

Performing nationalism – Sámi culture and diversity in early education in Norway

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Abstract

Kindergartens are institutional arenas for raising the nation through educating children in an every-day setting. With the implementation of the Framework Plan of 2017 (FP), the notion of “Sámi culture” became part of the mandatory curriculum in all Norwegian kindergartens for the first time. All kindergartens are now expected to ensure that children develop respect for, and solidarity with, the diversity of Sámi culture. This paper based on policy analysis and interviews in kindergartens investigates how the notion of “Sámi culture” is part of the national Framework Plan (FP) for kindergartens and how it is understood and implemented in kindergartens. The concept of everyday nationalism sheds light on tensions involved in including indigenous rights and perspectives in a national Framework Plan. Including indigenous rights and cultures as part of a national Framework Plan can widen the content of what it means to belong in a national state as well as sharpen the lines and maintain boundaries. Conceptions of diversity are an integral part of the messiness involved in drawing boundaries and in the making of the everyday nationalism, suggesting that the relationship between diversity and everyday nationalism deserves more interrogation.

Keywords

Everyday nationalism, diversity, early childhood education, Indigenous education, Sami

Introduction

Institutional settings such as kindergartens and schools are arenas for raising the nation through raising the children (Millei, 2019a, 2019b: 85; Thun, 2015) and where national belonging and identity are taught (Åkerblom and Harju, 2021; Lappalainen, 2006; Strand, 2006). In such settings, national forms of knowledge, practices, and emotions naturalize specific notions of the world (Skey, 2011). Perspectives of everyday nationalism are well suited to investigate how national identity is rooted in everyday routines as well as in policy documents and curriculums (Akerblad

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and Harju, 2021). This article investigates how Sámi rights and the notion of “Sámi culture” are part of the National Framework Plan for kindergartens in Norway, and how they are understood and implemented in Norwegian majority kindergartens.

In Norway, more than 90% of children under the age of six, and 98% of all children 3–6 years of age, are enrolled in kindergartens (udir.no). (Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). Kindergartens are now under the purview of the Ministry of Education and are seen as part of the educational system although they are not mandatory to attend. A legal reform securing the statutory right to daycare for all children in Norway has created explosive growth in the sector (The Kindergarten Act, Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). Along with an increased emphasis on quality and an enhancement of learning, the growth has created new conditions for kindergarten’s social role, organization, and content (Ertesvåg and Roland, 2013).

Since 1996, a kindergarten act and a governmental Framework Plan have regulated Norwegian kindergarten services, aiming at securing equivalent and qualitatively good services, as well as providing a common and binding objective for kindergarten staff (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996). A second national Framework Plan launched in 2006 increased the specification of tasks and content of services and clarified staff responsibilities for children’s development, such as care, formative development, play, learning, social skills, language skills, and the kindergarten services as a cultural arena (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006).

The 2017 Framework Plan built upon the same values as the former plans (Homme et al., 2020), and among other new things, assigned kindergartens the responsibility for making all children familiar with Sámi culture and society—and with the Sámi as an Indigenous people (Homme et al., 2020). The Framework Plan states that “Kindergartens shall highlight Sámi culture and help to ensure that the children develop respect for and solidarity with the diversity of Sámi culture” (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 9). To teach Sámi culture thus became part of the mandatory curriculum in all Norwegian kindergartens for the first time. This change happened in a context where Norwegian society is increasingly diversified, and the educational system is subjected to internationalization.

This change can be seen as a slow policy follow-up after the Sámi people were recognized as Indigenous people through Norway’s ratification of ILO-169 on the rights of tribal and Indigenous peoples in 1990 and mirroring the understanding of Norway as being founded on the territory of two peoples. This includes potential tension and ambiguity when it comes to the relationship between the two as it is possible to be both Sámi *or* Norwegian and Sámi *and* Norwegian (Olsen, 2019). Thus, kindergartens also face this ambiguity.

Sámi peoples today live in what are four different states, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. There are no official statistics on the exact number of Sámi, due to legal reasons. An estimate is that there are approximately 100,000 Sámi in the four states, with the majority living in Norway. What makes the Sámi recognized as an Indigenous people on a legal and political level is that they have been living in the same area or region since long before the dawn of modern nation-states and their borders. Also, they have distinct languages and traditions, and are in a minority situation—and for quite some time, also subject to colonization and assimilation (Gjerpe, 2017; Olsen, 2019). Today, the Nordic states of Norway, Sweden, and Finland have, to varying degrees, acknowledged their active role in the oppression and assimilation of the Sámi communities, as well as recognized—to varying degrees—the Sámi as an Indigenous people (Virtanen et al., 2021). All three states have initiated truth and reconciliation commissions to deal with their respective assimilation and oppression pasts.

A key arena in this oppression and assimilation—which lasted from around the late 17th century to the mid-20th century and which we choose to recognize and talk about as *colonization*—was the

educational system. In schools, the Sámi learned literacy, mainly in the majority of languages, and to speak the majority of languages. Many Sámi learned to feel ashamed of their own culture and language. By the end of the official assimilation policy, the Sámi communities were deeply changed by Norwegianization. Some Sámi languages and dialects became extinct or close to extinct.

