

# Sport, Ethno-Politics and Sámi Identity in Northern Norway

## The Organizing of the Sámi Sports Movement

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### Abstract

Although Sámi sport has not attracted a huge sports following, SVL's activities have been of importance for the individual athlete's understanding of his/her own (Sámi) identity, and for the collective understanding of what Sámi sports identity entails. In about 2000, Sámi sport also became an important arena for asserting that Sápmi belonged to the international society of indigenous peoples. Through the Viva World Cup and through participation in the Arctic Winter Games (AWG), self-understanding of the Sámi as an indigenous people was strengthened. These international competitions stressed fellowship with other minorities and indigenous peoples, at the same time as marking the contrast with 'Norwegian' sport. Thus I would maintain that the traditional view of sport as cementing pre-existing differences between competitors does not apply to the international environments in which the Sámi sports movement participate. On the contrary, these competitions helped to create an understanding of fellowship and a sense of belonging among the competitors. The Viva World Cup and AWG were experienced as events in which competition was characterized by cultural and historical fellowship. This in turn emphasized the contrast with 'Norwegian' sport and helped to strengthen the understanding of the Norwegians as "the others".

*Key words:* Sápmi, sport, indigenous identity, politics, ethnicity

## Introduction

Sámi sport was first organized with the establishment of Sámiid Valastallan Lihttu (the Sámi Sports Association), from now on referred to as SVL, in 1979. The SVL organized sports clubs and associations across the national borders of Norway, Sweden and Finland, and was to arrange competitions for Sámi athletes based on traditional Sámi reindeer herding culture. In 1990, the association was reorganized and regional sports associations were established in each of the three countries. As a result of the reorganization, Sámiid Valastallan Lihttu – Norga, the Sámi Sports Association – Norway, from now referred to as SVL-N, was founded. Despite its stated aim of organizing sport solely based on traditional reindeer herding culture, a separate Sámi Football Association, Sámi Spábbaciekan Lihttu (SSL), was set up in 2003. The SSL's aim was to organize all Sámi football in Sápmi.

Since its beginning, Sámi sport has been characterized by having few members, little activity and poor, *ad hoc*, organization. Even so, sport has been given an increasingly important ethno-political role by gaining the recognition of the Sámi authorities and the Sámi Parliament in Norway. This article outlines the history of organized Sámi Sport and some of the dilemmas faced by the organizers when segregating Sámi sport from other sport and making it “native”. I will consider how such segregation was linked to the goals of the broader ethno-political Sámi movement: to strengthen Sámi identity and nation-building. The article investigates how sport has helped revitalizing Sámi identity and discusses its contribution to Sámi ethno-politics over the past 30 years. Furthermore, it evaluates how successful the organization of Sámi sport has been as an instrument in this ethno-political struggle. In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to examine both how and why the organization of Sámi sport came into existence, and the associations' objectives and activities through its 30 years of existence. I will concentrate on the work of the Sámi sport organization in Norway because the two joint Nordic associations – the SVL and SSL – have been dominated by the Norwegian side from the 1990s to the present day. In addition, the SVL-N has to a large extent functioned as a separate association independent of the joint Nordic association, SVL, despite the fact that the prime objective of the associations was to promote sport “without borders”, uniting all Sámi in the entire Sápmi – the land of the Sámi. The dominance of Norwegian Sápmi in Sámi sport can be ascribed to the fact that the

largest percentage of the Sámi lives in Norway, and that the associations' economy and activities have largely depended on grants from the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and other Norwegian authorities. I have chosen to look at football as an example of how the Sámi sports movement has used sport to build a national Sámi identity. There are two main reasons for this choice. One is the fact that football is the largest sport in North Norway in terms of activity and interest, which makes it one of the main identity markers amongst young people. The other reason is that this makes football an arena where identity creation and ethnicity are clearly presented. As an international "language", football both binds together and separates different groups, also in the multi-ethnic Northern Norway.

The Sámi population is spread across four states. Over half live in Norway, while the remainders live in Sweden, Finland and Russia. The core Sámi area, Sápmi, covers roughly the northern regions of the Nordic countries and the Kola Peninsula. The livelihood of the Sámi has traditionally been based on utilizing natural resources both inland and on the coast. Fishing, hunting, foraging, agriculture and nomadic reindeer husbandry have constituted the fundament of Sámi livelihood and culture. Estimates of the size of the Sámi population are uncertain because the ethnic boundaries between the Sámi and the other ethnic groups in the area can be diffuse. One reason for this is the longstanding co-existence of the Sámi, Norwegians and the Kven people (ancestors of immigrants from Northern Finland during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century) as well as the historical Norwegianization process and the general modernization of North Norwegian society in the post-war period (Olsen 2008). Today most Sámi enter the same professions as other members of Norwegian society. There is no official demographic registration of ethnicity in Norway. The 1970 census was the last census to register ethnicity. According to Vilhelm Aubert (1978:113), a rough estimate based on the 1970 census is that there were a total of 40,000 Sámi in Norway in 1970. Depending on criteria, the estimates of the size of the Sámi population today are likely to vary. In Norway, the number of registered reindeer herding Sámi amounts to 3010 individuals (Severeide 2009). If the calculation is based on registration in the Norwegian Sámi electoral roll the number of Sámi in 2009 were 13,890 (Somby 2010). The Sámi population in Norway is, however, considerably larger than both these two calculations; only a small minority of the Sámi are occupied in reindeer herding and not all Sámi have registered in the electoral roll. Sta-

tistics Norway estimated the Sámi population to 38,470 people in 2008 (Severeide 2009). This estimate is geographically defined and counts the total population in the municipalities which are entitled to grants from the Norwegian Sámi Parliament's economic development funds.<sup>1</sup> The flaw in this estimate however, is that a large percentage of the population in these municipalities considers themselves as Norwegians or Kvens and not as Sámi. The Norwegian Sámi Parliament estimates the Sámi population to just over 100,000 people in Norway (Nordic Sami Institute 2010). According to researcher Odd M. Hætta a common estimate of the Sámi population is 40,000 to 60,000 in total, with half of them living in Norway. This estimate is based on language, ethnic and cultural affiliation and traditional livelihoods (Hætta 2002:15). The total population in Norway is 4.8 million. The varieties in estimates reflect the problem of defining Sámi ethnicity, a problem which in turn reflects the close relationship and interconnection between the ethnic groups in Northern Norway (Kramvik 1999). It also reflects the problem of determining ethnicity in general. The idea of ethnicity is closely connected with the equally complicated concept of identity which nonetheless plays an important role in studies of both sport and other cultural arenas. According to social anthropologist Finn S. Nielsen (2000), identity is "what a person identifies with" and therefore understands him- or herself as. A person's identity is constructed in society, or in meetings between the self and the generalized other (Benhabib 1986:402). In addition to individual identities, different collective identities exist and are constructed in meetings with other groups. The formation of ethnic identity is not distinctly different from the formation of identity in general.

