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The Development of Sámi Sport, 1970–1990: A Concern for Sweden or for Sápmi?

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ABSTRACT

It is widely agreed that sport and national identity are two interwoven phenomena. Recently, researchers have taken an interest in how sport has been used for nation-building purposes among groups not defined in terms of nation-states. These include the Sámi, an Indigenous people living in an area that extends over the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Sámi championships and a Sámi national football team have been important elements in shaping a Sámi national identity across the state borders. Against this background, the historical development that led to the formation in 1990 of a Sámi National Sports Federation was highly complicated. The period from 1970 to 1990 was fraught by the dilemma of how sport was to be organized – based on the division of the Sámi by state borders or through a transnational Sámi sports organization. The outcome was a compromise in that the Sámi National Sports Federation was founded as an umbrella organization under which Sámi in Norway, Sámi in Finland, and Sámi in Sweden established separate and autonomous Sámi ‘district associations’.

The world of sport consists of countless nations, many of which are small. Some are actually smaller than Sápmi. In the world of sport, it is not necessary to have sovereign states, with territories of their own, to participate in the Olympics and in world championships. The Sámi now want to become members of the global family of sport, with their own national sports association. Founded in Kiruna on 1 December 1990. The day when the Sámi sports movement agreed that sport in Sápmi should have no borders. Now the Sámi want to win sporting events large and small, under their own flag and with the Sámi national anthem played in the world’s arenas.1

The Swedish Sámi youth magazine Sáminuorra published the words above in 1990 in connection with the foundation of the Sámi National Sports Federation. The Sámi are an Indigenous people without a state of their own, inhabiting an area named Sápmi, which comprises the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The newly founded association thus extended over several state borders in the North Cape. These borders were unclear until well into early modern times, but when Denmark-Norway, Sweden-Finland and Russia began to collect taxes from the
population in the north, the need arose to define the borders more precisely. An addendum to the Treaty of Strömstad in 1751 defined the exact course of the border between Norway and Sweden-Finland. This addition, the so-called Lapp Codicil, ensured the right of the Sámi (especially the nomadic reindeer herders) to cross the border without hindrance. In the nineteenth century, however, the political climate between the states hardened, resulting in the restricting of freedom of the Sámi and the closing of the borders. The breakthrough of the modern western idea of the nation-state led to a shift in that the identification as Sámi took second place to identification based on citizenship.²

The size of the Sámi population is difficult to establish as there are no ethnic censuses in the Nordic countries. How many people identify as Sámi is therefore uncertain, but according to one estimate, the number is 80,000–100,000, of whom 50,000–65,000 live in Norway, 20,000–40,000 in Sweden, about 8,000 in Finland and about 2,000 in Russia.³ Nonetheless, today elected Sámi parliaments exist in Norway (established in 1989), Sweden (established in 1993) and Finland (established in 1996). The influence and powers of these Sámi parliaments vary from one country to another, as does the official status of the Sámi.⁴ Although the Swedish Parliament recognized the Sámi as an Indigenous people in 1977, Sweden has not ratified ILO 169, an international convention that secures and protects Indigenous peoples’ rights to their land, whereas Norway did so in 1990.⁵

The Sámi ethnopolitical movement started as early as the first half of the twentieth century, when Sámi associations were founded in Sweden, which in 1950 merged into the National Association of Swedish Sámi. In the same year, the Swedish Sámi Ski Association (Svenska Samernas Skidförbund) became the first Sámi sports organization. One purpose of this association was to organize the Sámi Championships, an annual ski sport event first held in 1948 in Jokkmokk in Sweden. The sports comprising this championship proceeded from the traditional practices of reindeer herding, with competitions in cross-country skiing and a reindeer herders’ relay race (a patrol competition where three-man teams skied, lassoed reindeer antlers and shot at targets in the shape of wolves).⁶

From the beginnings in the late 1940s and throughout the next two decades, the Sámi Championships were a concern solely for Sámi in Sweden.⁷ Although voices called for the event to be opened to Sámi in the surrounding countries, the leaders of the Swedish Sámi Ski Association were uncompromising. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Sámi Championships remained a competition for Sámi in Sweden only. Consequently, during the first decades of the Sámi Championships, the picture that emerged was that of the Sámi as an ethnic minority in Sweden, rather than as a transnational people.⁸ In the early 1970s, however, Sámi sport underwent a noticeable ideological change. As is particularly evident from the opening quotation, sport expresses the image of the Sámi as a nation with a flag and a national anthem of its own. These changes contributed to the creation of the Sámi National Sports Federation in 1990, establishing a transnational Sámi sports movement.

The crucial developments of the process that led to the formation of the transnational Sámi National Sports Federation took place in Sweden, which for decades was the only country where organized Sámi sport occurred. Moreover, it was
sports leaders on the Swedish side who began to pursue the issue of organizing Sámi sport across the state borders. Whereas previous research on Sámi sport has mostly dealt with the situation in Norway from 1990 onwards, the role of the Swedish side in the establishment of the Sámi National Sports Federation has been invisible. Since the development of Sámi sport in Sweden differs markedly from that in Norway, a nuanced picture of the history of Sámi sport is required.

Sport contributed significantly to the creation of a Sámi nation, although challenges arose when organized Sámi sport went from being an annual skiing championship in Sweden to becoming a transnational Sámi sports movement with its own national federation. The intentions held by the key actors in Sámi sports organizations between 1970 and 1990 and the tensions that arose after the implementation of these intentions demonstrate the dilemma that characterized Sámi sport throughout the whole period. The dilemma revolved around the question of whether Sámi sport should be organized according to the division of the Sámi by state borders or through a transnational Sámi sports organization. The dilemma was not only of an organizational nature as much as a question of how to express the Sámi identity through sport. Whereas some regarded Sámi sport as a concern for Sweden, others looked upon it as a tool to transcend the state borders in order to express a Sámi national identity.

The Sámi Nation

Sport and national identity are two interwoven phenomena. The ‘metaphorical warfare’ waged in international sporting spectacles such as the Olympic Games, as maintained by several researchers, has been especially significant in legitimizing the hegemonic position of the nation as an object of collective identification, even in a time of increased globalization and mobility across state borders. As argued by historian Eric Hobsbawm, the impact of football in the construction of national identities cannot be underestimated, since ‘[t]he imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people’. Benedict Anderson defined the nation as an ‘imagined political community’, since it ties together people who for the most part have never met and who will never meet or hear tell of each other. Sports scholars, however, have criticized the excessively mechanical use of the concept of nation, especially the taken-for-granted linkage of nation and state in sports contexts. By detaching nation from state in international sports contexts, Hywel Iorwerth, Alun Hardman, and Carwyn Rhys Jones have sought to shed light on groups that do not define themselves in terms of citizenship but rather with respect to ethnic-cultural identity.