Internationally, a growing body of research investigating Indigenous people's education and the representation of Indigenous people's culture and language in education policy and practice, is often related to citizenship issues, belonging, and otherness (Battiste and Henderson, 2016; McKinley and Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2020). Keskitalo et al. (2013) claims the need for the educational system to develop a stronger foundation in Sámi culture, as well as arguing for a cultural-sensitive pedagogical approach. Existing research concerning how kindergartens work with Sámi culture and languages in Norway focuses on Sámi kindergartens or Sámi departments in kindergartens, and how they interpret Sámi traditions (Nutti, 2018, Storjord, 2008). Aarre (2020) has also analyzed the Framework Plan in the context of the representation and understanding of the Sámi. We have not found research analyzing how the majority kindergartens in Norway deal with Sámi culture. This points to the need for empirical research that investigates how Sámi rights are managed in both Sámi kindergartens and in the majority kindergartens, and the latter issue is the theme of this article. Instead of analyzing the pedagogical approach or concept of citizenship, we will focus on everyday nationalism.

Based on policy analysis of the Framework Plan and interviews with staff in Norwegian majority kindergartens, this article will explore these questions: Is Sámi culture presented as part of "us" or "them," as part of being Norwegian, or as an oppositional identity? As part of a more general growing diversity or as an Indigenous culture with specific rights? And how can perspectives of everyday nationalism help understand the inclusion and exclusion of Indigenous perspectives in early childhood education?

Raising citizens and the concept of everyday nationalism

The concept of everyday nationalism provides perspectives that shed light on the links between early childhood education and nationalism, inclusion, and exclusion. It focuses on the agency of ordinary people, as participants and users of national symbols, rituals, and identities, as opposed to elites (Knott, 2015). The concept of everyday nationalism is developed in relation to the concept of banal nationalism, coined by Billig to analyze how nationalism pertains to personal and group identities in the West (Billig, 1995). Billig introduced the term to show how nationalism is produced in ways that have become naturalized in everyday life and are sometimes considered innocent. The term everyday nationalism focuses more on human agency than banal nationalism and aims to understand the lived experience of ordinary people of nationalism (Knott, 2015: 1). The concept of everyday nationalism entails both norms and practices. In line with Marco Antonsich's reasoning (Antonsich, 2018: 458), it is crucial to connect the micro of the everyday with the macro of societal and institutional structures when studying national belonging, and that is why we find it interesting to look at both the policy level and the local institutional level.

Within the study of everyday nationalism, Zsuzsa Millei's work has been central to understanding the role of children and their institutional lives as part of building national identity (Millei, 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Millei and Imre, 2016: 20). Millei (2019b) investigates how children perform the nation in institutionalized settings such as kindergartens and schools, and from a young age learn how to sense who "we" are, in contrast to who "they" are (p. 85). For instance, children learn to navigate national time regimes or songs and symbolic objects and, in that way, children learn nationalism in everyday life in kindergartens (Millei, 2019a: 87). Gullestad (1997) argued that there is a strong link between children and nation-building in Norway. By pointing to examples of

children carrying the Norwegian flag on national celebrations, and that the Norwegian flag is often included as part of birthday celebrations for children, she argued that children carry the values of the nation and that they thus are nation-building actors. Her argument about children and youth as carriers of the values of the nation point to why and how kindergartens and schools are arenas for building national identity.

By focusing on how nationalism is produced in everyday contexts, perspectives of everyday nationalism open for understanding policies and practices that may not be conceived as centric or nation-centric. We might not think of nationalism as present in contexts where other cultures are discussed because on the surface these acts can seem like anti-nationalism or the promotion of multiculturalism. The perspective of everyday nationalism however also allows for interpreting how the nation is constructed when something seen as different is presented. As noted by Fox (2017: 41) everyday nationalism becomes visible when it meets with difference, when some form of breaching happens, that can give a glimpse into unselfconscious dispositions. The nation is constructed through othering, the “we” in a nation is constructed in opposition to a “them.” Thus, this perspective is suited to analyze how Sámi rights are conveyed both in the Framework Plan and in Norwegian kindergartens. Although the concept of nationalism concerns national policies and interests, everyday nationalism is enacted both at regional and local levels of government as well as within private and public organizations and interests groups (Ball et al., 2012). Hence the enactment of everyday nationalism can be seen as a communicative practice and a product of human interaction and meaning-making (Ball, 2000). According to Antonsich, studies of nationalism can reify the nation as “an inescapable locus of discrimination, oppression, and homogenization” (Antonsich, 2020: 1234). However, bringing the concept of everyday nationalism into the discussion, allows also for opening the ongoing transition and fluidity of nationalism for research and discuss the possible opening of the nation-state to more inclusive forms (Antonsich, 2018). Further, we are intrigued by the messiness and contradiction involved in the production and reproduction of nationalism (Skey, 2011). Everyday nationalism is thus suited to analyze both and at the same time including and excluding policies and practices—as this article aims to do.

Methods and data collection

This analysis is part of a large, complex research project, called *An evaluation of the Implementation of the 2017 Framework Plan for Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2019–2023)*, financed by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Through multi-level and comparative analyses (Winter, 2003), this project will offer insights into the relationship between policymaking and implementation processes at different levels. The research consists of surveys, document and policy studies, and qualitative interviews with national and local stakeholders and kindergarten employees. The analysis in this paper builds upon data from qualitative interviews with kindergarten employees and studies of policy documents looking for conceptions of Norwegianity and of Sámi rights but is also informed by the whole project (Homme et al., 2020).