According to Richard Jenkins, ethnicity "is situationally defined, produced and reproduced in the course of social transactions which occur at or across – and in the process help to constitute – the ethnic boundary in question" (Jenkins 1997:52). Jenkins refers to the Norwegian social anthropologist Fredrik Barth, who outlines ethnicity as constituted by its borders and by border meetings between different groups rather than by viewing individuals or groups as more-or-less determined, general "bearers" of norms and values of their culture (Barth 1969). In this notion an ethnic group does not have to share cultural traits or values. What makes them a group is their common understanding that they differ from "the other". In this way ethnic identity is fundamentally a feature of social or-

1 Hereafter the Norwegian Sámi Parliament will be referred to as the Sámi Parliament. Both Sweden and Finland have national Sámi Parliaments, but due to the focus on Sámi sport in Norway these two parliaments are not discussed in this article.

ganization rather than an aspect of culture (Barth 2001:835). In addition to these border transactions, Barth has also added the importance of history and tradition to the creation of ethnicity (Barth 2001). The borders that constitute ethnicity are diffuse and dynamic. This means that ethnic identity is constantly invented and reinvented.

Benedict Anderson understands nations as imagined communities. Anderson defined a nation as “an imagined political community [that is] imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1991:6). In this context, nation-building and cultivation of selected historical and cultural symbols are crucial for the national unit. As debated in this article, sport and certain aspects of physical practice can function in this way. It also becomes imperative to integrate, assimilate or repress minorities to preserve the history of the nation as a unified national history. According to Jenkins (1997:10) political nation building creates the nation’s understanding of its common ancestry and not the other way around. In accordance with this, an ethnic group is what (certain) people think and believe it is.

Considerable changes have taken place in the status of Sámi identity in Norway over the past 40 years. Up to the post-war period Sámi identity was stigmatized and characterized by far-reaching, tough assimilation policies by the Norwegian state (Minde 2005). The Norwegianization policy was from the 1950s gradually replaced by a minority policy that stressed integration and increased self-determination, a change that was partly driven by a dawning Sámi cultural and political awareness. Cultural mobilization was a necessary building block in the construction of a unifying Sámi identity as well as being a key factor in the ethno-political Sámi movement. This movement put forward demands for greater political and cultural rights for Sámi society (Selle and Bjerkli 2004). A cornerstone in this demand was that the Norwegian state recognized the Sámi as an indigenous people in accordance with Article 169 of the ILO Convention (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention) which Norway ratified in 1990, to pave the way for the preservation and development of Sámi culture. In 1989 the Sámi parliament was established in Karasjok (Josefsen 2007). The Parliament has become the cornerstone of Sámi politics, and the most prominent symbol of the Sámi’s special status as an indigenous people. The organization of Sámi sport was part of the cultural and political revival of “Sáminess” and part of the building of cultural and political institutions in Sápmi (Andresen 2003). The clear ethno-political objectives of sport were unequivocally expressed during

a seminar held by the SVL-N in 1996 when the feasibility of closer cooperation with the Norwegian Confederation of Sports (NIF) was examined:

Both Sámi art and Sámi sport are necessary instruments in building up and maintaining the self-esteem (self-image) of the Sámi population group, which in turn strengthens Sámi society. (Somy 1996)<sup>2</sup>

Internationally, minorities have used sports to highlight their identity, to express their opposition to the majority society and to conduct nation-building (Bale and Cronin 2003, Cronin and Mayall 1998, Jarvie 1991, Eisen and Wiggins 1994, Mangan and Ritchie 2004). In Canada, a sports movement sprung up among the indigenous peoples as a reaction to the Canadian authorities' use of sport in their assimilation policies vis-à-vis the indigenous population. Sport occupied a key position in the school system, which was the most important institution in this assimilation strategy (Forsyth and Wamsley 2006, King 2006, Paraschak 1997). Therefore a prime objective for the indigenous peoples was to regain control of their own sports practices and organization. The North American Indigenous Games (NAI Games) and the World Indigenous Nations Games (WIN Games) were important factors in the revitalization of the identity of indigenous peoples in Canada. Their leaders also wanted to use the games to establish an international network of indigenous peoples within sport (Forsyth and Wamsley 2006:303). This was realized with the establishment of the Arctic Winter Games (AWG) which were held for the first time in Yellowknife in 1970. Sámi sport became part of this international network the first time the Sámi participated in the AWG in 2004. Sport has also played a key role in Aotearoa – New Zealand, both in terms of the relationship between Pakeha and Maori and in the creation of Maori identity (Watson 2007, Thompson, Rewi and Wrathall 2000, McConnell and Edwards 2000). Rugby is a core element in the national identity of New Zealanders and has been understood as a space providing equal opportunities across ethnic borders (Ryan 2003, Hokowhitu 2004, Jacson and Hokowhitu 2002). At the same time, however, Hokowhitu (2004) shows that New Zealand sport has also contributed in reproducing ethnic and social power relations.

<sup>2</sup> All citations in this article have been translated by the author

Research on sport and ethnicity in Sámi areas is scarce (Pedersen 2006, 2008, Rafoss 1993, Rafoss and Pedersen 1989). This may seem like a paradox in view of the significance of sport in contemporary Norwegian society. Firstly, this lack of research may be viewed as a symptom of the general lack of research on sport and cultural issues in Norway. Secondly, Norwegian research on sport and identity has tended to understand Norwegian national identity and different local and regional identities in Norway as very ethnically homogeneous. Even though the historian Matti Goksøyr has published several works on sport and identity in Norway, none of them discusses ethnicity (Goksøyr 1994, 1996, 1998), just as none of the official historical portraits of the Norwegian sports associations does (Olstad and Tønnesson 1986, Goksøyr and Olstad 2002, Goksøyr 2010). Thirdly, it can be seen as a result of a view of sport as “just play” and therefore unimportant in the research on politics and other social issues.

## Organizing and reorganizing Sámi sport

Establishing a well-functioning Sámi sports organization has proved difficult. When the SVL was reorganized in 1990, the association planned to build transnational sports associations, but this proved difficult in view of insufficient membership and limited resources. The SVL-N has experienced difficulties in trying to shape the organization and its range of activities so as to increase its membership and activity level. According to both Hans Erik Varsi and Nils Peder Eriksen, two central SVL-N figures in the 1990s, a lack of funding and excessive pressure on voluntary helpers has prevented such a build-up.<sup>3</sup> It is only after 2000 that the SVL-N and later SSL have benefited from the more predictable financial framework of grants allocated by the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and the awarding of gaming funds. These new financial models gave the SVL-N greater possibilities to expand both its level of sports activities and its administration.