The latter applies in large measure to the Sámi with their status as an Indigenous people, a non-dominant group within a state with an acknowledged claim to Indigenous status within a geographical area. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen has pointed out, the term ‘Indigenous’ does not necessarily mean that a group claims to have been the first to settle in an area. Such populations do, however, represent a non-industrial mode of production and a lifestyle that makes the group vulnerable in relation to the surrounding society. Eriksen, moreover, points out that ‘Indigenous
peoples nonetheless stand in a potentially conflictual relationship to the nation-state as an institution’. The aim is nevertheless rarely to establish a nation-state of their own, but rather to continue to live as a ‘culture-bearing group’.15

Over and above the definition of the Sámi as an Indigenous people, the late twentieth century saw the rise of the idea of Sápmi as a Sámi nation. As the historian Lars Elenius says, Sápmi is an example of a ‘symbolic nation’, or an ‘ethnopolitically imagined nation’, within which language, history, culture, and a shared territory are held up as identity markers. The relevance of talking about a symbolic nation is that it can be regarded as a stage in a postmodern identity creation that challenges ‘the posttraditional nation-state’ and in this way becomes a platform for political aspirations.16

Unlike the symbolic nation, the nation-state consists of a territory where the geographical borders are connected to a state apparatus with a far-reaching concentration of power as regards the monopoly on violence, taxation, and legislation, for example.17 By emphasizing non-dominant cultural and political markers, such as a language that is not the official language of the nation-state or a geographical territory that does not coincide with the borders of the state, the symbolic nation can challenge the dominance of the nation-state. Central markers of Sápmi in its capacity as a symbolic nation are, for example, the Sámi languages and a territory that extends across several different states. As regards the latter, Sápmi can thus be additionally defined as a transnational symbolic nation. In this context, ‘transnational’ refers to processes whereby networks, organizations and relations are established that transcend the political borders of sovereign states. Within these processes, new identities and new concepts of the nation are constructed, based on territories and forms of community that cross state borders.18

The rise of Nordic Sámi championships is thus a stage in a transnational process to construct a symbolic nation.19 The term ‘Nordic’ may however seem misleading in that it usually refers to the Nordic countries of Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, thus excluding the Soviet – later Russian – part of Sápmi. The fact that the transnational Sámi sports movement often called itself ‘Nordic’ should, nevertheless, not be interpreted to mean that there was a desire to exclude Sámi on the Russian side. The reason was rather that bureaucracy and closed borders rendered it impossible to incorporate the Russian part of Sápmi in the Sámi sports movement (see the section ‘Divided sport’).
Janice Forsyth and Kevin B. Wamsley have shown how Indigenous sports leaders in Canada have reshaped sport from having been an instrument for assimilation in the hands of the majority society to becoming a means for the cultural revitalization of Indigenous peoples. The establishment of an all-Native sport system separated from the Eurocanadian sport system was a step in this process, as were the efforts behind the initiation of the North American Indigenous Games and the visions of a World Indigenous Nations Games.\textsuperscript{20}

Previous research has also examined other sports events that can be viewed as counterparts to the Sámi championships, in that the forms of competition in these events have their roots in the traditional cultures of Indigenous peoples. Like the sports that are practised at the Sámi championships, these events form a contrast to the ‘mainstream’ sport of the dominating society. An important sports event for Indigenous people are the Northern Games. This Inuit event, which has existed since 1970, was first held in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories of Canada. As pointed out by Victoria Paraschak, the organizers did not prioritize standardized rules at the event and the schedule was very flexible. By organizing the Northern Games in this alternative manner, it thus ‘challenged the naturalness of Eurocanadian-derived sport as the sole, “legitimate” form of government-sponsored physical activity’.\textsuperscript{21}

In several studies, the focus lies on the opportunities and the challenges that arose when Indigenous peoples renegotiated and transformed elements of their traditional practices into competitive activities performed at games and sports festivals, such as the Dene Games, first held in 1977.\textsuperscript{22} The Dene Games involve physical skills and contain the traditional games of the northern Athapaskans, a First Nations community. Michael K. Heine has described the incorporation of events and competitions from the Dene Games into the Arctic Winter Games during the 1990s. The latter is a circumpolar sporting festival, founded in 1969, containing competitions in ‘mainstream’ and Indigenous sports. The inclusion of the Dene Games in the Arctic Winter Games had, according to Heine, an important function in revitalizing traditional practices of Athapascan culture. However, since the games are not fully compatible with the ‘performance principle’ of modern sport (i.e. focussing on winning), the challenge has been to emphasize their cultural meanings rather than the results and outcomes.\textsuperscript{23}

Audrey Giles has highlighted a gender-related tension regarding the Dene Games, in which several competitions are exclusively male events. Giles analyzes this circumstance by problematizing the concept of ‘tradition’. She defines the tradition as an outcome of power relations where certain interpretations are suggested, while others are invisible. In this case, when speaking of the revitalization of traditional practices, ‘[t]he voices of Dene women have been conspicuously absent from discussions concerning Dene Games’.\textsuperscript{24}

As with Indigenous peoples’ sports organizations in North America, Sámi sport stems from practices and skills with roots in the traditional Sámi reindeer herding culture.\textsuperscript{25} In addition to cross-country skiing, reindeer herders’ relay races and lassoing, reindeer racing is a popular Sámi sport, particularly in Norway.\textsuperscript{26} Although organized Sámi sport arose in Sweden as early as the 1940s, research has largely concerned aspects related to Norway.\textsuperscript{27} However, a transnational perspective is
apparent in sports historian Helge C. Pedersen’s study of the history of Sámi sport from 1990 onwards. Pedersen found that sport has been an important tool in shaping a Sámi national identity across state borders and in strengthening the image of the Sámi as an Indigenous people. Sámi participation in the Arctic Winter Games since 2004 has particularly boosted this image, Pedersen argues.28

In a study on sport in Sámi areas in northern Norway, sports scholars Kirsti Pedersen and Kolbjørn Rafoss describe the emergence of cross-border Sámi sporting events as follows: ‘Since 1971, the Saami skiing championships in Sweden have been open to Saami from the other Nordic countries, and both elite and recreational participants can take part’.29 This description, however, is oversimplified. Although the emergence of Sámi Championships open to all Sámi was in fact a complicated process, previous research has depicted it as relatively smooth, likely a result of the prominence of Norwegian perspectives in current research.30 Sámi in Norway encouraged the idea of Sámi Championships for all Sámi, regardless of citizenship. Among Sámi in Sweden, however, opinions were divided. On the one hand, a younger generation of Sámi sport leaders arose in the 1970s whose intention was to make Sámi sport independent of state borders and incorporate it in the symbolic creation of a Sámi nation. On the other hand, a faction opposing this ambition developed, instead advocating a policy of organizing sport on the basis of citizenship.

