, the Sámi People’s Party, and the Sámi Social Democratic Forum. Through the House, these three rivaling actors created a neutral Sámi space of sorts. While the House did provide a common arena and a common project, the disagreements and conflicts did not entirely subside, which one may expect because the NGOs’ doubling as political parties undeniably gives them competing interests at some level, even if all the organizations are oriented towards the same ultimate goal of working for the Sámi and their culture. In 2014, the organizational structure was remade completely, and the House now became a stock company in which 51% of stocks were held by the original owners, while 49% was in the hands of a new owner, the Sámediggi (Samiskhus.no 2020a).

Such direct involvement in a local institution is uncommon from the Sámediggi’s side. This unique aspect of Oslo’s urban Indigenous governance can be understood from several factors. First, the House in Oslo has strategic potential—it is not just a local culture house but can also be an institution that builds consciousness about the Sámi, and a positive impression of Sámi culture, in the capital of Norway. Second, there had been some public accusations against the Sámediggi of giving too little priority to the growing Oslo Sámi community. Third, Sámi media had reported critically about the management of the House’s economy. Finally—and this is the main reason given by several informants—the conflict level between the actors that owned the House was still high, and the Sámediggi was seen as a possible broker between the other owners (Aslaksen 2011, Berg-Nordlie 2018a).

Nevertheless, not all major players in Oslo’s Sámi community were incorporated into the new House structure. The municipal Sámi-oriented structures—the Sámi kindergarten and school structures—had no formal attachment to the House.<sup>15</sup> In addition, a new and vital Sámi NGO was established the year after the House was reorganized—Oslo’s Sámi youth

organization Oslove Noereh, which had no representation in the culture house's board. This lack of youth representation proved to be a weak point for the House's functionality as an organizational node for local Sámi civil society. According to activists in the youth organization, they were invited into projects at a stage where much had already been decided, and when their organization proposed projects to the Sámi House, they risked losing control over them because the board made important decisions without them. This initial rift between activists in the new, non-partisan youth organization and the "old firm" of parties that governed the Sámi House led to a period where the two actors organized events in relative isolation from each other. The youth organization eventually found an alternative partner—physically located next door to the Sámi House: *Riksscenen*, a folk music-oriented cultural institution partially owned by *Juiggiid searvi*, an NGO for practitioners of traditional Sámi music. Together with *Riksscenen*, Oslove Noereh launched the Sámi club concept *Idja* ("Night") (Berg-Nordlie 2018a, riksscenen.no 2020). The relationship between the youth organization and the culture house would go on to improve, but the youth organization remains without ownership or representation on the House board.

During the following years, the Sámi House secured improved financing from particularly the Sámediggi, but also the municipality, and became more visible and important in Oslo's Sámi cultural life. In 2017, the House employed a new manager in a 50% position, moved to a much larger locality in the downtown area, and expanded the scope of its activities. This made it easier for the House to realize more of its potential as a nodal point and an open arena for the urban Sámi population. During this time, different models for how the House should be further developed circulated in Oslo's Sámi community, and the language center model was brought up by informants when discussing the future of the House. In 2018, House activists and the Sámediggi started a project to—as in Bodø—build up

a Sámi Language Center at the Oslo Sámi House over a three-year period (samiskhus.no 2020b).

## Urban Indigenous Organizations and Institutions in Russian Sápmi

### Pre-Soviet and Soviet Sámi Organizing

When comparing Sámi organization history in Norway and Russia, it should be expected that significant differences will be revealed: these two states have had radically different historical trajectories that have also affected the histories of their Indigenous peoples. The Sámi living in the Russian Empire (e.g. in Finland and Russia) did not participate in the pioneering border-transcending organizational activity of the early 1900s, in practice this was limited to Norway and Sweden, which were part of a political union from 1814 to 1905 (see Chapter 2). There were also some notable differences between the Norwegian/Swedish and Russian/Finnish Sámi populations at this point in history: several people among the western Sámi had undergone education in urban areas, and there were Sámi who were active in the growing Labor movement – while in the Russian empire, such semi-urban or Labor-affiliated Sámi leaders did not appear. The Kola Peninsula, as with most of the other peripheral territories of the Russian Empire prior to the Revolution, was predominantly a rural agrarian region, and it was difficult for the Sámi there to access educational institutions.

That said, the Russian Sámi were indeed present in the urban life that Russian Sápmi had—they were firmly integrated into the area’s socio-economic dynamic through trade and as subjects of the legal and political systems. During the 1800s, there were also administrative structures that involved Sámi representation in the form of envoys annually sent by some of the Sámi communities to the Russian authorities, and particular mention often goes to the *sobbar* or Sámi assembly in the town of Kola, after which the current-day *Sám’ Sobbar* representation structure is named (Berg-Nordlie 2015a; Kalstad 2003, 49, 2009, 21–24; Kharuzin 1890; Ušakov 1997, 306–307, 436–437; Yefimenko 1878, 55–59). Furthermore, some Sámi were

stationed in or near urban areas through the military. It is in connection with the latter phenomenon that two Sámi reportedly took part in the storming of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg during the Russian Revolution (Kalstad 2009).

The years 1917–1921 were extremely tumultuous for the Russian Sámi, as indeed for people in Russia as a whole. Following the 1917 Revolution, the Kola peninsula was occupied by Allied forces and not reclaimed by Russian authorities until several years had passed (Lokhanov 2013). After reclamation, the new Soviet Indigenous policy began to be implemented in eastern Sápmi. This policy was initially rather progressive in terms of Indigenous self-determination: native minority areas were to be given limited autonomy, and it was considered a policy goal to cultivate “cadres” (administrators and politicians) from the Indigenous population. Education was seen as a key element of this (Berg-Nordlie 2015c; Bowring 2008, 13–18; Myklebost and Niemi 2015; Kalte 2003, 21, 23–27; Krjažkov 2010, 52–55; Shapovalov 2004–2005, 449). In 1925–1926 the *rabfak* was initiated – a preparatory faculty to train working cadres among Indigenous peoples of the North at the Herzen University of Leningrad (formerly – and today again - St. Petersburg) (Rantala 2006: 24). Later, in 1930, this faculty developed into a separate Northern Department of the Institute of the Peoples of the North (Kiselev and Kiseleva 1979: 79, Khomich 1999: 76). Sámi were also given the opportunity to study in this former capital of Russia, and many Sámi students went south to receive higher education and return to their community. This arrangement came to be important in cultivating the Russian Sámi population’s own urban political activists (Overland and Berg-Nordlie 2012).