To gain in-depth knowledge of street-level implementation behavior (i.e. practice within kindergartens) we have conducted fieldwork studies in 19 kindergartens through in-depth interviews and document analysis of annual, monthly, as well as weekly plans, other plans, and schedules. The interviews were conducted in 2019/2020. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, some of the fieldwork was conducted as online interviews. The kindergartens were situated in different regions in Norway, reflecting different contexts regarding the presence of the Sámi population. Whereas some kindergartens had a visible Sámi population present in their local surroundings, others did not. The interview material as a whole also includes Sámi kindergartens and kindergartens with Sámi departments.

However, as this article focuses on how Sámi rights are interpreted in majority kindergartens, this article only builds on empirical material from majority kindergartens.

In the interviews with all the kindergarten's employees from different groups (kindergarten heads, kindergarten teachers, skilled workers, and assistants) were asked how they worked to safeguard Sámi language and culture, and if Sámi children attended their kindergarten. These questions were part of longer interviews with open questions about how the interviewees interpreted, perceived, and operationalized the Framework Plan. Very few of the interviewees brought up Sámi representation on their initiative during the interviews.

When it comes to the authors and their connection to the field and the Sámi and Norwegian community, all are Norwegian citizens, two of the authors do not have a Sámi identity while one of the authors is a member of the Sámi electorate and considers himself a Norwegianized Sámi. As such s/he recognizes the ambiguity of Sámi identity and citizenship, and the topics discussed in the paper, on a personal level. As authors, we thus reflect on the situation of Early Childhood Education teachers coping with the demands of the Framework Plan from different positions and personal takes.

The Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) has been appointed as a Data Protection Officer for the research and the project is reported and secured by general and special safety requirements based on risk assessments and feedback from NSD.

The Framework Plan and Sámi rights

The Framework Plan for kindergartens must be understood as part of a Norwegian and international educational system where indigenous people have gained more rights (UNESCO, 2019). Earlier Framework Plans described that kindergartens should protect "the good Norwegian childhood" (Korsvold, 2007). OECD criticized Norwegian early childhood education for upholding policies where the "majority may see the minority as a problem or a challenge, or both, to be helped and integrated but also to some extent controlled and shaped" (OECD 1999, in Strand, 2006). Further, they recommended a more tolerant environment based on values and an educational framework that can be acknowledged by both ethnic Norwegians and families with other cultural backgrounds.

In 1975, the first Kindergarten Act of Norway said nothing about Sámi rights, Sámi communities, or Sámi children. The 1996 Framework Plan, the first of its kind, stated that Norway has a special responsibility for the Sámi people, based on the Sámi Act and the ILO-169. Norway's responsibility for the Sámi population was mainly positioned as concerning the existence of Sámi kindergartens for Sámi children in Sámi municipalities, not majority kindergartens. The multicultural society was an important aspect of the 1996 framework plan and Sámi culture was presented as a minority culture alongside other minorities (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996: 105). The Framework Plan from 2006 also emphasized that kindergartens should address Sámi topics and was accompanied by new info material on the matter (Olsen, 2019). The gradual changes in the Framework Plan reflect differing attitudes toward Sámi peoples, from including Sámi rights and issues reserved for the Sámi population, to including Sámi themes in the mainstream educational system (Olsen, 2019; Olsen and Andreassen, 2016).

The Sámi parliament was established in 1989 as a formalized and representative Sámi political body with the authority to be consulted by the state on matters relevant to the Sámi communities. The Sámi parliament has an institutionalized position in the making of curricula and framework plans in Norway as part of the state's obligation to consult the Sámi parliament. The Sámi parliament, consequently, took part in the making of the Framework Plan. According to Oksanen, Sámi peoples in the Nordic countries have successfully unsettled the status quo situation between

Indigenous people and the settler-state (Oksanen, 2020). He sees this change as an expression of emergent indigenous nationalism, formed in reaction to settler-colonialism and enabled by international norms, laws, and global indigenous peoples' networks (Oksanen, 2020: 1141). The changes in the educational system toward a higher degree of recognition of Sámi rights, values, language, and culture challenge the relationship between the Sámi and the Norwegian. Including Sámi culture into the obligatory parts of the Framework Plan can be interpreted as aiming to expand the content of being Norwegian or belonging to Norway.

An interesting change in the Framework Plan from 1996 to 2017, is the decrease in explicit reference to phrases such as "Norwegian culture" and "Norwegian" in the various Framework plans. A simple word count identifying key phrases reveals that in the 2017 Framework Plan, the word Norwegian is mentioned only 7 times, 3 times in connection to the Norwegian Constitution and 4 times when mentioning national minorities such as Norwegian travelers, Norwegian Finns, and Norwegian/Sámi language. "The good Norwegian childhood," a phrase used in earlier Framework Plans, is not mentioned at all. The word Sámi, on the other hand, is mentioned 57 times, while the word "diversity" is mentioned 22 times. Diversity is presented as a sought-after general value and about respect for Sámi diversity. Thus, there are no explicit references to the majority premises such as "Norwegian culture" in the Framework plan, as opposed to the specific phrasing of "Sámi culture." The lack of explicit phrasings does not mean that norms connected to building a Norwegian identity are erased from the plan. The emphasis on Sámi rights, often formulated through reference to Sámi culture in the document, can function as a breaching, as noted within perspectives of everyday nationalism (Fox, 2017) that stirs common-sense beliefs and makes new distinctions visible. The new elements are explicit, while the basis is implicit. Not explicitly mentioning Norwegian values as opposed to the direct focus on the Sámi language and culture in the Framework Plan can be interpreted as a strategy to make the present Framework Plan more inclusive. Previous Framework Plans clearly and explicitly defined Norwegian values as a norm (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996; Thun, 2015). However, implicit norms still prevail.

