

Chapter 10

Indigenous political communication in the Nordic countries

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Abstract

A study of political communication will not be complete without taking into account the differences in experiences regarding the lack of recognition and experiences of oppression between indigenous citizens and citizens belonging to the ethnic majority. This chapter reviews the status of Nordic indigenous political communication and compares political institutions, actors, and conditions. Most attention is paid to Sámi political and media institutions in Norway and Sweden, as we have most data available from these settings, although some examples from Finland and Greenland are included, too. The overview shows similarities resulting from colonisation and assimilation, but also major differences between the main institutions, Sámi parliaments, party systems, and media institutions owing to different state policies. In conclusion, we point to the challenges for research on indigenous political communication in the Nordic countries.

Keywords: Sámi, indigenous, political communication, media, journalism

Introduction

Across the world, indigenous peoples are reclaiming cultural and political influence after having suffered decades and centuries of colonisation, assimilation, and repression. The Nordic countries form no exception to this (Berg-Nordlie et al., 2015). Sweden and Denmark are among the oldest states in Europe, with a past as colonial powers that includes rule of territories historically populated by indigenous peoples and many linguistic, cultural, and ethnic minorities, both on other continents and in the home region. Within the Danish state, the Kalaallit peoples of Greenland are recognised as indigenous, and the Sámi have a similar status in Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The traditional Sámi living area includes Russia, but the premises for political communication in Russia differ extensively from the Nordic countries; thus, the situation in Russia is not included here. As in other parts of the world, indigenous peoples in the

Nordic countries were, at the height of the colonial period and far into the twentieth century, systematically repressed with the aim of erasing indigenous languages, cultures, and ways of life (Bryld, 2010; Eidheim, 1999). A study of political communication will not be complete without taking into account the differences in experiences regarding the lack of recognition and experiences of oppression between indigenous citizens and citizens belonging to the ethnic majority. We must acknowledge that collective experiences have had permanent consequences for contemporary political communication practices. One such consequence is marginalisation and lack of knowledge about the indigenous peoples in the majority population. Another consequence is silence among members of the minority groups (Kovach, 2009). For decades, individuals and families have stayed silent about traumatic experiences, family histories, and experienced injustice in both the local and national environment (Labba, 2020). A third consequence very important for political communication is the loss of indigenous languages and oppression of the use of mother tongues. There are many examples and much documentation. Suffice it here to refer to Hyltenstam (1999), who maintains that assimilation and rejection, rather than recognition of linguistic diversity, were traits of Swedish nationalism and nation-building. Such experiences continue to shape the climate and conditions for indigenous political communication even today (Mörkenstam, 2019).

Taking these basic facts as starting points, conditions for political communication for the Nordic indigenous peoples cannot be regarded as similar to those of the majority populations. This is to some extent recognised by the states. In Norway, following similar initiatives as Canada, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up in 2018 with the mandate to uncover past injustices towards the Sámi and other minority groups and suggest tools for reconciliation.¹ The government of Greenland unilaterally established a reconciliation commission in 2013; however, the Danish state did not see a need for participation (Thisted, 2017).

Even in a region once famous for its “passion for equality” (Graubard, 1986) and recently discussed as the next “supermodel” for successful government (The Economist, 2013), the examples above illustrate that colonial and postcolonial structures still matter for political communication. In the Nordic countries, parallel to experiences of indigenous peoples all over the world, minorities were silenced and excluded and expected to “die out” or disappear as the majority populations of the new and old Nordic states consolidated their state-formation processes (Elenius, 2002; Junka-Aikio, 2016). Further, indigenous political claims on the Nordic states have been met with what Mörkenstam (2019) has termed “organised hypocrisy”: Indigenous rights and claims for self-determination are, on the one hand, supported internationally and to some degree included in national constitutions and legislation, and on the other, often disregarded or rejected as industries (e.g., mining or energy

production) are allowed to extract resources on indigenous lands. The most well-known of these claims, the unsuccessful protests against damming the Alta-Kautokeino river in Norway in 1979–1981, led to recognition of Sámi demands for increased influence and establishment of the Sámi Parliament in 1989, followed a few years later by the Sámi Parliament in Sweden (1993) and in Finland (1997)² (Josefsen et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, in this chapter we do not provide a comparison with the Kalaallit-Greenlandic situation, not because the case is irrelevant but because we do not have the knowledge and competence needed to do so. On the contrary, the relevance is striking as there are many similarities between Sámi and Greenlandic colonial and contemporary political history, journalism, and media structures, as Hussain (2017, 2018), Ravn-Højgaard (2019), and Ravn-Højgaard and colleagues (2018) have shown in their recent studies. For this study, with the exception of mentioning some of the overarching institutional differences between the Greenlandic-Danish and other Nordic countries' solutions to self-government, we restrict the overview and comparison to the situation of the Sámi, and mainly to the conditions and structures for political communication in Norway and Sweden, with only some examples pertaining to Finland. We examine, first, who and which the central Sámi actors and institutions for Sámi political communication are; that is, the political actors and institutions and the media institutions and actors. In this part, we draw attention to the rather striking empirical differences between these two, otherwise quite similar, Nordic countries. Second, we discuss central approaches and theories that are applied to analyse Sámi political communication. In conclusion, we draw attention to some of the main challenges for research on indigenous political communication.