Territorial autonomy never did materialize for the Russian Sámi. Micro-level rural councils (*tuzemnye sovety*) were set up for a time, and there were also suggestions on the table for two Sámi autonomous districts that would have covered most of the peninsula, but this never happened. In the end, only Lovozero District in the east was given the symbolic status as

“national” despite the main settlement there being predominantly one of the Komi people (see Chapter 2) and not of the Sámi. Effectively, Russian Sámi policy was “ruralized” and also partially relegated to the east of the peninsula – only eastern, rural parts of Russian Sápmi were identified as areas to have Sámi political structures or symbolic Sámi status, and no “national” status was given to the western areas between the “railway belt” and the border to Norway and Finland. Security concerns are likely to have been an important reason for not establishing a Sámi autonomy here (Berg-Nordlie 2015a). The main proponent of the autonomy was the ethnographer Vasilii K. Alymov, who was an envoy from the Indigenous policy field’s authorities in Moscow and was connected to a network of local Sámi who among other things were involved in the creation of Sámi schoolbooks. Alymov concretely represented the Committee of the North, which was established by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee in 1924 and existed until 1935 (Dasjtsjinskij 2006; GAMO 1928, P169-1- 2, 124-125; Kuznetsova 2006; Sorokazjerdjev 2006; Stepanenko 2003). A number of local Committees of the North were established in this period as a link between center and periphery and sought to involve the Indigenous population in the new state structures that worked with issues relating to them. A branch of this committee was based in Murmansk from 1927 to 1930 (GAMO 1928, P169-1-2, 45-46) and worked not just with the Sámi, but also with other local minorities characterized by rurality and traditional economic activities—including the Komi, a small group of Nenets who had come with the Komi, and the Pomors, who are descendants of early Russian colonists in Russian Sápmi. People in the network formed around the Murmansk branch of the Committee of the North were later charged with false accusations of treasonous activities. Many were incarcerated, put into the prison camp system, or, like Alymov, executed (Siegl and Riessler 2015, 17; Ogryzko 2010, 21). The initially promising Soviet policy was during the mid-1930s replaced by a harsher policy of forced collectivization and centralization.

The Stalin era collectivization was followed by the ravages of WW2, after which Murmansk City had to be more or less rebuilt in its entirety. In the 1950s came the “Amalgamation” policy that saw the Sámi resettled from their traditional villages to larger settlements. The Sámi of Russia thus experienced forced de-ruralization and ceased to be a predominantly rural and semi-nomadic people (see Chapter 2). After the Amalgamation, many resettled Sámi groups spent significant portions of their lives in centralized small towns and bigger cities. The village of Lovozero (*Lujávrr*) came to be a particularly important demographic and cultural center for the Sámi. Lovozero has since the Amalgamation been considered a cultural and demographic “capital” of the Russian Sámi. Members of the resettled Sámi groups were also present in other important urban areas such as Mončegorsk (*Mončētuntur*) and Apatity with their mining industries, and not least Murmansk City with its political-administrative centrality along with opportunities for work and education. Murmansk and Lovozero are within the traditional Kildin Sámi area, on the coast and inland, respectively, while Mončegorsk and Apatity are within the Akkala Sámi area. However, in the Russian Sámi context such a focus on subgroups and their distinctions is not as important as in the rest of Sápmi. Sámi in the Murmansk region generally do not identify themselves that much with their “subgroups”, at least not to the extent that this – as observed in Nordic Sápmi – becomes a source of political rivalries.

During the late decades of the Soviet Era (1950s–1980s), a Sámi cultural activist milieu emerged in Russia. Several of the leading figures had received higher education at Herzen University in St. Petersburg. Among these “cadres” from St. Petersburg were, for example, Nina Afanasijeva, Sergej Semjaškin, Vasilij Selivanov, Anastasija Mozolevskaja, Iraida Vinogradova, Roza Jakovleva, and Anastasia Khvorostukhina. The first major project these activists got involved in was language revitalization, which was a dire need on the Kola Peninsula where the Sámi languages were in a downward spiral and was a project that was not



seen by the Soviet authorities to be controversial enough to warrant negative attention (Overland and Berg-Nordlie 2012). As the Perestroika began in the 1990s, more explicitly political activities were allowed, and many of the language activists now became central in organizational efforts.

During the 1980s, Russian-Sámi activists made connections across the Iron Curtain to the Sámi of the Nordic Countries. There had also earlier been some Sámi contacts that transcended the geopolitical divide, for example, during the North Calotte Conventions in Murmansk City during 1966 and 1977 (Bones et al 2015: 458; Kiseljov and Kiseljova 1981: 192-4)—but now, the window for networking between Russian and Nordic Sámi became much more open. The educational opportunities in Leningrad had had the important effect of giving Russian Sámi women a specific advantage in the age of ethno-political organizing: as is not uncommon in minority movements, the early leaders and organizers had higher educations, and since the study programs that had been made available for the Sámi at Herten were subjects predominantly studied by women in Soviet culture, many of the early Sámi leaders were female. It was hence no coincidence that the first Iron Curtain-transcending organization was the Sámi women's organization Sáhráhkka (Hætta 2003: 48-50).

#### [Organizational Growth and Urban-Rural Tensions in Post-Soviet Russia](#)

The Association of the Kola Sámi (AKS) was established in 1989 during the final years of the USSR. The AKS was intended to unite the Sámi living in all the various cities, towns, and villages across Russian Sápmi. The foundational meeting was not held in the eastern Sámi demographic center of Lovozero, but in the regional political, economic, and transportation hub of Murmansk City. It was seen as necessary for the organization to be close to the authorities of the province in order to make it easier to affect policymaking of relevance for the Sámi, and for this reason Murmansk City was chosen for the AKS's headquarters rather than Lovozero.

In other towns and villages of Murmansk Region, the AKS instead opened local chapters (Overland and Berg-Nordlie 2012).