The foundation of the plan is a set of norms coined as "the Nordic view of childhood" which values children's play indoors and outdoors and giving children the participation opportunity (Broström et al., 2016; Foss, 2009; Wood and Hedges, 2016). The Framework Plan points to liberal Christian and humanist traditions entrenched in human rights laws as core values of kindergartens. Diversity and mutual respect are also promoted as core values, and "kindergartens shall give the children diverse impulses and experiences incorporating local, national and international perspectives" (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 9). It is underlined that increasing diversity "demands an understanding of democracy, respect for our differences, and positive attitudes to be able to live together" (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 8). The plan thus promotes a positive co-existence of different cultures associated with multiculturalism, and cosmopolitan ideals and aims at living well together across differences.

Sámi rights are present in the framework Plan throughout the document. For instance, it is mentioned within the headline "Diversity and mutual respect":

"Kindergartens shall give the children diverse impulses and experiences incorporating local, national, and international perspectives. Kindergartens shall highlight Sámi culture and help to ensure that the children develop respect for and solidarity with the diversity of Sámi culture." (Framework Plan, 2017: 9).

The aim to pursue Sámi culture is here framed as part of the general work kindergartens do to develop values such as solidarity and diversity. Thus, the Framework Plan document puts forward Sámi rights, values, language, and culture as part of growing diversity in Norwegian society. Sámi

peoples are presented both as an integrated part of the national imaginary that Norway consists of, as well as someone different, in need of respect.

Sámi themes are also mentioned as vital in the learning area “Local community and society” in the Framework Plan (Framework Plan, 2017:55–57), stating that children should “learn about national minorities” (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017:55). The representation of Sámi rights, values, and culture in this section of the Framework Plan underscores Sámi as an Indigenous people with different rights than national minorities. The groups identified as national minorities in Norway are Kvens/Norwegian Finns, Jews, Forest Finns, Roma, and Norwegian Travellers/Tatere, yet the rights of these groups are not as prominent as Sámi rights in the Framework Plan. This is in line with the situation in the school curriculum, where we find a similar kind of distinction and emphasis on the Sámi as an indigenous people (Olsen, 2019).

The responsibility to include both Sámi culture and a diversity of cultures currently represented in Norway is based on different foundations. First, the Sámi have rights as a recognized Indigenous people. This distinguishes the position of the Sámi people both from recognized national minorities and from other sections of the diversity of Norwegian society. Secondly, this implies that the entire educational system is obliged to maintain and adhere to safeguard the rights of Sámi children regarding language, culture, identity, and values. Thirdly, it also means that kindergartens are obliged to work toward ensuring that all children in Norway have knowledge about the Sámi community, history, and culture (Olsen and Andreassen, 2017). Thus, the Sámi population is part of a general diversity at the same time as their status as an Indigenous people provides a position beyond that of other recognized minoritized groups in Norway.

In the kindergartens, staff shall, in the context of promoting equality and combat discrimination and racism, help the children to create a sense of belonging and introduce the importance of human rights, and “introduce the children to Sámi culture and the Sámi way of life and link the Sámi perspective to important dates and everyday life, art and culture and culinary traditions” (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 57). This paragraph conveys that Sámi culture should be a permeating theme in the kindergarten, marking special dates but also becoming part of everyday life in the kindergarten.

Still, the Framework Plan is a short document filled with general concepts and notions that are not defined or explained (Homme et al., 2020). The specific content of Sámi culture is very briefly elaborated, and thus it becomes the task of the kindergartens to define this content.

Early education institutions: Marking the Sámi National Day

How is the policy of the Framework Plan regarding Sámi rights interpreted and translated into practice in the majority kindergartens? Qualitative interviews with personnel in kindergartens in Norway show that the most common way to include the Sámi language and culture in the kindergartens is to mark the Sámi National Day on the 6th of February, often to prolong that celebration into a Sámi week or sometimes into a month. Almost all the kindergartens focus on the Sámi flag, hoisting it, painting it, and working with Sámi colors “A lot is going on here with the flag, right, and understanding that they have their own flag” (Pedagogue, kindergarten 12). The staff also mention other common activities connected to this celebration, although some are hesitant as they express concern that they are not doing it right.

Educator: We have focused on the Sámi National Day. Now I don't have anyone in the kindergarten who is of Sámi origin, so it hasn't been so easy to know the language and all that, working on it then is a bit unnatural for me. But at least I've been in charge of the Sámi National Day, to mark it, and then we've sung a song in Sámi and seen short films from the National Broadcasting. Had different pictures up, representing

different aspects of Sámi culture, and somehow talked to the children about the different sides. I've written a didactic plan for the Sámi National Day, and the plan is that you should be a little ahead of time and have worked on it, and gotten to know the culture before the actual day, but it's not always time for it, simply (Educator, kindergarten 15).

As described by the educator in this kindergarten, almost all employees describe that they mark the Sámi National Day by eating Sámi food, joik or singing Sámi songs, or watching Sámi films. The marking of the day thus resembles how the kindergarten also celebrates the Norwegian independence day May 17. In this way kindergartens contribute to creating a national celebration and representation of Sámi culture as an established order of things, appearing as an annual ritual and as such as part of the everyday making of the nation (Lappalainen, 2006: 108). Recognizing and celebrating Sámi culture becomes part of the national repertoire.