The Awakening of Sámi Sport in the Early 1970s

After a strong first decade following the establishment of the Sámi Ski Association, Sámi sport declined in the 1960s. Sámi associations31 in Sweden showed little interest in organizing the Sámi Championships, which meant that the Sámi Ski Association had to cancel the event five times during the decade.32 The reasons for this decline are a matter of speculation, although the lack of interest in sport shown by Sámi associations and Sámi villages and the fact that the board of the Swedish Sámi Ski Association did not forcefully encourage the Sámi associations to arrange the event likely led to these frequent cancellations. A turning point came at the start of the 1970s, when both competitors and organizers regarded some of the championships as a success.33

An awakening occurred within Sámi sport in the early 1970s. In order to understand the new directions that Sámi sport took during these years the ideas and the actions of the sport leaders must be scrutinized. This was a consequence of the increased commitment displayed by the leadership of the Swedish Sámi Ski Association, which also resulted in extensive changes to the form in which the Sámi Championship was held in Jokkmokk in 1973. Under the leadership of Anders Stoor, its chairperson, new statutes and competition rules were adopted, and the name was changed from the Swedish Sámi Ski Association to the Sámi Sports Federation34 (and from 1975 the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation).35

The name change signalled the broader scope that the executive board wished to achieve. The intention was that Sámi sport should not only include skiing and other winter sports but also football and athletics.36 To the chagrin of the sports federation, the Sámi associations continued to show a decreasing interest in the Sámi
Championships. As an argument for persuading the Sámi associations to change their attitude, the board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation stressed the importance of sport for the Sámi people’s cultural aspirations: ‘We all feel responsibility for our culture. Sámi sport is a living part of the cultural heritage. So it should not be a problem. Sámi associations get up and say: “We’ll undertake the Sámi Swedish Championship.”’.37 This cultural image building for Sámi sport is also present in the 1973 revision of the statutes. Previously, the main task of the Swedish Sámi Ski Association had been to ‘utilize and stimulate the sporting interests of Sámi youth’.38 After the revision of 1973, the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation underlined that its main task was to promote ‘the sporting and cultural interests of Sámi youth’.39 Because of the lukewarm interest in sport, the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation departed from the usual principle that Sámi associations should arrange the Sámi Championships. Instead, for three years in a row, 1973–1975, the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation organized the event in Jokkmokk on its own.40

Another problem that burdened the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation was the poor financial situation, which was due to several circumstances.41 The most important was that the federation did not belong to the Swedish Sports Confederation, the body responsible for managing the Swedish state’s grants to sport. A relevant factor is that state and sport were and still are closely interwoven in Sweden, as virtually all membership-based club sport is run and financed through corporative collaboration between the state and an organization with a monopoly on club sport – in the case of Sweden, the Swedish Sports Confederation.42 Consequently, Sámi sport does not fit very well into the ‘Nordic model’ of sport, as pointed out by sociologist Eivind Å. Skille.43 However, the separatism of Sámi sport from the Swedish sports movement had one important function. The executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation was anxious to retain its autonomy and wanted ‘to act as an alternative to other sports organizations – an alternative through which we can preserve and develop Sámi sport’, even if the consequence was that they did not receive any of the state allocation to sport.44

The most important source of income consisted of grants from the culture delegation of the Sámi Foundation (formerly the Lapp Foundation). This foundation allocated the state funding intended to promote and support Sámi organizations, Sámi culture and reindeer herding. As Sámi sport required funding to expand and the culture delegation distributed the grants, there were strong incentives to emphasize the cultural values of sport. However, the sums allocated to sport by the culture delegation were, according to the executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation, too low to organize Sámi sport activities.45 Sport was not acknowledged in the discussions of what constitutes Sámi culture, as is obvious not least from the government inquiry ‘The Sámi in Sweden: Support for Language and Culture’, which did not include a word about sport.46 This incensed the executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation and provoked the athlete Mikael Svonni to write a critical article in the Sáminuorra magazine.48

The status of sport in the Sámi movement in Sweden was rather low and that the executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation had little success in arguing that sport should be regarded as an expression of Sámi culture. Nevertheless, the
economic difficulties intensified the determination to fight in the federation, which successfully organized the Sámi Championships on its own. Spectator figures were relatively high: an attendance of 2,000 at the 1975 championship was sufficient to make ends meet.49 Three years later, the federation was bold enough to say, for the first time in its history, that the financial situation was ‘stable’.50 The executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sport Federation had on its own initiative taken control of the Swedish Sámi Championship and thus improved the financial situation. By increasing the interest in these championships among Sámi in Sweden, the executive board had reversed a negative trend.

The Transnationalization of Sámi Sport

In the early 1970s, the situation of Sámi sport was strongly marked by the struggle for financial resources. A reasonably sound financial situation was in fact necessary in the endeavour to change Sámi sport in both ideological and organizational terms. A growing ambition within the executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation was that the Swedish Sámi Championships should be open to all Sámi, including those living outside Sweden.51 By advocating for an event open to all Sámi, the executive board aimed to make Sámi sport independent of state borders.

This ambition corresponds with the aims of the ethno-political development simultaneously taking place among the Sámi. The political mobilization among the Sámi began to change from the 1950s. Instead of organizing themselves separately within each nation-state, the Sámi initiated collaboration across state borders to a much higher degree than before. The Sámi of the Nordic countries thereby acquired a strong political voice, and during the 1970s these efforts resulted in a transnational ethno-political movement.52 This movement toned down the view of the Sámi as a minority group in four different nation-states in favour of emphasizing the image of the Sámi as one people spread across several nation-states. In that way, the idea of Sápmi as a symbolic nation emerged in Sámi cultural life and among Sámi politicians.53

The transnational Sámi movement also left its mark on the Sámi Championships, especially on the rules that determined who could compete. Ever since the start in 1948, the Sámi Championships had been open solely to Sámi who were Swedish citizens, and the Sámi Ski Association rejected all suggestions to invite participants from other countries.54 The interest among Sámi in Norway remained high, however, and competitors from both Finland and Norway registered for the 1971 championship. Two years later, sixteen participants from Norway entered, but since it was a Swedish championship, for them it was only a matter of taking part without being able to win officially.55

The question of Norwegian participation was a topic for lively discussions in 1974, when Tore Oskal from Tromsø quite unexpectedly came first in the reindeer herding competition. Since he was a Norwegian citizen, and thus participated without being able to win officially, he did not receive a medal.56 The executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation began to find it embarrassing that Sámi from Norway were not allowed to compete on equal terms, especially when it turned out
that athletes competing for first place could not be proclaimed the official winners.\textsuperscript{57} Whereas the leaders of Sámi sport had previously been very firm in their view that only Swedish citizens were entitled to compete officially, the situation now changed quickly. The 1974 annual report noted: ’We hope that the Swedish Sámi Championship will soon have had its day and that it will be replaced by a championship comprising all Sámi regardless of citizenship.’\textsuperscript{58} An editorial in \textit{Samefolket}, the leading monthly Sámi magazine in Sweden, supported this stance:

Will the Sámi Championship competitions become Nordic? Yes, everything suggests that they will. These borders have been nothing but a nuisance for the Sámi. And when it comes to choosing the Sámi champion in different skiing events, it should not matter which side of the border you happen to live on if you want to compete. Next stop, the Nordic Sámi Championships, please!\textsuperscript{59}

Not only was the incentive to open up the Sámi Championship for all Sámi a question of achieving fair competitions but it also contained a strong political undertone. The latter becomes especially apparent in the quotation by the emphasis on the creation of a Sámi identity independent of state borders and citizenship status.