During the decade that followed, different internal conflicts sprang up within the AKS, one of which was a strong rural-urban conflict. Many Sámi were unhappy that the leadership was in Murmansk City while most Sámi lived in the rural center of Lovozero. Here we might see a mirror of the organizational history of the NSR in Norway, where discontent gradually grew forth against the centralization of the NGO to a major urban area outside a demographic “core area.” Unlike in Norway, however, the rural majority did not manage to claim control of the NGO. Instead, Russian Sámi civil society fractured into two organizations, namely the Murmansk-centered AKS and Lovozero-centered OOSMO (Public Organization of the Murmansk Region Sámi). While the positions and relationships of these two organizations have undergone many changes in the two decades that have followed, it has remained a feature of Russian Sámi civil society life that OOSMO has a stronghold in Lovozero while the AKS has a stronghold in Murmansk City (Overland and Berg-Nordlie 2012; Berg-Nordlie 2017). In 2007, OOSMO/AKS signed a cooperation agreement at a meeting in Murmansk, and the organizations were to work together to establish a “Russian Sámi Parliament” (*Kuéllnegknjoark Sám’ Sobbar* or *Saamskij parlament*), e.g. an organ analogous to the Nordic Sámediggi organs. This cooperation in practice faltered in 2010, as leadership in the AKS changed, and that organization became less supportive of the parliament project (Berg-Nordlie 2017, 2018c).

Certain reasons given by local informants for their support of the Sámi parliament project are interesting: in addition to the “obvious” reason of having a representative organ that could serve as the voice of the Russian Sámi, several of them emphasized that such an organ would unite the Sámi, who were now divided into different, often politicized, NGOs:

[such an institution] can unite us, all the organizations, the entire people ... Now there are all these councils and all these [NGOs] ... There's too little unity among us ("Vera," Russian Sámi activist, quoted in Berg-Nordlie 2015b).

This is akin to a phenomenon observed in Norway, namely a demand for more open Indigenous spaces and arenas where Sámi can network across the borders of NGOs that are specialized and politicized. Unlike in Norway, Russian Sámi civil society has not experienced partisanization, but definitely politicization and specialization around economic niches, settlement patterns, and political groupings.

During the current millennium, a special type of organization appeared in rural Russian Sápmi, the so-called *obščinas*, which are micro-organizations created with the aim of reintroducing and developing traditional small-scale private Sámi reindeer herding and other traditional Sámi economic activities. Sámi reindeer herding had been forcibly collectivized, centralized, and put under non-Sámi administration during the Soviet era, and the resulting large reindeer-herding companies were privatized after the fall of the USSR. The first Russian Sámi *obshchina* — "Kildin" — was established in 2002 and was in fact headquartered in Murmansk City (Yakovleva et al 2004: 5; Kalstad 2009; Vladimirova 2006). Later, however, authorities in Murmansk Region came to follow a policy of only allowing the registration of such organizations in the districts that are on the List of Places of Traditional Inhabitation and Traditional Economic Activities (see Chapter 1, Berg-Nordlie 2015b). This effectively excluded urban Sámi from forming such organizations, which in turn became a big problem when provincial authorities later implemented reforms that had the effect of increasingly basing the state's Sámi representation structures on the *obščinas*. The number of *obščinas* in Murmansk Region has grown significantly since 2002, and today about 40 such organizations are registered in the province (Gov-Murman.ru 2020a).

In 2007, another type of organization was established in Russian Sápmi – “National Cultural Autonomies” (NCAs). This type of organization, which is regulated by a separate federal law, has high symbolic status in Russia and can receive state funding to perform its services. Its activities are not territorially bound to one particular municipality, but can be distributed to all members of an ethnic group regardless of their place of residence, political views, or other factors, i.e. it is a type of organization that is meant to encompass all members of an ethnic group and to engage in culture promotion rather than politics. NCAs are mainly used by immigrant minorities in Russia as a way to organize the diaspora community and to receive funding that can be used to maintain and promote the ethnic minority culture (Osipov 2010, Berg-Nordlie 2015a; Berg-Nordlie and Tkach 2016). It is uncommon for Indigenous peoples to use this organization form, but the Russian Sámi have done so.

For the Russian Sámi, the NCAs have become a distinctly urban, or at least small-town, form of ethnic organizing. When Sámi NCAs were established in Mončegorsk, Apatity, and Revda, this was partly an answer to the emergence of *obščinas* on top of other types of organized Sámi spaces that were available for Sámi in more rural areas, particularly the large rural district of Lovozero. As stated by one member of the Mončegorsk NCA:

[a National Cultural Autonomy]...works well here, where there are few Sámi, but in Lovozero there are organizations, sovkhoses,<sup>16</sup> they are living compactly ... Here we are spread among many others. This is our way of uniting. (“Vadim”, 2009, quoted in Berg-Nordlie 2015b)

The NCAs were also explicitly intended to overcome the divisions created by Russian Sámi NGO specialization and politicization and to create more open Sámi spaces. The first NCA sprang out of a joint effort of OOSMO and one AKS chapter (Yona AKS in Kovdor), a project that was initially intended to lay the foundations for a Russian Sámediggi, but which eventually shifted over to focus on implementing the NCA model known from elsewhere in Russia (Berg-Nordlie 2015b). When the Mončegorsk NCA was established at a conference in

Lovozero, the local newspaper Lovozerskaja Pravda underscored the “openness” of the model—that this was a space for “all Sámi, be they in OOSMO or AKS” (Lovozerskaja Pravda 2007).