At the same time, as employees describe how they mark the national day or tend to have some projects attached to it, several also convey that the kindergarten makes little effort to disseminate the Sámi language and culture. As an example, one educator argued that "It is still just a happening. It's nothing. The rest of the year we have no thoughts about it, no" (educator, kindergarten 8). In the same manner, as the quoted educator, other employees expressed they are not doing enough, and not working properly with Sámi topics: «Often, we will not do anything more than marking that day» (educator kindergarten 7). Others expressed even more self-critical comments like, "We could improve as we could rather work with this throughout the year, not only in connection to that day" (skilled worker kindergarten 2). They thus express anticipation, in line with the Framework Plan, that Sámi language and culture should be a more pervasive theme in the year-round activities of the kindergarten than it is today.

Internationally, criticism has been directed toward a practice where the inclusion of minorities is seen as prioritizing only select parts of their culture, celebrating their red flag days, while otherwise doing little else (Hoffman, 1996). Similar practices are described in research investigating Sámi rights and the Sámi National Day in schools in Norway (Olsen and Sollid, 2019). Sámi rights, as they are conveyed in the Framework Plan, are thus reduced to a responsibility to mark limited events rather than being included in the integrated national imaginary presented to children. As noted by Lappalainen, kindergartens produce nationality by zigzagging through different world-views while producing hierarchies of belonging (Lappalainen, 2006: 108).

A limited marking of the Sámi National Day, however, can instigate inspiration about the Sámi language and culture that kindergartens can use to expand their knowledge:

Educator: What I think has been very fun to discover is that when we have focused on the Sámi day and the processes we have had, we actually got to know and discover that there are more people who have relationships with the Sámi culture than we would have known, and maybe they would not tell us if we had not had this focus. And I find that very exciting and important observation (Educator, kindergarten 7).

The celebration of the National Day contributed to the kindergarten becoming aware that children enrolled there have Sámi affiliation, in turn motivating the staff to prioritize Sámi culture. Thus, the celebrations could foster an increased connection to the Sámi language and culture in the kindergarten. On the other hand, Sámi people and culture are portrayed as a sharp contrast to the majority culture in the kindergarten, and its increased representation is tied to someone embodying that diversity.

When trying to explain why Sámi culture and language first and foremost is limited to the Sámi National Day, the explanations vary among kindergarten employees. Some comment that the broad general scope of the Framework Plan makes it difficult to prioritize. "There's so much you're going to work on. It may simply be a little down-prioritized" (skilled worker, kindergarten 1). Others

explained the narrow focus on Sámi culture and language due to an experienced lack of competence. They find it challenging to teach the Sámi language, as they have little knowledge of it themselves, while it is easier to find information about and disseminate Sámi culture.

Some among the kindergarten staff, who seemed enthusiastic to introduce the Sámi language and culture in the kindergarten, regretted that they lack knowledge. A quantitative survey among managers of kindergartens (Lotsberg et al., 2020) confirms a lack of competence in the Sámi language and culture among kindergarten staff.

In general, very few employees, if any, referred to courses or schemes about how to work with the Sámi language and culture. Therefore, the planning of activities related to Sámi culture in the kindergartens was largely left to the knowledge and prioritization of the individual kindergarten. The celebration of the Sámi national day is enacted both as an inclusive event where all children can take part in this national celebration and as a practice of difference and exclusion as activities connected to Sámi culture are limited to that special celebration. This is an example of the messiness involved in the production of nationalism in everyday life where inclusion and exclusion happen at the same time (Antonsich, 2020; Skey and Antonsich, 2017) and how conceptions of diversity are part of that messiness.

Sámi language and culture as “us”: A part of Norway

Staff in the kindergartens sometimes expressed that Sámi culture is part of us in Norway, and other times conveyed that Sámi culture is a contrast to the majority culture. In the interviews, different reasons were put forward as explanations for why it was important to include Sámi culture in the kindergarten.:

I think it is fun and exciting, and the children think it is exciting. It is easy to assume that it is a bit difficult to work with, but really, it is not. And I know that it is important, it is a part of Norway (Educator, kindergarten 15).

Several of the interviewees addressed, like this, the importance of including the Sámi language and culture because they are part of what “we in Norway are” alluding to multicultural ideology. This approach to difference and diversity conveys that Sámi language and culture should be addressed even when there are no defined Sámi children in the kindergarten.

Educator: The Sámi people and Sámi culture are part of Norway, and I think it is important that all children in Norway know as well, in addition to the fact that it is of course important that those who have Sámi affiliation also experience being included, but they are actually part of Norway. They are a minority in Norway, but part of our country and culture, although it has been peripheral to many, at least here in Southern Norway. So, I personally think it is a very important piece of work and have through this work learned a lot that I should perhaps have known long ago (Educator, Kindergarten 7).

In this conception, to teach children about Sámi culture is about values and pedagogy, of recognizing and valuing a difference that is placed within a conception of us who constitute a community. There is also a certain ambiguity concerning matters of belonging in statements like these about the relationship between Sámi culture and the nation of Norway. This is understandable as the same ambiguity is a founding dimension of the state of Norway as it is built on the land of two peoples, the Norwegian and the Sámi. Through colonization and assimilation, the boundaries between the two peoples have been blurred, leading some to think of themselves in an either-or fashion and some in a both-and fashion. Further, the difference between political and cultural ideas of citizenship and nationalism is part of this. You can be Sámi and a Norwegian citizen at the same time, but

Norwegian citizenship is the only one accompanied by a passport and to be eligible to vote in the Sámi parliament you must have Sámi ancestors. What it entails to be Norwegian and Sámi are thus ambiguous and complex identities.