The programme printed for the 1975 Sámi Championship in Jokkmokk likewise painted a picture of Sápmi without state borders: ’We are all brothers and sisters – the borders have just divided us. We shall therefore work to achieve Sámi championships – where the designation “Swedish” is a mere memory.’\textsuperscript{60} The man behind these words was Nils-Gustav Labba, a young skiing talent who was to become the leading figure in Sámi sport in the 1970s, both as a practise athlete and in organizational and ideological matters. He often excelled so much in skiing competitions that the regional Swedish press called him names like ’Sirkas lightning’,\textsuperscript{61} ’the Sirkas express’,\textsuperscript{62} or ’the King of Sámi skiers’.\textsuperscript{63} In Swedish cross-country skiing, he belonged to the elite, with a seventh place as his best result in the Swedish Championship.\textsuperscript{64} Exceedingly dedicated as a sports leader, he replaced Anders Stoor as chair of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation in 1976.\textsuperscript{65}

After Labba took office, the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation emphasized the importance of inviting Sámi from other countries.\textsuperscript{66} Many Sámi competitors from both Norway and Finland participated in the 1977 championship in Kiruna.\textsuperscript{67} Yet, it was no easy matter to open the Sámi Championship to all Sámi. First, the statutes and competition rules of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation had to be changed. At the annual general meeting of the federation held in conjunction with the Malå Winter Championship in 1978, the executive board considered for adoption the proposed change of rules and statutes. The most striking change was that Sámi associations outside Sweden could become ’supporting members’ of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation. This meant that the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation made it possible for Sámi without Swedish citizenship to participate officially in the competitions.\textsuperscript{68}

Another major change in the statutes was the revision of the criteria for participation. From now on, anyone who was a member of a Sámi village and/or a Sámi association could compete.\textsuperscript{69} This change might seem innocuous, but its ideological significance was tremendous. Previously, the only people allowed to compete were those entitled ’to herd reindeer according to the Act of 1928
concerning the right of Swedish Lapps to reindeer herding in Sweden.\textsuperscript{70} Removing this criterion meant that S\textsc{ami} without the right to herd reindeer were now able to participate. It is noteworthy that the Swedish state lay behind the criteria for who was entitled to herd reindeer. Consequently, from the Swedish S\textsc{ami} Sport Federation’s point of view, the change seems like a radical departure from an earlier order whereby it was the Swedish state’s definition of the S\textsc{ami} that formed the basis for inclusion in the S\textsc{ami} community at the championships. The revised criteria meant that the S\textsc{ami} now defined the S\textsc{ami} identity.

In the mid-1970s, S\textsc{ami} sport began to comprise other activities than winter sport. The first summer championship, containing competitions in lassoing and a summer variant of the reindeer-herding competition, which consisted of running and lassoing, was organized in Ankarede in 1977.\textsuperscript{71} As a stage in the symbolic nation building across state borders, however, football was the most important event. In 1972, in connection with a youth conference, S\textsc{ami} from Sweden and S\textsc{ami} from Norway played a football match with the former winning by 2–1.\textsuperscript{72}

However, S\textsc{ami} football has a longer history. In 1960, S\textsc{ami} in Jokkmokk founded the Sarek IF sports club with the primary purpose of organizing football among the S\textsc{ami}. The club, which had its base in Jokkmokk and Porjus, was for a time a member of the Swedish Sports Confederation. It participated in the Swedish national football league for some years and occasionally co-organized the S\textsc{ami} Championships.\textsuperscript{73} In 1962, Sarek IF began to organize the S\textsc{ami} Cup in football, an event that had become a recurrent happening at Pentecost weekend in May or June.\textsuperscript{74} When Sarek IF was unable to organize the S\textsc{ami} Cup in 1978, the Soppero S\textsc{ami} Association undertook to take over the arrangement of the tournament and simultaneously chose to turn it into a Nordic football championship for the S\textsc{ami}. With little time to prepare only five teams entered – two from Norway and three from Sweden.\textsuperscript{75} The following year the cup took place in Karasjok in Norway. The organizers called the event ‘S\textsc{ami} Championship’ but because there was not yet any Nordic sports association for the S\textsc{ami}, it had no official status.\textsuperscript{76} Nevertheless, football had become an important expression in the symbolic creation of a nation in that S\textsc{ami} came together and competed in a border-crossing sporting event.

For Nils-Gustav Labba and his fellow board members in the Swedish S\textsc{ami} Sports Federation the goal was clear: there should be just one S\textsc{ami} sports association, which should be open to all S\textsc{ami} and independent of state borders.\textsuperscript{77} The motives, however, were not merely ideological. An argument with just as much weight concerned sport itself. By opening the championship, it would also be possible to improve the quality of the competitions.\textsuperscript{78}

At the 1978 Swedish S\textsc{ami} Sports Federation meeting in Malå when adopting the new rules and statutes was on the agenda, the executive board encountered unexpected opposition. Although the executive board supported the changes, the full membership at the annual general meeting rejected many of them.\textsuperscript{79} The most striking setback was the rejection of the proposal that S\textsc{ami} associations outside Sweden could become supporting members of the Swedish S\textsc{ami} Sports Federation and would hence be entitled to take part in the S\textsc{ami} Championships.\textsuperscript{80}

The 1978 S\textsc{ami} championships in Malå were a turning point in the history of S\textsc{ami} sport. From the early 1970s, the executive board of its sport federation put large
effort into creating a sports movement for all Sámi irrespective of citizenship. However, the majority of the members of the Swedish Sámi Sport Federation did not support the idea of transnationalization. A division had thus arisen within Sámi sport.

**Divided Sport**

Within the Swedish Sámi Sport Federation, a majority of the members held a traditionalist view of the Swedish Sámi Championships, which at the time constituted a well-established tradition going back three decades. If the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation were to change the rules and statutes quickly, several members viewed it as a break with tradition.\(^8^1\) This was the embryo of a conflict between two factions, one of which sought to incorporate sport into the symbolic Sámi nation building, while the other wanted Sámi sport in Sweden to remain unchanged. The conflict strongly affected Sámi sport during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. The divergent opinions regarding how to organize the Sámi Championships and, not least, how to express the Sámi identity through sport, demonstrated the difficulties in organizing a unified transnational Sámi sports movement.