In addition to AKS/OOSMO, the *obščinas*, and the NCAs, some other organizations in Russian Sápmi should be mentioned before we move on to looking at urban Sámi cultural institutions in Russia. The *duodji* (Sámi handicraft) organization *Čepes Sámi* has been active since the 1990s and is located in Lovozero village. During the organizational “boom” among the Russian Sámi following the 1998 founding of OOSMO, several other organizations have emerged that are neither connected to the two would-be “big-tent” NGOs nor are or classified as NCAs or *obščinas*, such as the Murmansk-based Ecological Sami NGO “Sami Fund of Nature” (Moroshka.ucoz.ru 2020), the Mončegorsk-based NGO “Sámi Fund for Heritage and Development” which is connected to the movement for a Russian Sámediggi (Berg-Nordlie 2017, 2018c), and last but not least the first successful establishment of a Russian Sámi youth organization — *Sám’ Nuraš* (“Sámi Youth”, established 2009).<sup>17</sup>

The establishment of the youth organization was initiated by urban Sámi youth of families that had been forcibly resettled from their villages during the 1960s, many of them students, and all of them at the time living in Murmansk City. The headquarters of the organization were based in Murmansk City, but from the moment of its establishment, *Sám’ Nuraš* still had a status as an all-regional NGO. The organization worked systematically to expand its activities to reach and involve Sámi youth from rural areas, and to create a network of Sámi youth that spanned the peninsula. Like the AKS and OOSMO, its activities took place both in urban and rural areas. After a period where the leaders came from other parts of Russian Sápmi, *Sám’ Nuraš* reverted to being headquartered in Murmansk City, while still implementing activities in other parts of Russian Sápmi, often through cooperation with other Sámi NGOs that have a more established presence in rural and small-town Russian Sápmi.

## Urban Sámi Culture Centers in Russia—Governance and Openness

In the Norwegian-Sápmi part of this chapter we focused on distinct institutions in individual urban areas. In Russia, the situation is somewhat different, as there are generally no Sámi cultural centers in urban areas.

Lovozero village does have a comparable “culture house”—the National Cultural Center (*Nacional’nyj kul’turnyj centr*). This is a building in the center of town that serves as a venue and organizer for important cultural events. It even has an architectural expression inspired by Sámi culture, or at least inspired by the general Russian impression of the building traditions of the “small peoples of the North”. Lovozero is the main village that the Sámi were forcibly moved to, and as such it is definitely part of the Russian Sámi urbanization history because it played a key part in the population’s forced de-ruralization. Also, it is one of the larger compact settlements of Russian Sámi, and as such is more characterized by urbanity than many other parts of rural Russian Sápmi. Nevertheless, we do not consider Lovozero to be comparable to urban centers such as Tromsø or Alta in Norway, but rather to the larger Sámi villages such as Kautokeino or Karasjok.

Along the small towns of the “railway belt” we find a type of institution that has potential to be more similar to the urban Sámi culture houses of Norway: namely the above-mentioned NCAs. The Revda NCA did not have much activity and eventually closed down, but the NCA of the twin city Apatity-Kirovsk has been more active, and the Mončegorsk NCA shows particular comparative potential with Norwegian Sámi culture houses. This NCA has a physical space provided by the municipality, which constitutes their offices and a venue for cultural activities. The venue contains a small public museum to showcase Sámi culture, which among others is visited by children of pre-schools and schools, along with adult residents of the town. This activity bears some resemblance to a project run by Oslo municipality and Oslo

Sámi House in which school children visit the Sámi House to learn about Sámi culture and history and the current situation of the Sámi.

It is not an uncommon practice for Russian local authorities to provide NCAs with such localities and support (Berg-Nordlie and Tkach 2016). The NCA organization form may thus be well suited for the purpose of urban Indigenous culture houses by virtue of being a form of organization that Russian authorities are familiar with and have an established tradition of supporting. NCAs in Russian Sápmi have received support from municipal structures, the All-Russian Public Foundation "National Welfare Fund", and the regional and federal fund of the Northern Peoples' Center (more on this institution below). They have also received financing from abroad for their cultural activities, such as the Sámi Council's Culture Committee and the Danish NGO "Infonor."

NCAs have democratic membership structures that allow for Indigenous empowerment. In the specific Russian Sámi context, the NCAs have the advantage of transcending the barriers between the politicized main NGOs—the AKS and OOSMO. Thus, the NCAs have the potential to be particularly open urban Indigenous spaces under the democratic control of a broad spectrum of local Sámi. Nevertheless, NCAs are rarely used by Indigenous peoples, and the choice of using this organizational form, associated as it is with *priježie* (immigrant) peoples, was also criticized by one informant as being unfitting for an Indigenous people such as the Sámi. The NCAs are also cultural organizations rather than political ones, which limits their potential to serve as a political voice for urban Sámi. Still, the NCAs are involved in ecologically oriented activities, for example, by running the government-funded project "Sejdjavr" ("Holy Lake") that aims at preserving the ecological balance of the Kola Peninsula (Danilov 2010; Kremlin.ru 2009).

Murmansk City, the largest urban area in Sápmi, is a place where Sámi culture is not particularly visible, and the urban Indigenous socio-political infrastructure includes fewer Sámi

institutions and services to the Sámi population than do many smaller cities and towns in the West. In 2004, however, an institution was established in the city that has come to have a significant impact on Sámi cultural and political life not just in the city, but also in Murmansk Region as a whole. After the fall of the USSR there had been a prolonged period of institutional instability in Murmansk Region's official structures for Indigenous policy, but the institution that was established in 2004—the “Center for Native, Small-Numbered Peoples of the North” (*Centr korennykh maločislennykh narodov Severa*), later renamed “Center for Northern Peoples” (*Centr narodov Severa*)—proved to have some staying power. Despite the name change, the center still seems mainly oriented towards the Indigenous people (“native, small-numbered people” in Russian parlance—see Chapter 1) of the region, the Sámi, although as we shall see below it does not exclusively limit its activities to Sámi affairs (Berg-Nordlie 2017; Vinogradova 2005, 3; Gov-murman.ru 2020b).

The Northern Peoples' Center is a state regional budgetary institution (*gosudarstvennoje oblastnoje bjudžetnoje uchreždenie* or GOBU). It is an example of a type of institution that Russia has many of, namely institutions (*uchreždenija*) that are policy-implementing and are owned by state-based actors, such as in this case the provincial authorities, but also have some degree of autonomy in their actions. This type of institution also has a role in ethno-politics in other parts of Russia for non-Indigenous peoples, where such institutions include elements such as providing offices for the government-employed experts and coordinators of urban multi-ethnic affairs who implement ethnic policy and attempt to coordinate with the representatives of ethnic minorities, providing offices or meeting spaces for ethnic minority organizations, and providing venues for ethnic minority culture events. The existence of such institutions in ethno-politics constitutes part of the Russian network governance trend where the state seeks a closer relationship with parts of civil society that do not challenge the regime, and new public management-like trends that involve creating specialized institutions that operate between



elected officials and constituencies (Aasland et al 2016: 153-4; Berg-Nordlie and Tkach 2016: 182-3; Berg-Nordlie and Bolshakov 2018).