There was opposition to the establishment of a separate Sámi sports organization, both within Sámi society and Norwegian society at large in the 1980s. This opposition was based on the traditional view that sport

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3 Varsi, Hans Erik. SVL-N's first Chairman in 1990. Telephone interview 18.12.2008. Eriksen, Nils Peder. A Central figure in the SVL, SVL-N and in IL Nordlys. He has written several of SVL and SVL-N's enquiries. Telephone interview 18.12.2008.

and politics should not be mixed, and that it was particularly important not to be segregated in separate organizations in a multi-ethnic society such as in Finnmark. Another argument was that Sámi sports competitions were really attempts to woo young people in order to involve them in organizations with specific Sámi political goals (NOU 1987/34:122). At the same time, the founding members wanted to break the strong ties that existed between Sámi sport and the Sámi political movement. Varsi, who was appointed as SVL-N's first chairman in 1990, declares that this was a key argument in the discussions leading to the proposal to reorganize the SVL at the end of the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> To participate in the Sámi championships prior to the reorganization, membership of a local Sámi association was required. As a rule these were affiliated with the National Association for Norwegian Sámi People (NSR), an association with unambiguous ethno-political objectives. For the founding members it was important that participation in Sámi sport was linked to membership in a sports club which, in turn, was part of the SVL-N. Ties to political organizations ought to be severed. According to Varsi, "they wanted to remove sport from the political organization [because] not everyone was enthusiastic about this".<sup>5</sup> These ideals of political independence were incorporated in SVL-N's set of values, which state that it should be a politically neutral, independent Sámi sports organization based on Sámi cultural heritage (SVL-N 2007).

But even if the SVL-N adopted a policy of party-political independence, this did not mean that the founders thought Sámi sport should operate in an apolitical manner. They had clear ethno-political goals, an example of which is the reference made to the ILO Convention to justify demands for public funding.

To enable Sámi sport to survive, the public authorities must provide at least the same level of assistance as that given to other cultural and sporting organizations in society in general. This is a legitimate demand, because the Sámi are the only recognized indigenous group in Norway pursuant to the Constitutions. The ILO Convention also affords protection to minority peoples. Article 169 states that the Sámi themselves shall be given the opportunity to promote their own culture, language, social life, way of life etc. based on their own aspirations and ways of life (Eriksen 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Varsi, Hans Erik. SVL-N's first Chairman in 1990. Telephone interview 18.12.2008.

<sup>5</sup> Varsi, Hans Erik. SVL-N's first Chairman in 1990. Telephone interview 18.12.2008.



Thus, even if it may be claimed that Sámi Sport loosened its party political affiliation with the NSR, it was firmly established on an ethno-political platform.

The dividing lines in the debate on segregation ran along classical polarities in Sámi politics. The NSR was a zealous advocate of separate Sámi organizations while Samenes Landsforbund (SLF) (The Sámi National Union) had a more guarded approach (NOU 1987/34:122). Another reason for the opposition to the establishment of the SVL-N was that the range of sports activities offered by the NIF was seen by many as satisfactory, also for Sámi athletes.

The reorganization of SVL in 1990 provided a basis for a more organized structure for Sámi sport in Norway, and in due course this led to sport on the Norwegian side acquiring a leading position in SVL's joint Nordic association. The SVL-N organized the most teams and most members and was the best organized of the regional associations of the SVL. Even though the SVL-N had a leading position in Sámi sport, membership was small and the organization continued to be poor. In 2003, there were approximately 500 sportsmen and women who, as well as participating in sport under the auspices of the NIF, also took part in sport organized by the SVL-N. According to its own registers, SVL-N had 28 member clubs with 3,000 individual members in 2003. This included all the individual members in sports associations organized by the NIF who also took part in one or more of the events organized by SVL-N's (SVL-N 2004). Therefore, the 2003 figures gave an inflated picture of its actual size and activity. The vast majority of the 3,000 individuals only engaged in sport organized under the NIF, but were counted as SVL-N members because they belonged to an association that paid membership dues to the SVL-N. Nor did the Sámi Football Association (SSL) have many organized members; in 2004 it had 22 member associations, clubs and groups.

The fact that the established sports clubs in Finnmark that are affiliated to the NIF have shown little interest in SVL-N's activities, might help explain why the Sámi sport associations have few membership clubs and individual members. The majority of the members of the SVL-N and SSL have been organized in a few well-run sports clubs – Deanu Searat (Tana), IL Nordlys and Kautokeino IL. In addition to these NIF-based sports clubs, the membership of the SVL-N has comprised groups organized *ad hoc* – for example, teams that take part in the Sámi football championship. On such occasions teams are organized differently. IL

Nordlys, Porsanger FK, Tana FK and Avju, all NIF-registered teams, are the main teams to participate. The ad hoc teams are also often formed by players from clubs affiliated to the NIF. Although these teams consist of players who originate from NIF-based clubs, these teams play under Sámi names in the Sámi tournaments and has no formal affiliation to their NIF-based “mother” clubs during the tournaments. In addition to these teams, a number of Sámi associations take part in the Sámi Football Championship, such as Karasjoga Johttisamiid Searvi (Karasjok Nomadic Reindeer Herding Sámi association) and Maze Samiid Searvi (Maze Sámi Association) (SVL-N 2004). In addition, there are teams from reindeer grazing districts such as Lakkonjarga, rural clubs such as Mieron Gilisearvi, *siida* (reindeer husbandry) teams and *verde* (friendship) teams consisting of a mixture of Sámi and others such as Iesjoht Joavku and Johkgatte Searat (riverside forces; SVL-N 2004).

However, the SVL-N did not single out the small membership base as the main cause of the poor organization and lack of activity. The SVL-N’s own explanation for its organizational problems and scarce activity has, right up to the present, been the lack of funding from the Sámi and the Norwegian authorities. It has wished to have funding in place first and then to allow the expansion of the organization and the activities to follow on naturally. Sport clubs in Norway are usually funded by their members through membership fees and through public grants in accordance to the size of their membership base. A third reason put forward by the organization was that the extent of today’s administration/bureaucracy found in voluntary sports organization could in many ways be described as contrary to Sámi culture. In 1996 an SVL-N report stated that attitudes towards administrative bureaucracy in rural areas (in Sápmi) also as a rule differed from attitudes in large towns and urban settlements (SVL-N 1997:9). The same report states that as a bearer of traditional Sámi culture, Sámi sport is in many respects considered incompatible with today’s sports activity in terms of organization, administration and practice (SVL-N 1997:18). In this way, the focus was moved toward culture as an explanatory factor.