Although the executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation failed in its attempt to open the Sámi Championships to Sámi in all the Nordic countries, it did succeed in pushing through a revision of the statutes on a later occasion.\(^8^2\) The plan was therefore to organize an ‘Open Sámi Championship’ in 1979, where ‘open’ indicated that all Sámi, irrespective of citizenship, could participate.\(^8^3\) Once again, the plans came to nothing. The local Sámi association in Gällivare had been chosen to organize the championship. However, widespread discontent about the changes arose, and the organizers questioned the legitimacy of the new statutes.\(^8^4\) The latter therefore defied the instructions of the executive board to make the championship open to all Sámi, observing instead that ‘what we are organizing is a Swedish Sámi Championship’.\(^8^5\)

Further setbacks awaited the executive board. At the annual general meeting of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation, the members criticized the executive board, chaired by Nils-Gustav Labba, so vehemently that the entire executive board resigned.\(^8^6\) Josef Pittsa then became the new elected chairperson. He did not have much experience working in Sámi sport, but he had been on the organizing committee for the championship in Gällivare and was an influential force behind the decision to allow only Sámi from Sweden to compete in the Sámi Championships.

Sámi sport was now clearly divided into two factions, one of them headed by Pittsa, the new chairperson, and the other by Labba. They represented two divergent views of how Sámi sport should be developed. Labba wanted to make Sámi sport independent of state borders, whereas Pittsa’s organizational line was based on the state borders and laid the greatest emphasis on the Sámi Championships being a Swedish event. An article in *Samefolket* clarified the differing stances. The article consists of a conversation between Pittsa and Labba, the latter serving as editor of the magazine. In the introduction to the article, Labba wrote:
Now Josef Pittsa has undertaken to lead the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation, which has been split since the annual general meeting in Gällivare into two powerful camps, with the dividing line running at the question of Sámi participation in the Sámi Championships regardless of national borders.87

From Labba’s point of view, sport was intimately intertwined with politics. When Labba posed the question ‘Is there any link between Sámi sport and Sámi politics?’ to his successor, Pittsa answered, ‘I suppose it depends on how you interpret that. But I don’t think that politics should be a part of the sports movement because it will only lead to unpleasantness.’88 When asked how he felt as chairperson about future organizers perhaps inviting participants from Norway and Finland, Pittsa’s answer appeared evasive, ‘that’s a matter we will be discussing’, and he underlined: ‘We must not forget the voices that want a Swedish Sámi Championship’.89 Pittsa’s goal thus seems to have been to guarantee that the Sámi Championships would remain what they used to be: a Swedish Sámi Championship.

However, the deposed executive board prepared a countermove and organized an alternative championship for all Sámi in Kiruna a few weeks after the Swedish Sámi Championship in Gällivare.90 At a meeting held in connection with this championship, this group emphasized the need for a Sámi sports organization acting independently of state borders. They appointed an interim board to continue working with the question of a new, alternative, organization.91 This new organization thus acted wholly in the spirit of Sámi nation building, unlike the Swedish Sámi Championships and the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation.

In preparation for the 1980 Sámi Championship, the two Sámi sports organizations negotiated about how the event should be organized. The outcome was a compromise – a combined Swedish and open Nordic championship in Kiruna, which thus meant that Sámi from Sweden took part in two competitions simultaneously. ‘Out of the smoke and fog after the battle in Gällivare, we have now glimpsed a solution that should appeal to everyone’, said Josef Pittsa.92 The regional Swedish newspaper Norrbottens-Kuriren viewed the event as a milestone: ‘Nothing less than Sámi skiing history is being written because this is the first official Nordic championship’.93 However, widespread discontent existed on the Swedish side about the championship being given official status as ‘Nordic’ because the traditionalists foresaw that the Swedish Sámi Championships would ultimately come to an end. The executive board of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation did not oppose Nordic championships, but the Swedish championships took priority for them, and they primarily wished to safeguard the continued existence of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation. If Nordic championships were organized, the executive board considered it necessary that equivalent associations should be founded in Norway and Finland too.94 For those holding the opposite opinion, the statement revealed the need for an alternative sports organization independent of state borders.95 ‘The formation of a Sámi Sports Federation is totally independent of what the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation thinks’, Nils-Gustav Labba emphasized.96

The goal of founding this federation came to fruition in 1981 in connection with a new Nordic Sámi Championship held in Utsjoki in Finland. At the first annual general meeting, Sámi associations and Sámi villages from Norway, Sweden and
Finland founded Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu (also called the Nordic Sámi Sports Federation). The new federation elected John Isak Sara from Karasjok in Norway as chairperson, and it included Labba and Nils-Henrik Sikku among the Swedish board members. Hence, the vision of a Sámi Sport organization independent of state borders was realized. The number of participants in the Nordic championship in Utsjoki was very low compared with the co-arranged event in Kiruna the previous year, mainly because very few participants from the Swedish side chose to take part. The lack of interest on the Swedish side of Sápmi was conspicuous since only one Sámi association from Sweden participated, whereas nine Sámi associations or Sámi villages from Norway and three from Finland attended.

With the creation of this new organization in 1981 Sámi sport now involved two separate sports organizations. One of these (the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation) organized the annual Swedish Sámi Championship, while the other (Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu) organized the annual Nordic Sámi Championship. The division followed a clear geographical pattern. The further north and closer to the borders, the greater was the identification with the idea of a Sámi nation across state borders. Loyalty to Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu was greatest in Kiruna. Those individuals who were loyal to the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation, working actively to preserve the Swedish Sámi Championships according to the traditional pattern, had their firmest strongholds in Jokkmokk and Gällivare. Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu had little support in Southern Sámi areas in Sweden, mainly because of the great distance to the places where the Nordic Sámi Championships were held. In the matter of language, too, there was a conflict between Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu and the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation. At the Swedish Sámi Championships in Arvidsjaur in 1983, a highly controversial question arose regarding what language to use, a Sámi language or Swedish. A letter to Samefolket declared:

I heard on Sámi Radio that the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation did not want to have co-arrangements with Sámiid Valastallanlihttu because of the Sámi language that is used in commenting on the competitions. This depressing opinion of the Sámi language is always heard from South Sámi areas too. The Sámi Swedish Championships in Arvidsjaur were no exception. Now I must ask: […] Have you South Sámi (this does not apply to you all) become so Swedified that you cannot bear to hear a Sámi language? Has the majority society got you where they want you? To become Swedes. […] The language is the foundation for the preservation of Sámi culture, whether Northern or Southern, and that is far more important than the hunt for gold medals in the Swedish manner. This also applies in very large measure to the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation, which isolates itself in Swedishness, which appears to be more important than being Sámi.