The Northern Peoples' Center, or "the GOBU" as it is often referred to in Russian Sámi contexts (Konstantinov 2015: 237-238) is exactly the type of organization described above, only for an Indigenous people. It is a combination of a provincial administrative structure and a "culture house" that provides venues, funding, and employed personnel. In contrast to many other such state-based "culture houses" in Russia, and also in contrast to the urban Sámi culture houses seen in Norway, the GOBU's scope of activities is not just limited to one city, but to the entirety of Murmansk Region. Another difference between the urban Sámi culture houses of Norway and the GOBU is that the GOBU's activities are not limited to Sámi affairs. It has tended to consider its target population to also encompass the Komi population of Murmansk Region. The Komi people living on the Kola Peninsula are descended from migrants who came to Kola during the 1800s (Overland and Berg-Nordlie 2012), and they are as such not an Indigenous nation in this area. Their historical background is more comparable to the Kvens of northern Norway. The Komi are, in fact, not even considered part of the "native small-numbered people" category in their traditional homeland farther east in Russia, because they number more than 50,000 individuals (cf. Chapter 1). Nevertheless, Russian policy has sometimes tended to treat the Kola Komi as part of the same social category as the Kola Sámi, due to perceived cultural similarities (Mustonen and Mustonen 2011). The GOBU has treated the Komi as part of their responsibilities, and with the name change to "Northern Peoples' Center", the name of the institution no longer stood in the way of this. A change in their strategic documents made in 2016 also shifted their priorities from Indigenous peoples ("small-numbered, native peoples") to "the intangible cultural heritage of the peoples of the Russian Federation in the field of traditional folk culture" (Gov-murman.ru 2016, 2019). This has been controversial among the Sámi because it communicates a disregard for the colonization-induced

challenges of the Sámi and the Indigenous status and rights they are granted in order to assist them in overcoming these challenges. Konstantinov (2015) also underscores this tendency of the administrative authorities not to treat the Indigenous Sámi any differently from other ethnic minorities in the area (Konstantinov 2015, 237-238).

Nevertheless, a substantial amount of the GOBU's activities were and are targeted at offering Sámi cultural services and organizing distinct Sámi cultural and social activities, both urban and rural (GOBU 2012). In terms of culture house-related activities, the center participates in organizing Sámi national holidays, cultural festivals, exhibitions of national arts, round tables, and seminars. The GOBU also provides support to Sámi NGOs by assisting in organizing and conducting meetings and seminars. In particular, the GOBU's services include the organization of such festivals as the Sámi Festival of the North (Lovozero), the Summer Bear Games Festival (Lovozero), the Autumn Sami Games Festival (Loparskaja, a village in the rural hinterland of Murmansk City), the Sámi Musical Festival (Olenegorsk), and Sámi National Day celebrations (Murmansk City and other places); various scientific-practical conferences and round tables covering acute Sámi issues; consultation meetings between authorities, *obščinas*, and other Sámi NGOs; and various Sámi cultural and art exhibitions.

The GOBU has networked closely with Sámi and other culturally-oriented institutions and organizations in the region—such as the National Cultural Center in Lovozero, the AKS, OOSMO, Sám' Nuraš, the Murmansk Regional Museum of Local Folklore, other culture houses in the region, and independent Sámi artists, intellectuals, and writers. The GOBU also deals with organizing and carrying out the publishing of educational, literary, and artistic works, documentary films, and art reflecting the historical, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic identity of the Kola Sámi people.

Should the GOBU be considered an “urban Indigenous culture house”? Our answer to that question is—yes, at least partially. At its core, though, the GOBU is something else

entirely: a cultural and administrative institution that operates throughout the entire province. Granted, some of the urban language centers in Norway also cover rural areas in the vicinity of the city, but there is a difference between operating in the urban hinterlands and covering the entirety of the country's part of Sápmi. Nevertheless, in the city where it is located, the GOBU does fulfill some of the roles that are taken by Sámi culture houses in Norway—it organizes cultural events, it constitutes a venue for cultural events, it is a hub for projects aimed at Sámi culture promotion, and it is a nodal point of orientation for local Indigenous civil society. In this context one should perhaps keep in mind that just like the “local culture house” in Murmansk City is actually more of a regional entity, “local Indigenous civil society” in Murmansk City is also very much regionally oriented. While Sámi activists in cities and towns of Norway tend to work a lot with the creation of urban Indigenous spaces in their own city—the focus of Murmansk-based activists is perhaps somewhat more often than in Norway on creating events that are of benefit to the entire Sámi community of the state, or even on creating events that take place elsewhere.

The Sámi culture houses described in the Norwegian cases are very different in terms of governance: the examples showcase total ownership by state-based actors (e.g. Gáisi Sámi Language Center in Tromsø), majority or total Indigenous non-state ownership (e.g. the Álttá Siida and Alta Language Center), and the involvement of state-based Indigenous representative structures on the owner side (e.g. the Oslo Sámi House). In Russia, we find the Mončegorsk NCA to constitute an Indigenous civil society-governed urban culture house, while the GOBU is a completely state-owned one. As the case of Tromsø shows, Indigenous civil society can be included in governance even if the institution as such is state owned. In the case of the GOBU, Sámi civil society involvement in its governance has been an issue of some contention and is an issue deeply connected to the “Sámi Parliament conflict” that characterized Russian Sámi politics particularly between 2007 and 2014. Much has been written about this conflict

elsewhere (Berg-Nordlie 2017, 2018c), but we will here discuss the connection between that conflict and the GOBU's first attempt at securing a link to Indigenous civil society.