The SVL-N has three sub-committees – one for reindeer racing, one for skiing and summer events, and one for competence, development and culture (SVL-N 2010). These three committees reflect its prime sports objective, to disseminate sport based on physical practices linked to traditional Sámi reindeer herding culture. This also underlines that the association regarded sport as an important cultural arena. Identity-

building was to be specifically promoted through such activities as cross-country skiing, cross-country skiing combined with lasso-throwing, cross-country running combined with lasso-throwing, lasso-throwing and reindeer racing. These sports marked the Sámi identity through the historical bond with reindeer herding.

In addition to these traditional sports, the association organizes football. One can hardly claim that football is in any way related to traditional reindeer herding culture. The explanation for the inclusion of football as a Sámi sport is probably to be found in the power of football itself, which has had a strong position in the core Sámi areas of inner Finnmark over the last 40 years, both as an activity and as a cultural fellowship (Pedersen 2011). Defining football as a Sámi sport could be understood as a way to boost Sámi sport by recruiting more active members, getting better media coverage and better income. I will also argue that by incorporating football, the association emphasized that Sámi culture was dynamic and open to new stimuli. In this manner, Sámi sport showed an ambition to be seen simultaneously as a culture bearer and a modernizer of Sámi society. Despite this desire to incorporate football in the concept of Sámi sport while reaping the benefits from including the world's largest sport, there is arguably a discrepancy between football as the main sport being practiced within the SVL-N and its ideological and rhetorical basis. Sámi sport has always intended to showcase Sámi identity by promoting sport based on Sámi culture and tradition; football does not fit in to this picture.

## Sámi nation and identity building. The objectives of Sámi sport

The SVL-N has defined Sámi sport as sport carried out by the Sámi organized under the SVL(-N) and SSL, declaring that Sámi sport must be built on traditional Sámi culture and activities must be based on traditional Sámi reindeer husbandry culture (SVL-N 2008:1.3.). This ethnic dimension has been a fundamental idea throughout the entire history of the organization of Sámi sport, and distinguished the organization of Sámi sport from the NIF's approach that membership should be open for everyone regardless of background. In line with this, identity and nation-building has permeated both the SVL-N's and the SSL's statements on goals and sets of values. Sports objectives have occupied a sub-

ordinate and partly marginal place in the associations' statutes and goal statements. SVL-N's objects clause (section 2) states that its objective is to promote Sámi sport through Sámi traditions, cultural interaction and good fellowship (SVL-N 2006). One of the association's six ethical principles states that Sámi sport should promote Sámi culture, tradition and identity (SVL-N 2007).

The association's organization was based on a general understanding that the Sámi had the right to practice Sámi sport on Sámi terms (Eriksen 2004:2). The Sámi championships were to be reserved for Sámi competitors; the wish was to set up championships in selected disciplines, in which only Sámi competitors could be proclaimed champions (SVL-N 1997:3). This was an important element in enthusiasts' goal that sport should promote the building of Sámi identity, which became a "prime objective" that SVL intended to promote through its activities (SVL-N 1994a). In addition, there was a need to strengthen an organization which could preserve traditional Sámi physical practices and modify them in line with modern cultural expressions.

Another basic understanding was that the Sámi were *one* people separated by the borders of four states. Sámi sport was therefore to be without borders. These joint Nordic ambitions must primarily be interpreted as an expression of the fundamental ideological idea of Sápmi and the homogenous Sámi nation. In practice, it was a challenge to fulfill such ambitions, and this was often not even desired.

## The formation of the Sámi Football Association 2003

In 2003, Sámi football was reorganized. At the SVL's annual assembly in 2001, board member Leif A. Nilut presented a proposal to found a cross-border football association under its umbrella.<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that the SSL formally became an association under the SVL, it has emerged and operated on an independent basis regarding the adoption of statutes, objects clauses, administration and sports activity. Nilut, who became the SSL's first president, saw this as an important step for Sámi sport for two reasons. Firstly, it was important to strengthen the organization of the sport aspects and, secondly, he regarded the formation of the SSL

6 Nilut, Leif Aslak: President of the SSL from 2003 to 2008. Nilut has been a central figure in the organizing of Sámi football for several years. Telephone interview 9.12.2008.

as a natural consequence of the Sámi as a people that traverses borders. He found it natural that all organization of Sámi sport should be carried out through cross-border national associations rather than one association representing all sports based on national borders (SSL 2003a). Nilut played a decisive role in the SSL's reorganization, and to a large degree defined the terms for the new association. His involvement was motivated chiefly by his interest in Sámi organizational work and the significance of organizations for Sámi identity. He had previously played a central role in the establishment of a Sámi Artists' Association and a Sámi Music Association and also regarded the field of sport as being of key importance for the creation of Sámi identity.<sup>7</sup> Nilut's philosophy was that sport, especially football, was a matter of feelings and identity, making it a natural arena for the development of Sámi identity and culture. This understanding of football as a creator of identity also permeated the SSL's objects clause, statutes and regulations. In one of its sub-objectives, the understanding of football as suited to playing a role in the creation of identity emerges very clearly. The association must:

[...] strengthen the feeling of community among the Sámi [...] and strengthen the ties between the Sámi in the whole of Sápmi. Furthermore, through football Sápmi will become [...] better known and be more visible and respected among the general population who will be made aware that the Sámi are a people with international status as an indigenous people. (SSL 2003b, 2006a)

At the annual general meeting in 2010, however, total control of the SSL was located in the Norwegian part of Sápmi. The recommendation put forward by the election committee, naming Håkan Kuorak from Gällivare in Sweden as the president and Anne Kristine Balto from Karasjok in Norway as the vice-president, was rejected in favour of a motion from the floor that the sitting president, Mikkel Isak Eira from Kautokeino, remained in office. The remainder of the election committee's recommendation was also rejected. The new board, with one exception, now consisted of members solely from Kautokeino. This consolidated the Norwegian dominance of the SSL. This dominance was also evident in the SSL girl's U 16 team at the Arctic Winter Games in North America in 2010, which consisted exclusively of players from Norway. This un-

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<sup>7</sup> Nilut, Leif Aslak: President of the SSL from 2003 to 2008. Nilut has been a central figure in the organizing of Sámi football for several years. Telephone interview 9.12.2008.

derlines the wide division in relation to the associations' ideological goal that in its work the SSL shall consider Sápmi in its entirety and help to eradicate the boundaries between the countries the Sámi inhabit.