Sámi language and culture as “them” and unnatural to prioritize

While some of the staff saw the marking of the Sámi national day as unsatisfying to fulfill the intentions in the Framework Plan, others explained why they thought that their efforts were adequate. Many of the interviewees associated the absence of a more consistent focus on Sámi culture in kindergartens with the lack of Sámi children among the children enrolled in the kindergarten they worked in. “I’m sure it would have been different if we had any Sámi children here” (educator, kindergarten 8). Many among the staff referred to ethnicity when they talked about why they did not prioritize Sámi culture and language more.

Educator: With the one- and two-year-old [children] I think that if we’ve had anyone associated with Sámi culture within the group of children, it would have been more natural, but when we don’t, also I think they are too small to work specifically with these topics (Educator, kindergarten 1).

Referring to what is natural or not can be a way of explaining a practice that seems common sense for the educator. As with the educator quoted above, some employees argue that it is unnatural to prioritize the Sámi language and culture more than they already do if they do not have known Sámi children in kindergarten. “It’s very exotic for us, it is. For we have not, we may have had one child who has some Sámi ancestry, right” (educator, kindergarten 15). Using terms like exotic as opposed to natural to describe Sámi identity emphasizes that Sámi language and culture appear as something they do not know, something distant or strange that they do not need to take seriously as long as no one embodies that specific kind of diversity. In this way, the Sámi language and culture are othered and become something very different from the “us” in the kindergarten.

Staff are aware that if there are Sámi children present in the kindergartens, they have a right to Sámi education no matter where the kindergarten is located in Norway. Thus, knowing whether there are Sámi children in kindergarten becomes important:

I think it would have come more naturally for us if we had children of Sámi origin, where a parent or grandparent of the child is Sámi if they speak Sámi . . . But I find it a little bit difficult with the language itself and things like that, to contribute to the child experiencing Sámi language in kindergarten. Then I think that not everyone (among the staff) knows Sámi. It is important, I completely agree with that, they must get to experience their language and culture in kindergarten, it is about identity and things like that.

The staff seem eager to support children’s Sámi identity and several talk about involving parents and grandparents to teach about culture and language. However, the question of children’s ethnic identity as Sámi is delicate and open to interpretation.

Our material shows that no kindergartens have routines for identifying if children are Sámi or not. There exist no national guidelines for this for kindergartens, neither in the Framework Plan nor in the Early Childhood Education Act. Thus, without routines or guidelines, the staff’s knowledge about the presence of Sámi children in kindergarten is very limited. Further, to identify a child as Sámi in relation to the kindergarten is up to the parents to decide and it is still a contested question in Norway; who is the Sámi child? The Framework Plan does not define what a Sámi child is. Yet, the Sámi child is a defining entity for staff in the kindergartens.

According to this point of view, the legitimation of working or not working with Sámi culture becomes linked to who the children are, the children's identity, and the local situation where they grow up. The staff seems focused on the presence of Sámi children in the kindergarten, children and their families are embodying diversity. This way of thinking about children is also present in the Framework plan, giving Sámi children specific rights to a Sámi education. However, the Framework Plan also states that Sámi language and culture must be part of all the kindergartens because of their status and rights as indigenous peoples and that all children, including those with little or no connection to Sámi society, have the right to learn about Sámi culture and that perspective seems somewhat neglected by many kindergarten employees. This points to a mismatch between legal and policy requirements regarding Sámi rights and the everyday practice in kindergartens. Further, the views that some of the staff convey is that Norwegianness is the natural order and the premise for the organization of the kindergarten whereas Sámi culture represents something different.

Sámi culture as part of a greater diversity

Managing diversity and aiming at inclusion is an important issue and value in the Framework Plan and it is partly used as a framing of Sámi themes in the Framework Plan. While the representation of the Sámi language and culture was among the special topics for the overall research project, the more general handling of diversity in kindergartens was not an explicit theme in the qualitative interviews. Nevertheless, issues of diversity were prevalent in the interviews.

Contrary to how they related to Sámi rights and perspectives, many employees addressed the topics of inclusion and diversity frequently and on their initiative in the interviews. Diversity is a mainly positive buzzword that refers to many types of differences in Norway today, both in terms of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, and disability (Bakken and Solbue, 2016; Gjervan et al., 2012; Korsvold, 2011). In the interviews, the kindergarten staff used the phrase diversity predominantly when talking about diversity associated with ethnic and religious backgrounds. As also found in international research (MacNaughton and Hughes, 2007), the educators promoted that cultural and social values of inclusion were important to foster among the children.

In the interviews staff in the kindergartens often framed Sámi language and culture as part of a larger perspective of inclusion. Many among the staff underlined the connection to equality; "Whether one is Sámi or coming from the eastern part of Norway, to accept all of them. Everyone is equal" (Educator, kindergarten 1), referring to a common image of Norway as an equality-loving country. Norway has a public image as a homogenous country with the social democratic welfare state as a symbol of equality, but where equality and sameness are equated (Danielsen and Bendixsen, 2019; Gullestad, 2006). Other educators pointed to a recognition of diversity. "I think it is about diversity and different cultures, that's what it's really about, Sámi is just a part there." (Educator, kindergarten 2). The focus on the Sámi language and culture is placed within a larger perspective on diversity, posing that the kindergarten should create an inclusive community for all children, recognizing and valuing their differences.