It is part of the task of institutions such as the Northern Peoples' Center to attempt to coordinate with ethnic minority civil society in order for the state to more smoothly implement its minority policies by getting information and assistance from below. The minority organizations benefit by gaining access to institutions and persons with the power to help solve tasks of interest to their group (Aasland et al 2016, Berg-Nordlie and Tkach 2016). In 2006 the GOBU created the Coordination Council (*Koordinacionnyj Sovet*), a body that collected the leader or vice leader of every single Sámi NGO in Murmansk Region—at the time 18 smaller and larger organizations. This format emphasized the GOBU's character as a primarily regional and not a local urban entity. However, the council experienced an internal conflict that was at least partly rural-urban. The Coordination Council was groundbreaking in being the first state-based forum to unite Sámi representatives from all of Russian Sápmi. However, there was also much discontent with its structure because, unavoidably, people compared it to the Nordic Sámediggi—in Russian *Saamskie parlamenti* or “Sámi Parliaments”—and this comparison made the Coordination Council fall drastically short: instead of being a national-level organ, it was placed very low in the state's administrative hierarchy (an advisory body to a policy-implementing institution owned by a subunit of the provincial government), and it was unlike the Sámediggi not democratically elected. Another issue was that the system made each of the small individual *obščinas* as powerful as the two “big” organizations, the AKS and OOSMO. The AKS and OOSMO made an agreement to work for the establishment of a “Sámi Parliament” in Russia. The Mončegorsk NCA also involved itself in this work, despite this type of organization not normally being preoccupied with “politics”. There was more enthusiasm for the Coordination Council among some of the rural *obščina* activists—some of whom had also

earlier wanted an “*obščina* council” and saw aspects of this in the Center’s “user group” council (Berg-Nordlie 2015b; 2017).

After mounting internal disputes among Sámi activists, and between some Sámi activists and the authorities, the Center abolished the Coordination Council in 2008. This was the end of the system of an organized “user group” body for the GOBU, but just the beginning of the dispute over a Russian “Sámi Parliament”, which can be read about in more detail elsewhere (Berg-Nordlie 2017, 2018c). After 2009, the GOBU began to work closely with a new structure, the Council of Representatives of the Native, Small-Numbered Peoples under the Government of Murmansk Region, which was a body of people nominated by *obščinas* and selected by the governor. This model sidelined the pro- “Sámi Parliament” activists of OOSMO and the AKS. Because *obščinas* are rural-only, this also in principle excluded urban activists from direct participation in giving input to the GOBU. Political realities are complex, however, and it was not unheard of for *obščinas* to be represented by urban-settled people, and activists associated with other organizations—even key activists in the movement for a Russian “Sámi Parliament” —were in practice involved in planning and carrying out cultural activities with the GOBU (Berg-Nordlie 2015b). In 2014, the Murmansk authorities in practice established a new Sámi representation structure for the entire province, which was more open than the *obščina* council, while retaining the latter’s existence (Berg-Nordlie 2018c). Through this *Sám’ Sobbar* (“Sámi Assembly”), urban-settled Sámi individuals should again have more formal possibilities to influence provincial Sámi politics and to work with the GOBU.

## Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have gone through some key elements in the structure of Sámi civil society life in Norwegian and Russian urban areas, both historically and in the present, and on the governance of some urban Sámi “culture houses” in the two states. The reader may be left with a general impression of differences rather than similarities, which is to be expected when

comparing such different entities as a Nordic state and the Russian Federation. There are, nevertheless, some interesting similarities to point out.

First, the chapter has demonstrated that both in Norway and Russia *urbanization is a driving force in Sámi organizing*. As discussed in other chapters, the Sámi as a people tend to be associated with rural settlements and villages—somewhat incorrectly because the Sámi have always had a relation to the urban areas that developed in Sápmi, but due to historical processes of exclusion and immigration the Indigenous people have indeed come to be culturally stronger in rural areas. The history of Sámi organizing does, however, show that individuals who spent parts of their lives in urban areas for higher education and work have had key roles in building the modern Sámi political movements in their countries. We observe this for example in the early organizational pioneers of Nordic Sápmi, several of whom had lived for longer or shorter periods in urban areas; in the fact that Norway's strongest Sámi organization, the NSR, has its roots in the southern capital Oslo; in the vital role of St. Petersburg-educated Sámi in the birth of the modern Russian Sámi movement; and in the choice of the provincial capital for the headquarters of the first Russian Sámi NGO, the AKS. The skills and networks acquired by the Sámi in urban areas have obviously been of benefit for the Sámi people in their struggle for cultural survival, and the political centrality of certain key urban areas has made it necessary for the Sámi to focus on cultivating a presence there. The *milieus* that have formed among the Sámi living in cities have been important organizational innovators and channels of communication between the Indigenous nation and the majority's main institutions of power.

This leads us to our second point, that while there is an effective symbiosis between the urban and rural Sámi communities, there is also evidence of some *urban-rural Sámi conflicts* in both states. In Russia, the division within the AKS during the 1990s was partly caused by this, and when a schism eventually occurred, the new organization, OOSMO,

embodied (among other things) rural Sámi communities in opposition to the urban leadership of the AKS. Later, we observed aspects of urban-rural conflict as the provincial authorities of Murmansk Region began to construct Sámi representation structures that favored a rural organization type. In Norway, we can see traces of the urban-rural conflict in the process through which the organizational center of NSR was shifted from Oslo to Finnmark. We have also seen some indications of opposing interests when it comes to discussions over the location and services of language centers—institutions of key importance for Sámi language and culture revitalization in Norway. Sámi urban-rural conflicts are not high on the agenda of Sámi public discussions in Norway, and there appears to be a public consensus that urban and rural Sámi both have rights to cultural survival, and little discursive space for (or interest in) advocating the position that urban and rural Sámi may have conflicting interests. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are also strong social ties between urban and rural Sámi communities, and many urban Sámi have an identity that connects them to rural Sápmi, all of which strengthens the solidarity between city and countryside. Nevertheless, it should not be ignored that the cultural and socio-economic drive towards urbanization is also a direct threat to the survival of many rural Sámi communities, and to a certain extent this is a zero-sum game as the migration of Sámi from rural communities to urban communities redistributes demographic resources and competence from the former to the latter. The alliance of urban and rural Sápmi is dependent on Sámi political leaders managing to present a convincing program for cultural survival in urban and rural areas simultaneously. If a mood begins to spread at the grass roots in rural or urban areas that their part of the Sámi community is not being given the priority it needs, then urban-rural conflicts may become more prominent in the Sámi politics of the future.