From the Swedish side, the interest in the Nordic championships was rather lukewarm, along with widespread worry that they would engulf the Swedish Sámi Championship with its venerable traditions. The greatest involvement in Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu was from Sámi in Norway – much more than from Sweden – and in Finland, too, membership rose quickly. Despite the weak Swedish support, Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu clung to the idea of the transnationalization of Sámi sport by making the championship alternate years among Sweden, Finland, and Norway. In the first half of the 1980s, the financial situation for both the Nordic and the Swedish
Sámi sports movements was anything but advantageous. At first, the Nordic Sámi Council had generously allocated cultural funding to Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu, but when this funding ended, the association lacked financial security and came close to bankruptcy.\textsuperscript{104} Even if joint arrangements of the type held in Kiruna in 1980 represented one method to relieve the strained situation, it was not until 1987 that the two organizations made renewed efforts to cooperate.

Coordinating the Nordic and Swedish championships in 1987 was a delicate task, however. The two associations not only differed ideologically – they had also drawn up different statutes and competition rules, with the result that it was difficult to arrange uniform competitions. Several Swedish Sámi associations considered a boycott, as they thought that the rules of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation had been ignored.\textsuperscript{105} In connection with the championship in 1987, John Isak Sara, the first chairperson of Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu, resigned. In his farewell speech, partly published in Samefolket, he did not conceal his view of the Sámi sports movement in Sweden as reactionary, while simultaneously emphasizing the significance of cross-border Sámi sports:

> It seems to be the case that SSIF [Swedish Sámi Sports Federation] has not matured as much as NSIF [Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu]. In our association we are not encumbered with identification problems. We are aware that we are Sámi. I have also heard on Sámi Radio today from the SSIF annual general meeting that they do not want Norwegians or Finns in their championships, but the truth is that we Sámi are a people regardless of national borders. In NSIF we have often experienced how strong the sense of Sámi solidarity is.\textsuperscript{106}

In Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu, the aim was that there should be an all-embracing transnational Sámi sporting life alongside the Sámi Championships. The vision was that Sámi national teams would exist in the 1990s in football, skiing, and athletics. The optimism is visible in the following 1986 quotation from Sáminuorra: ‘It is ultimately about setting our sights on the Olympics, the World Championships, or the European Championships!’\textsuperscript{107}

The visions of a sporting Sápmi without state borders also comprised the Sámi from the Soviet Union. From the early 1980s onwards, several efforts attempted to incorporate the Soviet side of Sápmi into the Sámi sports family, but problems always arose when implementing the intentions in practice. The organizers of the 1982 Nordic Sámi Championship in Nesseby sent an invitation to Sámi in the Soviet Union, but the authorities on the Soviet side proved an insurmountable obstacle. Nils-Henrik Sikku forged new contacts across the Soviet border in 1988 when he visited the festival days in Murmansk, which by tradition included competitions with Sámi elements.\textsuperscript{108} As a result of these contacts, a delegation of Sámi from the Kola Peninsula prepared to participate in the Nordic Sámi Championships at Utsjoki in 1991. This time, too, issues regarding visas and Soviet bureaucracy obstructed Kola Sámi participation.\textsuperscript{109} It was not until the Malå championship in 1993, after the fall of the Soviet Union that Sámi from Russia participated in a Nordic Sámi championship for the first time.\textsuperscript{110}

The result of the formation of Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu was that football attained an increasingly prominent position in transnational Sámi sporting life. Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu organized official Nordic football championships for both women
and men, but the development did not stop there. For Nils-Henrik Sikku, at the time one of the leading figures in Sámiid Valástållanlihttu, the aim was to serve both ethno-political and sporting purposes by establishing a Sámi national team with players from all over Sápmi: ‘Sport and politics do not belong together, some people preach. But what do Sámi politicians say when SVL [Sámiid Valástållanlihttu] issues this appeal to join together for an international match?’

That Sápmi wanted to have its own national football team was of course a significant assertion of symbolic nation building. The first match for the national team was played in Mariehamn in 1985, when Sápmi met the Åland Islands, an autonomous part of Finland, in a match that was broadcast live on the radio in Norrbotten in Sweden, with a commentary in Sámi, as well as in Northern Finland and Northern Norway. Mikkel Bongo, the national coach, formulated the purpose of the national team as follows:

The Sámi national football team wants to increase the understanding of the distinctive character of the Sámi as a separate people. We also hope to contribute to reducing the racist tendencies that I personally have witnessed at various sports arenas. Not least of all, I have been forced to experience racism at close quarters, when I travelled around Northern Norway as coach of the 3rd division team Kautokeino.

Football was undoubtedly successful as a demonstration of power. Fielding a national team was associated with a large measure of ethno-political self-assertion. Although women’s football grew in the 1980s, only the men’s side played international matches. From the football point of view, the years 1985–1987 were particularly dynamic, with three matches against Åland and one against the German Democratic Republic. Then there was no activity for a few years, but a new momentum arose at the start of the 1990s. In the years 1990–1992 Sápmi played against Estonia three times, with one win at home in Karasjok in 1991.

Among the summer sports, football was not the only successful sports concept for the symbolic nation building. In 1985, the same year as the establishment of the national football team, a delegation of Sámi athletes went to Friesland in the Netherlands to participate in the Eurolympiad – an Olympiad for small nations without a state of their own. When Nils Jon Porsanger from Karasjok won the marathon with the excellent time of 2.30, the victory was described in Sáminuorra as historic because it was the first international medal won by Sápmi.

While national identity strengthened through football and athletics, Sámi sport leaders made new attempts to reach a solution to the conflict between the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation and Sámiid Valástållanlihttu. Negotiations to bring about cooperation between the two associations began in 1985, but the joint arrangement in Kiruna in 1987 had exposed the differences in ideology and rules. That same year, though, Jan-Olov Winka from Tärnaby took over as chairperson of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation. He and the executive board attached great importance to improving collaboration with Sámiid Valástållanlihttu. In 1988 the two Sámi sports associations began negotiations, and in the end the Sámi sports leaders cut the Gordian knot and reached a compromise solution.

In 1990 Nils-Henrik Sikku because chairperson of Sámiid Valástållanlihttu during a reorganization. Those individuals who doggedly worked for Sámi sport to become independent of state borders had to modify their ambitions. Sámiid
Valstållanlihttu became a superior Sámi National Sports Federation within which the three Nordic countries – Norway, Sweden, and Finland – were district associations. (The aim of establishing a district association for Russia was never accomplished, however.) The Swedish Sámi Sports Federation simultaneously renounced its traditionalism by agreeing to be incorporated in a Nordic Sámi National Sports Federation but was able to retain a large measure of independence as a district association. This meant that the Swedish Sámi Championships could remain as they were.