Some were afraid that they will step on someone's toes: "Respect is part of it also, how to represent or bring something to the children without doing something wrong with these cultural approaches" (Pedagogue, kindergarten 8). This fear of reproducing stereotypes underlines that some among the staff felt awkward or uncomfortable concerning the task of teaching children about Sámi culture. Some also referred to situations where they identified that stereotypes had been reproduced. To show respect and recognition requires knowledge and is also about making and constituting differences and making those differences salient. Some educators, however,

argued that Sámi rights had too much focus in the kindergartens, at the expense of other forms of diversity.

What I maybe find challenging, is that there is such a focus on Sámi issues because it can be a challenge in our city where we are surrounded by so many other cultures, that maybe deserve just as much attention and that is a bigger part of the children's everyday life. I think about the last kindergarten where I worked, there were more than 40 different nations present, and maybe a quarter of a Sámi person, and then it becomes a challenge regarding how we do this (educator, kindergarten 7).

Even if just a rhetorical device, the expression of the quarter of a Sámi person points to a conception of identity as a matter of numbers. As illustrated by the quote above, Sámi language and culture were by some educators viewed predominantly as a part of a wider diversity and set up against other kinds of diversity, that are presented as more important. The interviewed educator argued that diversity connected to migration and ethnicity is more crucial to focus upon than Sámi culture as it is a more prominent part of everyday life for the children. Thus, kindergarten staff juxtaposes the focus on the Sámi language and culture against other forms of diversity, instead of comparing it to the permeating focus on Norwegian values and celebrations in the kindergartens which becomes the unsaid norm. The staff in the majority kindergartens did not relate the teaching of the Sámi language and culture directly to national values concerning anti-discrimination, power relations, or fighting against oppression which may point to a lack of skills to do so. The silent nationalism the educators convey, the permeating focus on Norwegian values and celebrations, thus becomes a dominant force in the kindergarten which is not subject to discussion.

Discussion: Everyday nationalism within the frame of diversity

Educational institutions have long been viewed as mediators of dominant norms, values, and national belonging (Millei, 2019b). Increasingly, schools and kindergartens are also viewed as arenas for fostering cosmopolitan values and respect for diversity (Åkerblom and Harju, 2021; Alaca and Pyle, 2018; Duhn, 2014; Rosenberg, 2020; Sadownik, 2020,) and for preventing injustice and inequality (Dannesboe and Kjær, 2021). These intentions are also present in the Norwegian Framework Plan (Sadownik, 2020). It is recognized by current research that Norway since the 1970s has moved toward a higher recognition of Sámi (Fløtten, 2016; Olsen and Andreassen, 2016).

Sámi rights, language, and culture are presented as a crucial and permeating thread in the plan due to the recognition of Sámi as indigenous peoples in Norway, and as part of a growing diversity in Norwegian society that children should know and respect. These different ways of understanding Sámi rights and addressing and conceptualizing diversity are also found among staff in kindergartens. Our qualitative interviews with Norwegian kindergarten staff show that they are conscious about their responsibility to include Sámi culture and language in the curricula content of kindergartens, a responsibility they solve mainly by marking the Sámi national day in different ways instead of working with Sámi culture throughout the year. Hence, the ambiguities concerning safeguarding Sámi rights are present both in the Framework Plan and in the policy enactment in kindergartens (Ball et al., 2012).

When enacting policies concerning the Sámi language and culture, some kindergarten employees do not recognize the implications of the Sámi as an Indigenous people to the same degree as the Framework Plan does. Rather, the Sámi language and culture are mostly presented as part of a greater diversity among staff in the kindergartens juxtaposed against a more silent but permeating Norwegianness and where different conceptions of diversity are at play.

Our analysis reveals that educational policy intentions differ from practices in educational institutions. The enactment of the Framework Plan is a communicative practice and a product of employees' interaction and meaning-making, based upon their professional expertise and judgment. As also shown in international studies (Alaca and Pyle, 2018; MacNaughton and Hughes, 2007: 199), the educators in this study lacked confidence in pedagogy concerning indigenous peoples. In a recent article, Pesch et al. (2021) argue that diversity related to transnational migration seems to be more integrated, while the Sámi is more stereotypically represented in kindergartens through images and visible teaching aids in the kindergartens. When Sámi right is a field where staff lacks specific knowledge, it becomes vulnerable to how the individual educator in the kindergarten approaches the field and thus to the unnoticed bias or prior knowledge that may influence staff in kindergartens. Some of the staff argued that other forms of diversity were more important to prioritize in the kindergartens than Sámi culture.

Commonly but not openly discussed views regarding Norway, Sámi peoples, diversity, and belonging are, as we have seen, dealt with in different ways in policy and practice. Practices are legitimated by references to what sort of diversity it is considered natural or not natural to include in the kindergarten. Using conceptions related to common-sense understandings to explain practice is a way to refer to taken-for-granted forms of knowledge. Everyday nationalism is precisely a perspective and a concept that aims at uncovering taken-for-granted foundations of everyday nationhood by analyzing such practices and discourses (Fox, 2017: 26).