A third finding is that the urban areas exhibit a strong degree of *local variation in the structure of Sámi civil society and institutions*— although this variation is greater in Norway

than in Russia. Despite the existence of NGOs and political parties that have a countrywide (or in Russia's case, province-wide) presence, the constellations and interrelations of civil society-based actors vary from location to location. Regarding the way institutions are organized, Sámi activists and allies in different places have had different opportunities to build structures for cultural survival, and have taken them, thus also resulting in high organizational heterogeneity. Local urban Indigenous institutional and organizational life is essentially "homegrown", as it has grown from and adapted to local specifics. Neither the Sámediggi nor any other overarching actor has had the authority, resources, or desire to attempt to streamline the urban institutional landscape. Nevertheless, in Norway the "language center model" is becoming a standard type of institution for urban Sámi to have or to strive for. This type of institution can, however, be organized in many different ways, and the ones observed here exhibit strong dissimilarities in terms of ownership and in terms of their relationships to both state and non-state actors—which, again, reflects local specifics. This local variation in relationships between key urban institutions and actor types also includes the Norwegian Sámediggi, which has different types of involvement with different urban Sámi cultural institutions. In Russia, "the GOBU" is simultaneously the *de facto* Sámi "culture house" of Murmansk City and a province-wide institution that has responsibilities for Sámi in both rural and urban areas throughout Murmansk Region. The centrality of GOBU constitutes a similarity in Sámi politics of different cities, towns, and villages of Russian Sápmi. Nevertheless, Russia also has local and specific urban Sámi institutions, most notably the Mončegorsk NCA. The latter example does, however, also exhibit an element of "regionalism" over "localism" in Russian Sámi organizing: the NCAs of Murmansk Region are united in a regional umbrella organization, headquartered in Apatity-Kirovsk.

A fourth finding is that in both Norway and Russia *due to fragmentation of Sámi civil society there are challenges when it comes to creating Indigenous spaces that are seen as*



*adequately open for the entire local Sámi population.* The situation in both Norway and Russia is that Sámi civil society at different points began to become fragmented—partially through specialization, and partially through politicization, with the latter process in Norway having culminated with partisanization after the establishment of the Sámediggi.

This fragmentation is not a particularly urban phenomenon, but its consequences are perhaps particularly negative in heavily majority-cultural areas such as towns and cities, where arenas to live and learn Sámi culture outside of the home have to be actively created. Under such conditions, it is arguably crucial to establish Indigenous spaces that are inclusive towards the entire local Sámi population. We do indeed observe that many Sámi in both countries have tried to work towards the establishment of open and inclusive urban spaces that can gather Sámi from different organizations and groups. In particular, one of the urban culture house structures in Norway, that in Alta, is heavily dominated by one NGO/party that has been fundamental in the establishment of these structures—while in, for example, Tromsø and Oslo key urban Sámi institutions have a broader foundation. The involvement of the Sámediggi in local urban institutions can also be seen as safeguarding the openness of these institutions because as a representative institution, it transcends party boundaries. In Russia, Sámi activists have on multiple occasions worked for the creation of a Russian Sámediggi, in part precisely because such an institution was seen as capable of uniting the organizationally fragmented Sámi around a common institution. There is a certain irony to this because the Sámediggi of Norway, while certainly a nodal actor that serves as a common arena for different Sámi voices and possessing organization-transcending legitimacy, simultaneously has had the effect of *furthering* the fractioning of the Sámi civil society landscape because its very existence creates incentives for partisanization. In Russia, the desire for a Sámediggi was part of what led to the creation of the NCAs, and the Mončegorsk NCA must be said to be the most open urban Indigenous space in Russian Sápmi because it exists independently of the

AKS/OOSMO divide. In both Russia and Norway, it is notable that youth organizations have to a larger extent avoided becoming embroiled in internal political conflicts—Sám’ Nuraš is outside the AKS/OOSMO divide, and Noereh like its predecessor Davvi Nuorra is not connected to any political party. Also among other more recently established Sámi organizations in Norway, one may possibly detect a tendency towards choosing to avoid having a formal connection to any political party.

While discussing these organizations, one should also note that both the Norwegian and Russian Sámi organizations have quite urban memberships. This can be seen as reflecting the urbanization of young Sámi—perhaps particularly those youths who are likely to start and lead organizations—but it could also be seen as reflecting that the culturally strongest rural Sámi areas do not have such a need for organized Sámi spaces, and the culturally weaker rural areas have fewer potential members for such organizations, while the cities and towns have both the needs and the demographic traits that encourage the formation of such organizations.

Finally, we should point to an important *distinction* between the role of the city in Russian and Norwegian Sámi organizing, namely that Norwegian Sápmi is more multi-nodal than Russian Sápmi. Murmansk Region is a geographically smaller part of Sápmi than Norwegian Sápmi, with a much smaller Sámi-identifying population. There is also no question that Murmansk City is the political, economic, and demographic center of that area. It is the place of residence for many key Sámi activists in several province-wide organizations and it is an important arena for events and meetings that are of consequence to the entire province, and the role of “the GOBU” in Sámi cultural and political life on the peninsula has served to further entrench the nodality of Murmansk City in Russian Sápmi. It is common to say that Lovozero is the “capital of Russian Sápmi”, but it may be more correct to say that Lovozero is the “rural capital” and that Murmansk City is the “urban capital” of Russian Sápmi. In comparison, Sámi social and political life in Norway is multi-nodal. Oslo has a

particular political centrality because it is the capital of Norway, but power and economic means are more decentralized than in Russian Sápmi. There are several cities and towns that have a claim to some nodality in Sámi affairs, in addition to several villages with important cultural and political functions, making the rural-urban Sámi relationship more balanced than in Russia. In fact, it is most often the rural Inner Finnmark district, where the villages Kautokeino and Karasjok are situated, that are referred to as the “central” parts of Norwegian Sápmi. The more empowered position of rural areas in Norwegian Sápmi than in Russian Sápmi also means that the cities of Norwegian Sápmi do not have to take the central coordinating role that Murmansk City has to, so the Sámi of urban areas are freer to focus on local needs. If anything, the urban areas of Norwegian Sápmi are “capitals” for their regions and their local Sámi subgroups—the latter also being of less importance to Russian Sámi than Norwegian Sámi—but even in this they may be rivaled by villages in the same region.