Sámi football is based on two pillars. One is the Sámi Football Cup which is held every summer, and the other is the Sámi national teams. The Sámi men's football team has played unofficial international matches sporadically since 1985. The women's football team played its first match in 1991, but 14 years elapsed before the team played again. In the last three years, a girls' team has been sent to the AWG. The Sámi Football Cup attracts players mainly from Norway and Sweden as well as a few teams from Finland. All the participating teams must be members of SSL. In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of teams competing totaled 20-25, but interest has declined over the past ten years and the number of teams entering the competition has fallen drastically. In 2009, the organizers (Tana Football Club) had to cancel the tournament because of insufficient enrolment (Guttorm 2009). The Sámi Football Cup has been open to all players and ethnic affiliation has not been a requirement for the players. The president of SSL from 2003 to 2008, Leif Isak Nilut, maintained that the Sámi Football Cup should be a meeting place for football players of all ethnic groups from the entire Sámi area.<sup>8</sup> Others have seen this as one of the main reasons why the Sámi Cup has lost its status as a leading tournament as the level of some teams has become too high since they have brought in players from the top three tiers of the Norwegian league system (Guttorm 2009).<sup>9</sup>

## Sámi football and the understanding of Sámi identity

When the Sámi national football team played its first game against Åland,<sup>10</sup> in its capital Mariehamn in July 1985, the expectations of the players were high. They had never met each other and by taking part in

8 Nilut, Leif Aslak: President of the SSL from 2003 to 2008. Nilut has been a central figure in the organizing of Sámi football for several years. Telephone interview 9.12.2008.

9 The top three tiers of the league system in Norway are the "Tippeligaen", the premier division sponsored by the Norwegian National Lottery (Norsk tipping), the first division and the second division (in practice the 2nd and 3rd tier). These are the three national leagues. Underneath these three national leagues, the league system contains regional leagues.

10 Åland is an island in the Baltic Sea under Finnish sovereignty with a population who mainly speaks Swedish.

a training camp prior to the game they were to be united as a team. The team consisted of players from the core Sámi areas in Sweden, Norway and Finland. In due course the team was welded together and gained a feeling of belonging.<sup>11</sup> The social fellowship created an important framework for the strengthened feeling of Sámi ethnicity experienced by several of the players. The fellowship in itself promoted identity creation for several of the players involved. The criteria for selection for the team were twofold. One was linked to language, and required that the players signed a document confirming that at least one grandparent spoke Sámi as one of the languages used at home. In addition, the players had to acknowledge their Sámi identity. According to Kalle Tjäder, all the players on the team felt an affinity with Sámi culture and with this part of their background. There were, however, national differences in the players' affiliation to the Sámi culture. Most players from the Norwegian side of the border came from the two large Sámi municipalities of Kautokeino and Karasjok and played for local clubs in Finnmark such as IL Nordlys of Karasjok, Kautokeino IL and Alta IF. Two players played for Oslo-based clubs in the Norwegian first division. All of them had a strong affiliation to Sámi society because of factors such as language, place of residence and a family in reindeer husbandry. All of them spoke Sámi. The players on the Swedish side came from larger towns such as Gällivare, Boden, Luleå and Umeå, towns that are not as typically Sámi as Kautokeino and Karasjok. They did not have a good command of the Sámi language; several understood it but none of them spoke the language. On Åland, this meant that when Sámi was used when giving information and during meetings, it was interpreted into Swedish. Tjäder, who lived in Stockholm and had grown up in Gällivare, was of the view that the Sámi national football team probably played an important role for the Swedish players in creating a sense of Sámi identity. For him, participation in the Sámi national team had played a decisive role in his acknowledgment of Sámi identity.

It appears nevertheless that the internal discussion of the identity question, which was common in the early years, became less frequent towards the end of the 1990s and the years following 2000. Tor Even Stamnes, who played on the team in the period 1991-2003, does not remember there being any discussion of affiliation to Sámi society and Sámi iden-

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11 Tjäder, Kalle: Footballer who played for the Sápmi National team from 1985 to 1993. He has been assistant coach for the Sápmi National team in several spells after 2000. Tjäder played both in Swedish and Norwegian league football from the early 1980s to 2000. Interview 3.12.2008.

tity among the players during his time on the national team.<sup>12</sup> Instead, discussions tended to be limited to sports-related issues. All three players on the Sámi national football team who were interviewed, particularly the two who did not have a strong association with core Sámi values, emphasized the identity-related significance the national team had had for their own relationship to their Sámi origins. Tjäder felt that it was quite natural to agree to play for the Sámi national team, saying “It felt right immediately... I felt an immediate association with the Sámi national team”, and he believed that playing for the team meant “an awful lot” for his acknowledgement of his own Sámi ethnicity. For example, he got to learn more of the language, which he felt was perhaps the most important Sámi characteristic.<sup>13</sup>

Before the game in Mariehamn, which Sápmi won 4-2, the flags of Åland and Sápmi were raised and the national anthems played. These national symbols clearly expressed national identity and what the teams represented. During the banquet that followed the game, the distinction between Norwegian and Swedish Sámi became more obvious. In addition to all the leaders – both Norwegian and Swedish – wearing the traditional Sámi *kofte*,<sup>14</sup> several of the players from Karasjok and Kautokeino did the same. None of the Swedish Sámi players did so.

The criteria for participating in the Sámi national team appear to have altered in line with what can be understood as a widening in the popular understanding of Sáminess. From being categorized in a relatively narrow sense with Sáminess being linked to the traditional inland Sámi population and reindeer herding culture, it has become a great deal more inclusive. Even though SSL's formal regulations remain the same as in 1985, the conception of what a Sámi is has changed. Accordingly, the interpretation of the ‘ethnic’ regulation has changed in practice. The recruitment base for the Sámi national team has been extended, ensuring that the pool of players today has a far wider geographical diversity. The understanding of Sámi ethnicity in the organization of the Sámi national team has changed in line with the ethno-political effort to include coastal

12 Stamnes, Tor-Even: Footballer who played for the Sápmi National team from 1991 to 2001. Stamnes played for Alta IF in the Norwegian 1. and 2. Division in the 1990s. Interview 5.12.2008.

13 Tjäder, Kalle: Footballer who played for the Sápmi National team from 1985 to 1993. He has been assistant coach for the Sápmi National team in several spells after 2000. Tjäder played both in Swedish and Norwegian league football from the early 1980s to 2000. Interview 3.12.2008.