In the Norwegian majority kindergartens, it has become as common to celebrate the Sámi National Day as it is to celebrate the National Constitution Day. Resembling the celebration of the national constitution day in Norway with its focus on the flag and songs, children thus experience that there are more national days than one. To mark the Sámi National Day becomes a naturalized part of what you do, and a day all Norwegian children have a right to take part in. Collective rituals in everyday life are a common object of research within studies that examine everyday nationalism (Skey, 2011). How citizens position themselves and others by responses to national days both reflect and drive everyday nationalism, contributing to demarcating what should belong to a nation and what not (McCreanor et al., 2019: 232). Further, national celebrations activate questions of who is allowed to take part in such celebrations and who cannot. The relatively new practice of marking the Sámi national day allows the majority children to have a peak into Sámi culture, if only for a day, as presented by their respective educators.

At the same time, it becomes evident that the staff views Sámi culture dominantly as only one of many variants of diversity that they need to include as topics in kindergartens. The staff, thus, does not see Sámi culture as an integral part of national identity in Norway. Rather, some exoticize that part of the activities in kindergartens. It is therefore questionable if the staff consider the special position Sámi have in Norway as an indigenous people when they plan how to introduce children to Sámi culture. How the staff relates to Sámi rights may be changing, though. A recent report finds that younger heads of kindergartens are more aware of Sámi rights than older heads of kindergartens (Lotsberg et al., 2020).

Whereas some kindergarten staff are self-critical and express that they should integrate Sámi culture more thoroughly, others explain that it would be unnatural to do more because there are no Sámi children enrolled in the kindergarten. For these employees prioritizing Sámi culture came across as somewhat "unnatural" if there weren't any known Sámi children present in the children's groups. Using the words natural and unnatural when explaining a limited focus on Sámi language and culture in kindergartens is a very strong, but also vague, way of arguing. Defining something as unnatural evokes connotations of something which has no right to be present, something which does not belong. Alternatively, the term unnatural becomes a way of talking about that which you do not know, it is an alienating or othering term.

Conclusion: Inside and outside the nation

Investigating the policy and practice of kindergartens is one way of making visible the way the nation is often “lurking just beneath the surface” (Fox, 2017: 26). With the help of the concept of everyday nationalism, the article has highlighted how nationalism is constructed and enacted in different ways in policy documents and everyday life in early childhood institutions. Using kindergartens as a lens to discuss everyday nationalism, shows the importance of educational institutions in making inclusive and exclusive societies and how nationalism is a present force in events, settings, and institutions seemingly devoid of it. Further, it shows how everyday forms of nationalism are constructed and performed in processes instigated both from a macro level, through the Framework plan as a policy instrument, and from a local level, through discourses and practices in kindergartens.

Certain forms of nationalism are state-driven and yet performed and in that process transformed in everyday settings in kindergartens. The Framework Plan for early childhood education in Norway is a binding document for the kindergartens, defining the everyday organization and content children are exposed to in kindergartens. The 2017 Framework Plan states that kindergartens should provide a comprehensive picture of the Sámi language and culture. Still, the kindergartens can choose how to fulfill the demands of the Framework Plan depending on the expertise and professional judgment of those working in the kindergartens. Educators in kindergartens, however, convey partly that they lack the expertise to incorporate Sámi culture consistently throughout the kindergarten year and partly that they do not want to do that as their priorities lie elsewhere.

Kindergartens are seen internationally as sites for policies fostering inclusion and respect for diversity, however still reflect the interests of dominant groups (Åkerblom and Harju, 2021; Alaca and Pyle, 2018; Dannesboe and Kjær, 2021; MacNaughton and Hughes, 2007). It is important to bear in mind that the impact and range of inclusive policies depend both on how policies are formulated and enacted and how they are played out in everyday educational settings. This analysis points to the significance of educators’ professional knowledge and skills when it comes to enacting inclusive policies and practices.

One can question whether the kindergarten teacher education adequately safeguards the framework plan’s ambitions concerning Sámi language and culture as something more than a question of general diversity and inclusion. In some countries power relations and ideologies affecting majority and indigenous people and how to champion fairness are part of the curriculum for kindergarten teachers (Alaca and Pyle, 2018; MacNaughton and Hughes, 2007).

Educational policies and practices are important means of forming national identities and future citizens. Maintaining “Norwegianness” can be seen as a foundational, taken-for-granted, premise in the 2017 Framework Plan for Kindergartens. Including Sámi culture as an obligatory part of the curriculum in kindergartens is however a way of intervening in what Norwegian culture consists of, as well as defining boundaries between Norwegian and Sámi culture. As seen in this article there is tension both in the Framework Plan and among staff in the kindergartens between the unspoken, taken-for-granted, support of Norwegian values and traditions and the special position Sámi language and culture officially is given.

There is also a tension between viewing Sámi rights as part of a general diversity or as a special right about Indigenous status. Sámi peoples are conveyed both as part of the diversity the “we” in Norway consists of and as someone else who needs to be included at the same time, all those that make up the “us” in Norway do not have the right to be Sámi. These tensions are permeating the way everyday nationalism is enacted in kindergartens today. Including indigenous rights and cultures as part of a national Framework Plan can, as we have seen, widen the content of what it means to belong in a national state as well as sharpen the lines and maintain boundaries. Conceptions of

diversity are an integral part of the messiness involved in drawing boundaries and in the making of everyday nationalism, suggesting that the relationship between diversity and everyday nationalism deserves more interrogation.

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