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<sup>1</sup> “Finn” is an ethnic slur for the Sámi in the Norwegian language. See Chapter 1 for more on the usage of “Finn” to mean “Sámi,” and how it came to take on the character of a slur.

<sup>2</sup> “Fjellfinn” is also a slur used against the Sámi. It means “Mountain Finn” (see footnote above). It is often used specifically to refer to reindeer herding Sámi and Sámi living on the highlands of the interior.

<sup>3</sup> After years of work to expand cultural space in terms of tolerance and acceptance, a Sámi kindergarten was opened in 2017. The Sámi kindergarten in Trondheim is a Sámi section within a majority-Norwegian municipal kindergarten. It offers services in South and North Sámi, and the institution has the responsibility to be a resource for Sámi culture in relation to other kindergartens in Trondheim municipality. (<https://www.trondheim.kommune.no/org/oppvekst/barnehager/ferista-fbhg/>). It is located in relative proximity to Sverresborg Folk Museum, which has been one of the nodes of Sámi cultural activity and networking in Trondheim (Berg-Nordlie 2018a).

<sup>4</sup> The concepts of “specialization”, “politicization”, and “partisanization” as utilized here have been developed from the broader concept of “specialization” as used in Berg-Nordlie 2018a.

<sup>5</sup> The Kven national minority has its roots in immigration from the Finnish side of the border to the northern coasts of Norway, a phenomenon that particularly took place from the 1800s. The Finnish-speaking populations in Norway were also targeted by Norway’s assimilation policy. A large share of the population in the far north of Norway has mixed ancestry—their ancestors may include both Sámi, majority Norwegian, and immigrants from Finland. Which ethnic group(s) a person identifies as part

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of will depend on different social, cultural, and linguistic conditions. The modern Kven identity is based on an emphasis on Finnish aspects of one's heritage. During the Norwegianization period, it was widely held to have a higher social status to be of Finnish descent than Sámi, but after the Norwegian Sámi policy shift, the northern ethnic landscape came to be characterized by a main dichotomy of dominant people-Indigenous people, and the Kvens fit neither of these categories. The category "national minority" has been established in Norwegian politics for the Kvens and other peoples like them (non-Indigenous but old ethnic minorities in Norway), but there are some fears of being sidelined and forgotten by the Norwegian state. These frustrations are channeled by some into resentment against the Sámi, rather than against the Norwegian state (Berg-Nordlie & Schou 2011; Elenius 2019; Forsgren and Minken 2020).

<sup>6</sup> For transparency: Author and editor Astri Dankertsen is a member of the board of Sáltó Sámesiebrre and has also been a member of the national board of the NSR. She was also a deputy representative in the Norwegian Sámediggi for the NSR from 2013 to 2017. She is also a representative in the municipal council in Bodø for the Red Party.

<sup>7</sup> Both these provinces are now defunct. In 2020, Sør-Trøndelag was merged with Nord-Trøndelag into Trøndelag, and Hedmark was merged with Oppland into Innlandet.

<sup>8</sup> Tråante2017 was at one point a project partner of NUORGÁV, the research project that resulted in this book. The conference "An urban future for Sápmi?" was organized by the editors as part of Tråante2017.

<sup>9</sup> Of the population registered to vote in the South Sámi constituency, 29.3% lived in Oslo County/Municipality in 2017 and 41.7% lived in the larger Oslo urban agglomeration. Comparatively, South Norway's second largest urban agglomeration in terms of Sámediggi voters (and citizens in general) is Bergen, which only had 4.7% of South Norway's Sámediggi voters.

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<sup>10</sup> For transparency: Author and editor Mikkel Berg-Nordlie was involved in the creation of this organization and currently serves as its leader.

<sup>11</sup> Norwegian: *Høyre*, *Fremskrittspartiet* and *Venstre*. The name of the smallest of these parties, the liberalist Left Party, dates back to the late 1800s, before the emergence of more left-leaning political forces, i.e. the labor movement and the socialist parties. Today, the Left Party is counted among Norway's right-wing parties.

For transparency: Authors and editors Mikkel Berg-Nordlie and Astri Dankertsen are active members of political parties on the left wing. At the moment of writing, Berg-Nordlie leads the Socialist Left Party's Sámi Political Council, and Dankertsen is a member of Bodø's municipal board for the Red Party.

<sup>12</sup> The "equality" that EDL claims to stand for is that citizens should be treated formally equally with no regard for ethnicity. However, they tend to portray Norwegian culture and language as something neutral that all citizens in Norway can and should adhere to, whereas being Sámi should be an entirely private matter. The organization's spokespersons are known to attack visible Sáminess. EDL has also given voice to conspiracy theories about a half-century-old international Sámi plot to take over the north, engages in unfounded historical revisionism that frames the Sámi as non-Indigenous, and develops innovative interpretations of Norwegian and international Indigenous law (Berg-Nordlie and Olsen 2020; Berg-Nordlie and Schou 2011, Nrk.no 2011).

<sup>13</sup> For transparency: Author and editor Astri Dankertsen was at the time a deputy representative for the Norwegian Sámi Parliament (NSR) in the Sámediggi, and a representative in the Bodø Municipal Council (Red Party) and took part in the initiative to establish the Sámi Language Center in Bodø.

<sup>14</sup> For transparency: The NUORGÁV Project participated in Tråante2017 by organizing an open, two-day conference titled "An urban future for Sápmi" at Sverresborg.

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<sup>15</sup> For transparency: One of the authors (Berg-Nordlie) have children who are in the Sámi kindergarten and who participate in the municipal Sámi school system, has served as a parents' representative and has also been involved in project activity based at the Sámi House.

<sup>16</sup> The large reindeer-herding companies are still often referred to by the Soviet term, despite post-Soviet restructuring into private firms. This is somewhat telling of their retained "cornerstone" status in certain rural parts of Russian Sápmi.

<sup>17</sup> For transparency: Author Anna Afanasyeva was the first leader of Sám' Nuraš.