14 Kofte is a traditional Sámi costume that today mainly is used on special occasions such as weddings.



and fjord areas in Finnmark, Troms and parts of Nordland in the interpretation of Sámi. A key reason for this was sporting considerations and the wish to have the best team possible. The amplified understanding of Sámi ethnicity meant that there were more players to choose from both in the Tippeligaen and at first division level. Hence, the fact that sporting considerations have grown in importance can be understood as connected to the growth of the principle of ethnic self-acknowledgment. This emerged clearly during the Viva World Cup in Monaco in 2006, when the squad mainly consisted of players from the Norwegian first and second division and with some from the Tippeligaen. In addition, one player played in the Finnish premier league, and two others in the Swedish first division<sup>15</sup> (Brennodden 2009). Very few of the players in the 1985 team played at national level. While all the Norwegian players in the 1985 side came from core Sámi areas, the squad in 2006 had only five from this area, and only two of the five were in the starting line-up. The other players came from coastal and fjord districts in North Norway and from towns such as Tromsø, Bodø, Alta and Hammerfest and played for clubs in these towns. This change reflects two factors. Firstly, a change in the understanding of Sámi ethnicity as more inclusive, according to which players with no apparent or noticeable features of Sáminess such as language, place of residence, family name or association with reindeer husbandry, are also included as Sámi. This change represents a general development in the understanding of Sámi identity, by which a growing number of groups and geographical areas have been included in the understanding of what Sámi is in the last 20 years. The other aspect that this change from 1985 to 2006 illustrates is that there has been a shift from the ethnicity criterion to other criteria, based to a greater degree on sporting performance, possibly reflecting a more relaxed approach to SSL's goals relating to culture and identity in favour of good sports results. On the other hand, this can also be interpreted as an attempt to achieve the ethno-political goals of strengthening Sámi identity and fellowship. By performing well on the pitch the Sámi national football team could become a unifying national symbol that Sámi people could be proud of all across Sápmi.

Whether the Sámi national football team has actually played a role as a national symbol of Sámi society outside football is uncertain. The team has received relatively little attention since the mid 1980s, and several of

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<sup>15</sup> The Swedish first division was in practice the third tier of Swedish football. Allsvenskan and Superettan equals the first and second tier in the Swedish league system.

the Viva World Cup tournaments have been perceived as farcical, poorly organized and displaying a low level of sporting performance. In the Viva World Cup in Monaco in 2006 the Sámi national team won the final with a score of 21-1. Despite this I will argue that the Sápmi national team appears to have opened up reflections on Sáminess and Sámi ethnicity in football environments in North Norway. In this way the team has contributed to a greater degree of tolerance and increased dialogue in what were understood formerly to be closed and clearly delimited ethnic categories.

## From sport to indigenous sport

Both SSL and SVL-N have underlined the importance that Sámi sport should be a part of an international sporting community. In the 1990s, its goal was to become part of the established international sport organizations. SVL's goal on the international stage was to be admitted into the broad international sports family including the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Ski Federation (FIS) the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and the World governing football body (FIFA) (SVL-N 1994). Membership of these large international sports organizations was regarded important by the SVL for two reasons. First, membership was important for the development of Sámi sport:

For Sámi sport to provide an alternative for Sámi men and women, it is essential to participate internationally. If no initiatives are made internationally, the development will cease, and Sámi sport will remain a phenomenon that is found on the plains and mountain plateaus." SVL-N 1994)

Second, SVL was of the opinion that membership was important for the recognition of Sámi culture and society. The leaders of SVL-N regarded the inclusion of a Sámi sports *siida*<sup>16</sup> at the Lillehammer Olympics in 1994 as instrumental for achieving international recognition. According to an SVL-N report, Sámi culture would experience enormous interna-

<sup>16</sup> The *siida* organization is the traditional way to organize the reindeer herding Sami community. A *siida* is a Sami reindeer foraging area, a group for reindeer herding and a corporation working for the economic benefit of its members. It can also refer to the place or the campsite of a reindeer herding group. The *Sámi sports Siida* can be understood in this latter way; as the *Sámi sports camp*.

tional recognition through participation in the Olympics. Furthermore, the SVL-N hoped that through the Olympics Sámi sport would be seen as being capable of standing on its own feet and perhaps in time be able to compete under the Sámi flag (SVL-N 1994a). However, participation in the Winter Olympics at Lillehammer was characterized by conflict with the organizer of the official Lillehammer Sámi cultural *siida*, which resulted in SVL-N organizing its own *siida* at Øyer outside Lillehammer (SVL-N 1994b). The crux of the conflict was the distribution of profits resulting from the reindeer racing and reindeer herding competitions for which SVL-N was intended to have responsibility. This resulted in the cutback of SVL's programme and of the marketing of Sámi sport. For a long time, a stated goal of the Sámi Football Association was membership of UEFA.<sup>17</sup> However, in 2005 SSL's President Leif Isak Nilut realized that this was unrealistic because UEFA's regulations prevented stateless nations from gaining such membership.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the goal of internationalizing Sámi sport was abandoned. The focus was moved from membership in the large and top-heavy organizations to membership in other alternative international sports associations. In the case of football, this meant a change of focus toward involvement in the alternative football association N.F.-Board.<sup>19</sup> Initially N.F.-Board was to function as an intermediate station for membership in FIFA/UEFA for football associations outside these organizations. When N.F.-Board was established in 2003, the association was to organize nations, regions and peoples who had not been accepted as members of these international federations. Associations from places such as Sahara Occidental, North Cyprus, Tibet, Zanzibar, Somaliland, Greenland, Padania and Monaco became members of the association (NF-Board 2009). When SSL realized that membership in UEFA was a utopian vision, the policy was adopted that it would be preferable to develop an alternative world championship under the auspices of N.F.-Board. Following Nilut's departure from office as president of the SSL, however, the long-term goal of becoming members of UEFA has resurfaced. As this goal is unattainable in the foreseeable future the

17 Nilut, Leif Aslak: President of the SSL from 2003 to 2008. Nilut has been a central figure in the organizing of Sámi football for several years. Telephone interview 9.12.2008.

18 Today there are some exceptions to these rules. For historical reasons, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England are independent members of UEFA, despite the fact that they are part of the United Kingdom. In addition, the Faroe Islands are a member of UEFA although they come under the Kingdom of Denmark.

19 *Nouvelle Fédération-Board*, unofficially also known as the *Non-FIFA-Board*.

short term goal is to help develop the N.F.-Board system and the Viva World Cup (SSL 2010).