A scarcely noticeable yet important change was the renaming of the Swedish Sámi Sports Federation in 1991. At the annual general meeting, the members adopted a proposal to change the name of the federation from *Svenska Samernas Idrottsförbund* (literally ‘the Swedish Sámis’ Sport Federation) to *Samernas Svenska Idrottsförbund* (literally ‘the Sámis’ Swedish Sport Federation). The former name emphasizes the word ‘Swedish’ whereas the focus in the latter is on the word ‘Sámi’. Thereby, the change of the sequence of the words constitutes an ideological shift of the federation from Sweden to Sápmi.

The formation of a Sámi National Sports Federation in 1990 was thus a compromise satisfying the interests of traditionalism on the Swedish side and the symbolic nation building of Sápmi. Consequently, the Sámi sports movement did not become wholly independent of state borders. Nevertheless, its creation was an important manifestation of Sápmi as a symbolic nation.

**Sámi Sport as a Concern for Sweden and for Sápmi**

The complex process by which Sámi sport developed from 1970 to 1990 can be viewed as a consequence of the fact that the Sámi inhabit an area stretching across several state borders. In comparison with the simultaneous development in Canada, where an all-Native sport system emerged with financial support from the federal government, the transnational Sámi sports movement had not just one but three surrounding majority societies to negotiate with simultaneously in order to obtain resources. Since a transnational sports movement did not fit very well into the citizenship-based ‘Nordic model’ of sport, a uniform system of financing was, and still is, a great challenge to the Sámi National Sports Federation.

The development in the 1970s and 1980s was marked by ambitions to achieve sports in Sápmi across state borders, as advocated by people like the Sámi sports leaders Nils-Gustav Labba and Nils-Henrik Sikku. This development thus shows many similarities to the struggle led by Wilton Littlechild among the Indigenous peoples in North America. In the 1970s, numerous separate sports associations and events arose which, like Sámi sport, signalled the cultural revitalization and political struggle of Indigenous peoples in North America. As for the Sámi, the symbolic nation building was as a stage in a liberation process. Previously, the definitions of the Sámi, within the Sámi sport context, derived exclusively from the Swedish state. However, with a transnational context for Sámi sport it was possible to mould a Sámi identity defined by the Sámi, and not by a surrounding majority society.
Sámi sport was one of many means of expressing a national Sámi identity distinct from the surrounding majority societies. Pedersen has observed that the Sámi participation in the Arctic Winter Games and in football tournaments for nations without states has ‘emphasized the contrast with “Norwegian” sport and helped to strengthen the understanding of the Norwegians as “the others”’.\(^{126}\) The same applies to Sámi sport in Sweden, as shown through the development of the sport organizations governing Sámi sport. However, parallel to this ethno-political wave sweeping across Sámi sport, traditionalism also developed on the Swedish side, by which the state borders were more consolidated than transcended. In fact, there was a widespread opposition to making Sámi sport independent of state borders, and this traditionalism is not visible in previous research. What distinguishes Sámi sport from the self-determination through sport that was simultaneously happening in North America is that there was no unanimity as to what the goals of sport were. The lack of unity was due to the existence of the Sámi Championships as an established tradition on the Swedish side when ideas for a transnational Sámi sports movement began to flourish.

The long history of the Sámi sports movement in Sweden, going back to the 1940s, engendered a notion that sport should not be reduced to an instrument for other (political) purposes. It was at the same time a matter of power and protectionism; the leaders in Sweden did not want to see their power – built up over several decades – over rules and traditions being lost to actors from surrounding countries. Instead of solely focussing on the external relations of Sámi sport, i.e. how a Sámi identity is shaped contrastively vis-à-vis the majority society, scrutiny of the internal relations additionally enables Sámi sport to stand out as a heterogeneous phenomenon, with cooperation and competition between actors with different wills and intentions.

**Notes**

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12. Malcolm MacLean and Russell Field, ‘Performing Nations, Disrupting States: Sporting Identities in Nations without States’, National Identities 16, no. 4 (2014): 284; Hywel Iorwerth, Alun Hardman, and Carwyn Rhys Jones, ‘Nation, State and Identity in International Sport’, National Identities 16, no. 4 (2014): 332.

13. Iorwerth, Hardman, and Rhys Jones, ‘State and Identity in International Sport’, 327.

14. Eriksen, Ethnicity and Nationalism, 152.

15. Ibid., 153.

16. Lars Elenius, ‘Nationella minoriteters symboliska nationsbyggande: Föreställningen om Kvännland och Sápmi som nya former av etnopolitik bland finskspråkiga och samiskspråkiga minoriteter’, Historisk tidskrift 137, no. 3 (2018): 480–5.

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28. Pedersen, ‘Sport, Ethno-Politics and Sāmi Identity’; Helge C. Pedersen, ‘Skiing and Divergent Ethnic Identities in the Multiethnic Northern Norway’, National Identities 16, no. 4 (2014): 365–76.
29. Pedersen and Rafoss, ‘Sport in Finnmark and Saami Districts’, 38.
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31. In the Sāmi Championships the competitors usually represented Sāmi associations or Sāmi villages, and it was mostly Sāmi associations that arranged the events. Sāmi associations are not sports associations, but they can have sport among their organized activities. There are also some examples of separate Sāmi sports clubs attached to the Sāmi sports movement, for example, Sarek IF and Dearna IF. A Sāmi village is an economic and organizational association of reindeer-herding families, together with the specific geographical area in which these reindeer herders have the right to graze their animals. See Patrik Lantto, Tiden börjar på nytt: En analys av samernas etnopolitiska mobilisering i Sverige 1900–1950 (Umeå: Institutionen för nordiska språk, 2000), 28.
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62. ‘Labba överlägset i same-SM-stafett’, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*, March 30, 1974, 10.

63. Lundström, ‘Nils Gustav visade klassen i same-SM’.

64. Stefan Nolervik, ‘Flygande SM-start’, *Östersunds-Posten*, March 15, 1986, 34.

65. ‘Flera klasser i Same-SM’, *Samefolket*, no. 4, 1976, 110.

66. ‘Same-mästerskapet 9–11 mars. Inte enbart svensk medaljakt’, *Samefolket*, no. 2, 1979, 24; Interview with Labba.

67. Kuorak, *60 år på Samemästerskapspåret*, 93–5.

68. ‘Nya regler för Samemästerskapen’, *Samefolket*, no. 1, 1978, 18.

69. Ibid., 19.

70. The criterion is cited in Lidström, ‘Same-Mästerskapens uppkomst’, 74.

71. ‘Historiskt i Ankarede’, *Samefolket*, no. 8, 1977, 212.

72. Håkan Kuorak, *SSIF 50 år 1948–1998* (Malmberget: Datorteket, 1996), 17.

73. Gustav Heikka, ‘Sareks IF enda samiska idrottsföreningen i Sverige’, *Samefolket*, no. 3, 1982, 38–9; ‘Samerna får en egen idrottsförening’, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*, December 28, 1972, 18.

74. Biete, ‘De vann Samecupen’, *Samefolket*, nos. 6–7, 1976, 198. Football was undoubtedly a male bastion in the Sámi sports family. Towards the end of the 1970s, however, women’s football gained momentum too, when some women’s teams competed against each other in the Sámi Cup.

75. ‘Soppero historiska Samemästare’, *Samefolket*, no. 7, 1978, 10.
Unfortunately, neither the minutes of the annual general meeting nor the annual reports for 1978 and 1979 have been found among the source material. However, the rule stating that only Sámi entitled to herd reindeer were allowed to compete in the Sámi Championship seem to have been abolished in 1978. Since 1979 any Sámi with a membership in a Sámi village and/or Sámi association have been allowed to compete in the Sámi Championships.

This view is apparent in the jubilee book of the Sámi Championships. See Kuorak, 60 år på Samemästerskapspåret, 7–8.

There was however harsh criticism of the way the board forced the changes through. Niko Kuhmunen, ‘Årets samemästerskap i Gällivare’, Samefolket, no. 5, 1979, 14.

The statutes stipulated that changes had to be approved at two successive meetings, one of which had to be an ordinary meeting. In addition, the decision had to be approved by a two-thirds majority. The change to the statutes that was adopted at the ordinary general meeting in Malå nevertheless differed on several points from what was adopted in Kiruna in May. Moreover, the decision is said not to have received a two-thirds majority. Kuhmunen, ‘Årets samemästerskap i Gällivare’, 14.

Nils-Gustav Labba, ‘Öppna mästerskap idag enbart en dröm’, Samefolket, no. 5, 1979, 8; Pål Doj, ‘Idrott och politik III’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1979, 2; Kuhmunen, ‘Årets samemästerskap i Gällivare’, 14.

Labba, ‘Öppna mästerskap idag enbart en dröm’, 8.

Ibid., 9.

Ibid.

Ola Andersson, ‘Sjul Axel Nejne’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1985, 36; Doj, ‘Idrott och politik III’, 2; Kuorak, 60 år på Samemästerskapspåret, 112.

‘Idrottstagar’, Samefolket, no. 2, 1981, 21; Interview with Labba.

Nilsgustav Labba, ‘Blir Finland vår’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1980, 14.

Gustav Heikka, ‘Jon Isak Sara, ordförande i samernas gemensamma idrottsförbund’, Samefolket, no. 6, 1981, 20.

Gustav Heikka, ‘Dåligt intresse från Sverige’, Samefolket, no. 6, 1981, 18; Heikka, ‘Jon Isak Sara’, 20.

Gustav Heikka, ‘Styrelsen kritiserades hårt på Idrottsförbundets årsmöte’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1987, 34–5.

Gustav Heikka, ‘Segergest igen för Niilo’, Samefolket, no. 5, 1984, 24.

Såbmelas, ‘Same-SM en svensk tävling – inte samisk’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1983, 21.

‘Nordiska Same-M’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1982, 7; Heikka, ‘Segergest igen för Niilo’, 24; ‘Samemästerskap i Karasjok’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1985, 41; Kuorak, SSIF 50 år 1948–1998, 12.

‘Nordiska idrottsförbundet bankrut – slutet nära?’, Sáminuurra, nos. 2–3, 1983, 22; Heikka, ‘Segergest igen för Niilo’, 24.

‘Nordiska idrottsförbundet bankrut’, 22.

Heikka, ‘Styrelsen kritiserades hårt på Idrottsförbundets årsmöte’, 34–5.

Gustav Heikka, ‘Ordförandebyte i Idrottsförbundet’, Samefolket, no. 4, 1987, 36.
107. ‘Idrottshelg i Tärnaby’, Sáminuorra, no. 4, 1986, 20.
108. Nils-Henrik Sikku, ‘Arktiska mästerskap – redan nästa år?’, Sáminuorra, no. 1, 1988, 17.
109. ‘Ryssar stoppade samer delta vid SM’, Sáminuorra, no. 2, 1991, 21.
110. Lennart Pittja, ‘Samemästerskapen i Malá’, Sáminuorra, no. 1, 1993, 12.
111. Nils-Henrik Sikku, ‘Nytt inom samisk idrott’, Sáminuorra, nos. 3–4, 1981, 35.
112. ‘Landskamp Åland–Sápmi 18 juli på Mariehamns idrottsplats kl 1900’, File F7:2, ‘Handlingar för ordning idrott’, Nils Henrik Sikku’s archive, Ája archive.
113. Mikkel Bongo, ‘Eftersta landskampen’, Sáminuorra, no. 1, 1985, 37.
114. ‘Samelandslaget i fotboll’, in Jubileumslandskamp i fotboll: Sápmi – Estland (Stockholm: SVL, SSIF, and Stockholms Sameförening, 1998), 3.
115. Nils-Henrik Sikku, ‘Nils-Jon historisk guldman’, Sáminuorra, nos. 1–2, 1986, 24–5.
116. The Swedish Sámi Sport Federation, Board meeting minutes, Tärnaby, August 9, 1985, Board meeting minutes 1981–1996, Ája archive.
117. Interview with Jan-Olof Winka, July 9, 2017, Tärnaby, by the author. Notes in possession of the author. During Winka’s time as chairperson, two Alpine Sámi Championships were also organized.
118. Sámiid Valástallanlihttu finally incorporated the Sámi national football team as a separate association in 2003. In 2012 the football association was excluded from Sámiid Valástallanlihttu and replaced by FA Sápmi. See Fahlén and Skille, ‘Samisk idrett og statlig politikk’, 140.
119. Although it was hoped at the time of the reorganization that a district association would be founded on the Russian side as well, this never happened. See ‘Inbjudan till seminarium om Samisk idrott på 1990-talet’, Samernas Idrottsförbund (blue folder), Ája archive.
120. The Swedish Sámi Sports Federation, Protokoll för vid den förbundsgemensamma arbetsgruppens möte i Kiruna’, November 18, 1988, Board meeting minutes 1981–1996, Ája archive.
121. The Swedish Sámi Sports Federation, Annual meeting minutes, February 28, 1991, ‘SSIF fullmäktar, stipendiater’ (red folder), Ája archive.
122. Forsyth and Wamsley, ‘Native to Native’, 300.
123. Skille, ‘The Nordic Model and Multiculturalism’.
124. Forsyth and Wamsley, ‘Native to Native’.
125. Paraschak, ‘Variations in Race Relations’; Giles, ‘Kevlar, Crisco, and Menstruation’; Heine, “It’s a competition, not a show!”; Heine, ‘No “Museum Piece”’; Heine, ‘Performance Indicators’; Heine and Young, ‘Colliding Identities in Arctic Canadian Sports and Games’; Mrozek, ‘Games and Sport in the Arctic’; Giles, ‘Kevlar, Crisco, and Menstruation’.
126. Pedersen, ‘Skiing and Divergent Ethnic Identities’, 373.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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