Even if N.F.-Board consists of football associations who represent very different regions – everything from Sealand (an occupied sea fort off the coast of England) to Greenland and North Cyprus – SSL has regarded membership as a key factor in the development of Sámi sport as part of a global fellowship of minority groups and indigenous peoples. This was clearly shown in 2005 during N.F.-Board’s congress in London when delegates discussed the criteria for players chosen to represent the various teams. Gibraltar had a residential requirement while Monaco had a rule that players had to have lived within a radius of 20 kilometers from the principality for a certain period of time (Menary 2007:36). After a prolonged debate and strong disagreement among the delegates, SSL’s President, Leif Isak Nilut, rose and performed a *joik* (a traditional Sámi form of song). This was intended to illustrate what being a Sámi meant and the significance of playing for the Sámi national team. After the song, Nilut said, “We play for the Sápmi team because that is who we are. We are not a state, we live in four different countries, but it’s about where you belong” (Menary 2007:36). This view that self-acknowledgment had to apply as the main criterion gained the approval of the congress, and N.F.-Board’s President, Christian Michelis, formulated it in this way: “People must choose why they want to play from the outset” (Menary 2007:36). N.F.-Board was intended to be different from FIFA and to be open for “the people”; it was to be a meeting place for marginalized peoples with a focus on fellowship and friendship through football (Menary 2007:36-37). The desire to link Sámi sport to the indigenous dimension was made even clearer and achieved greater impact through participation in the Arctic Winter Games (AWG) from 2005 onwards.

The shift in SVL’s international focus towards indigenous sport changed the status of Sámi sport among the Sámi public authorities. Following their incorporation in the indigenous fellowship, the SVL-N and SSL gained greater power vis-à-vis those responsible for budgetary allocations in the Sámi Parliament. Both the Sámi Parliament and the Sámi political parties were made more aware of the importance of establishing ties between the indigenous peoples of the Arctic through sport. The President of the Sámi Parliament, Egil Olli (the Norwegian Labor Party’s Sámi Parliamentary group, hereafter DNA) deemed it of great importance that young Sámis had the opportunity to experience fellowship with other indigenous peoples. According to him, participation in

the AWG at Yellowknife in Canada in 2008 stood out as an event of great value and importance for Sámi society. In particular he highlighted the indigenous dimension and the cultural aspect.

During the AWG young Sámi who are actively engaged in the field of culture and sport have the opportunity to develop reciprocal cooperation across country borders, and at the same time to meet and feel affiliation with young people from other indigenous groups and from other Arctic regions. (Olli 2008)

In 2005 the then President of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament, Sven Roald Nystø (NSR) expressed this even more clearly when he said that for him it was clearer than ever before that it was here (as participants in the AWG) that the Sámi belonged (Nystø 2005). In his opinion participation strengthened the inner sense of belonging among the Sámi even though they were divided by national borders. At the same time, being part of the AWG was to promote the sense of affiliation with other indigenous groups participating in these games (Nystø 2005). Participation in the AWG gave SVL's work a new dimension due to the fellowship with other indigenous peoples. According to Nystø there was a sense of kinship and affiliation (Nystø 2005). Nystø encouraged SVL to give participation in the AWG high priority so that it could perhaps be possible in the long-term to arrange the games in Sápmi. He promised support from the Norwegian Sámi Parliament for this international indigenous peoples' cooperation. Sport thus became part of what Ronald Niezen has described as "indigenism," a term used to describe the international movement that aspires to promote and protect the rights of the world's "first peoples" (Niezen 2003:4). According to Niezen "The concept of 'indigenous peoples' is in part a tool for clarification of identity through a global assertion of the values of community" (Niezen 2003:215-216). This global indigenous network also worked as a tool to affirm local claims of difference. The Sámi was a part of the world's indigenous peoples in contrast to the "others" of North Norway; the Norwegians and the Kvens.

## Sámi sport, the Sámi Parliament and Sámi party politics

From the outset, the basis of Sámi sport has been to preserve and develop Sámi culture and tradition (SVL-N 1997). According to SVL-N this made it natural for the Sámi Parliament to become involved in Sámi sport. In the first decade following the establishment of the Sámi Parliament however, sport did not play a significant role in its cultural policy. This was evidenced by the limited awareness of the symbolic value of sport among the political parties that were represented in the Parliament. This scant awareness was reflected in the small financial allocations to the sports associations. The fact that allocations from the Sámi Parliament became more predictable from 2002 onwards was associated with a growing interest among Sámi politicians for making use of Sámi sport as a tool in Sámi nation-building. This interest arose because of SVL's participation in the AWG and the Viva World Cup.

All the main parties in the Sámi Parliament have articulated their policies on Sámi sport. The awareness of sport's power to create identity and as a meeting place for the Sámi ethnicity has increased, and is shown by the mention of sport in the parties' election manifestos and by the fact that the parties have signalled a willingness to support Sámi sport financially. They all highlight the significance of sport in identity creation, its central position in society and the indigenous dimension that arises in international sport activities as the justification for financial support. For instance, The election manifesto for 2005–2009 of the NSR asserts that:

[...] A strong Sámi sports life is an important identity factor for young people, and this strengthens solidarity regarding joint values and norms. It is important to have arenas in which Sámi people from all parts of Sápmi can participate together in sporting activities and competitions. NSR will push to give Sámi sports and youth organizations opportunities to work on joint Sámi sports activities and sports-related issues. (NSR 2008)

In 2005, DNA suggested among other things an increase in allocations to Sámi sport in its budget proposal for 2006 (Arbeiderpartiets same-tingsgruppe 2005). The Sámi People's Party (SáB) also highlighted the importance of sport for nation-building, stressing that sport strengthens the unity achieved by common values and norms across the Sámi community (SáB 2005). The Centre Party, in addition to stressing sport's

cultural values, also emphasized the importance of sport as a leisure time activity for children and adolescents, and its role in stimulating greater physical activity (Senterpartiet 2009).

The relationship between Sámi sport and the Sámi parliament and political system has primarily been characterized by a desire for financial support from the Parliament as the authority responsible for budget allocations. It took the Sámi Parliament some time to accept the SVL-N's and SSL's demands that sport activity should be placed on an equal footing with other Sámi cultural activities in budget allocations. Without substantial revenues from fees from a broad membership base and without the award of any gaming revenues, the Sámi Parliament was the most important source of funding for the organizations. Prior to 1990, the SVL-N mainly received funding for special arrangements such as the annual Sámi Football Cup and the Sámi Ski Championship. In addition, it now and again received *ad hoc* grants for the Sámi national football team's games. From 1991 to 1995, the SVL-N received between NOK 80,000-100,000 in funding from the Sámi Parliament, which was a small amount compared with the grants to Sámi sport in Sweden and Finland at that time. The SVL-N was extremely dissatisfied with this. In 1996, it estimated that it had an annual budgetary requirement of between NOK 400,000 and 1,000,000. This sum would cover fixed administration costs as well as a wider range of activities and recruitment work (SVL-N 1996a). The Sámi Parliament allocated NOK 100,000 that year. When it appeared that the Sámi parliament was unwilling to fulfil these demands, the SVL-N examined the possibility of being accepted as a national association in the NIF. However, it proved that such an affiliation would be contrary to its own statutes. The flirt with the NIF was probably first and foremost an attempt to highlight the value of Sámi sport for the Sámi Parliament and to exert pressure in order to attain an increase in budget allocations.

The SVL-N must continue to trust that the Sámi Parliament will in the very near future find sports activity of importance for Sámi society, and thereby grant the necessary funding allowing the SVL-N to establish its own secretariat. (SVL-N 1997)

The SVL-N argued that the association had to be included as a permanent item on the budget of the Sámi Parliament, put on par with other Sámi cultural institutions such as the Beaivvás Sámi Theater (SVL-N 1996a). It also asked the Sámi Parliament to push for the Norwegian state to grant

earmarked funds from the gaming revenues that are distributed to sport in Norway. Such an allocation was only natural, the SVL-N argued, because Finnmark's population in general, and the Sámi municipalities in particular, were at the top of the national gaming statistics, placing most bets in Norway (SVL-N 1996 a and b).

The relationship between Sámi sport and politics shifted after 2000, leading to an increased acceptance of the demands of Sámi sport for funding and recognition in line with other Sámi cultural organizations. The key reasons for this new relationship were probably that Sámi sport remained independent and that its international focus was on indigenous sport. In 2002, the SVL-N was finally included as a fixed item on the Sámi Parliament's budget when NOK 500,000 was allocated to the association. This sum has increased up to the present time. In 2005, the allocation had increased to NOK 650,000, while in 2007 it totaled NOK 925,000. In 2009 the total allocation had decreased to NOK 1,629,000, before rising to a total of NOK 2,416,000 in 2010. In 2010 SVL-N was handed NOK 800,000 to the participation in the AWG, while they received NOK 150,000 both in 2009 and 2011 for this purpose. In the 2011 budget the Sámi sports organizations has in total been allocated NOK 1,847,000.<sup>20</sup>

In 2005, Sámi sport received a share of the Norwegian states' gaming revenues for the first time, when the then Norwegian Minister of Culture and Church Affairs, Trond Giske, allocated NOK 300,000 to be distributed by the Sámi Parliament. In 2002 the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet) declined SVL-Ns application because the ministry assessed SVL-Ns activity as not "of such a magnitude that it will automatically qualify for direct grants for the operation of the organization" (kommunal og regionaldepartementet 2002). The Sámi President at the time, Sven Roald Nystø (NSR), regarded the grant as an indication that Sámi sport had finally been given the state recognition it deserved. Nystø thanked the SVL-N for their longstanding struggle to achieve such recognition (Kuhmunen 2005). The Sámi Parliament had requested the Minister of Culture and Church Affairs to allocate NOK 6 million for Sámi sport in the 2006 budget. Terje Tretnes, a member of the Sámi Parliament Council at the time, however, suggested that allocating NOK 300,000 out of a total gaming revenues pot of NOK 1.7 billion was ungenerous (Tretnes 2006).

20 The Sámi Parliaments Budget 2011, point 3.2.3 Samisk idrett, page 44. Samediggi. <http://www.sametinget.no/filnedlasting.aspx?FilId=2965&ct=.pdf>. 01.12.2010, Read 07.04.2011.



The new struggle to be awarded part of the distributed gaming revenues led to friction between the central authorities, the Sámi Parliament and the SVL-N. For the SVL-N the core of the struggle was that Sámi sports organizations should be on the same footing as NIF. The argument of the Ministry was based on an assessment that the existing activity of the SVL-N was too small for this to be fair. For the Sámi Parliament, however, this wish was probably related to a desire for recognition of Sámi culture, and with the central authorities fulfilling their duties vis-à-vis the Sámi as an indigenous people.

## Conclusion

Despite its weak organization and limited sports activity, organized Sámi sport has achieved recognition in Sámi political life from 2000 onwards. The ethno-political power of sport paved the way for grants from the Sámi Parliament. The segregation policy of Sámi sport can be seen as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it facilitated a successful ethno-political strategy, implying that Sámi culture and sport was completely different from its Norwegian counterpart, while emphasizing the right of the Sámi to manage their own organizations in line with international conventions for indigenous peoples. On the other hand, this policy can also be regarded as one crucial reason why Sámi sport has not truly succeeded in becoming a broad and popular sport movement. Cronin and Mayall have alleged that confining indigenous sport to separate organizations or to ethnically-based or “native” sports have also excluded identity-creating competition with “the others” (Cronin and Mayall 1998). Sámi sports organizations have precluded the opportunity of competing with “the Norwegian” clubs within the NIF. Perhaps this has contributed to making Sámi sport less attractive to Sámi sportsmen and women.

This policy of segregation must be interpreted in light of the general development of organizations within Sámi society and the development of the ethno-political movement over the last 30 years. The development of the SVL-N can be understood as expressing a desire to strengthen national Sámi organizations and institutions in line with the Norwegian institutions. The build-up of organized sport as part of the Sámi organizations and institutions helped to create a modern Sámi identity, which in turn played an integral role in linking Sámi identity to the international indigenous peoples’ movement. From being an individual and per-

sonal matter, the ethno-political Sámi movement has worked to shape ethnic Sámi identity as also being a national identity linked to national institutions and symbols. Key factors in this institutional and national development have been the Sámi Parliament, political organizations and parties, Sámi educational and research institutions, the Sámi media, business and cultural organizations, national symbols such as the flag, the national costume and the Sámi national anthem. The Sámi Sports Association and the Football Association, Sámi national teams and the national team's strips have been and continue to be part of this movement. While traditionally, Sámi identity was based on the interaction of local families and the Siida system, it has now been institutionalized as a common identity for Sámi across a wide geographical expanse (Selle and Bjerkli 2004).

Although Sámi sport has not attracted a huge following, the SVL's activities have been of importance for the individual athlete's understanding of his/her own (Sámi) identity, and for the collective understanding of what Sámi sports identity entails. In about 2000, Sámi sport also became an important arena for asserting that Sápmi belonged to the international society of indigenous peoples. Through the Viva World Cup and participation in the AWG, the self-understanding of the Sámi as an indigenous people improved. Such international competitions stressed fellowship with other minorities and indigenous peoples, and at the same time as marking the contrast with 'Norwegian' sport. Thus, I would maintain that the traditional view of sport as cementing pre-existing differences between competitors, as alleged for example by MacClancy (1996), does not apply to the international environments in which the SVL and SSL participate. On the contrary, these competitions helped articulate a sense of fellowship and belonging among the competitors. The Viva World Cup and the AWG were experienced as events in which competition was characterized by cultural and historical fellowship. This in turn emphasized the contrast with 'Norwegian' sport and helped to strengthen the understanding of the Norwegians as "the others".

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