Political institutions and actors

With a few local exceptions, the Sámi live as minorities in rural and urban localities alongside non-Sámi people within and outside of their traditional homeland, Sápmi (see Figure 10.1).

Public registration of ethnicity is prohibited in Sweden and Norway, while in Finland the definition of who is Sámi is highly controversial. This has resulted in absent and deficient demographic data on the Sámi population. Most sources estimate that 40,000–60,000 Sámi reside in Norway; 20,000–40,000 in Sweden; 7,000–8,000 in Finland; and 2,000 in Russia. However, the figures vary and are highly inexact (Lehtola, 2004; Pettersen, 2014).

At the state level, the political systems in which Sámi political communication take place are quite similar (with the exception of Russia): Finland, Norway, and Sweden are small Nordic welfare democracies displaying characteristics

Figure 10.1 Sápmi, the traditional homelands of the indigenous Sámi people

Comments: Shown in blue, Sápmi spans the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.

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of social equality, comprehensive public services, and inclusion (see Chapters 2–7). The Sámi have a constitutional position as an indigenous people in all three Nordic countries, but the measures for political influence towards the national governments and the scope of self-determination differ, as does their status in terms of international law. Whereas all the Nordic countries have adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), only Norway and Denmark have ratified the ILO C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989). The differences in the states' adoption of international law are regarded as essential for understanding and explaining the differences in power for the Sámi (Josefsen et al., 2016; Mörkenstam, 2019). State borders also differentiate when it comes to institutionalisation of indigenous politics and, accordingly, the political structures enabling political inclusion, participation, and self-determination vary. There are significant power asymmetries between the Sámi and the national institutions and actors in both countries, most importantly the prerequisite for self-determination, namely autonomy. None of the states have granted the Sámi people territorial

autonomy. The institutional differences in indigenous representation and self-determination between Norway and Sweden can be explained by references to past colonial practices and present state policies. Not neglecting the fact that in both countries long-term assimilation processes had similar effects on both sides of the border, we also find striking dissimilarities. One of those is the differences between the two Sámi parliaments.

The Sámi parliaments

The Sámi parliaments are elected by and amongst Sámi voters in each country and are institutions for indigenous representation voicing demands for increased political self-determination; however, they do not have identical powers. In Norway and Sweden, the Sámi parliaments share similarities in their dual functions of being both administrative and representative assemblies, but they are different in terms of autonomy and hierarchical ties to the state, as we outline below.

In Norway, the Sámi Parliament met for the first time in 1989, established by an amendment of the Norwegian constitution and empowered by the Sámi Act (Sameloven, 1987). The Act states that the Sámi Parliament decides independently what matters it considers relevant to discuss and consult with the Norwegian state or parliament. In 2020, the Sámi Parliament had 39 members elected from seven constituencies. Election periods were four years, and election day and periods coincide with those of the Norwegian parliament (see also Chapter 5, Skogerbø & Karlsen). The constituencies are not limited to the historical Sámi homelands but cover the entire country. They vary in geographical size and population with most voters concentrated in the northernmost constituencies. The election system is proportional and dynamic to the degree that the number of mandates for each constituency is revised every four years according to changes in registered voters within each constituency.

The representatives are elected from a variety of lists and parties, most of them small and returning few mandates. Some of the parties that seek representation at the local and national levels of Norwegian government (see Chapter 11, Hopman & Karlsen) also run for representation in the Sámi Parliament. The largest of these is the Labour Party, which has a couple of times managed to form a governing coalition led by a Sámi Labour president. Others – explicitly Sámi organisations and parties – run only for election to the Sámi Parliament. The dominant one, the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR), has led majority coalitions in most periods since 1989, also after the 2017 election. Even the Progress Party, which has as its main Sámi political issue to abolish the Sámi Parliament, has returned representatives in several elections (Josefsen et al., 2017a). The Sámi party system in Norway is thus different from the Swedish

one in that so-called Norwegian parties run in the Sámi Parliament election. Further, there have been continuous cooperation and consultation between the Sámi Parliament and the Norwegian government and parliament to include Sámi rights in Norwegian law. Important examples are the Education Act (1998), the Planning and Building Act (Plan- og bygningsloven, 2008), and the Finnmark Act (2005). Still, despite protective measures being set up by international and national law on indigenous rights and resistance from the Sámi Parliament, there seems to be an increase in industrial exploitation projects of natural resources in Sámi traditional living areas.

In Sweden, the Sámi were historically categorised in two groups: those who were reindeer herders and those who were not – a policy termed “the category split” (Saglie et al., 2020). The first group were allocated specific rights to reindeer husbandry and defined as Sámi, the second group were considered non-Sámi and subjected to assimilation (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008). For centuries, this policy split the Sámi population, and it remains a dividing line in Sámi politics (Nilsson et al., 2016). This has a bearing on the Sámi Parliament in two ways: first, it is the main dividing line between parties returning representatives; and second, the Sámi Parliament is one of two Sámi political power centres, the other one being the Sámi reindeer herding communities (discussed more below).

The Sámi Parliament in Sweden is organised partly as a democratically representative body and partly as a state government agency for Sámi issues (Lawrence & Mörkenstam, 2016). This double purpose creates less autonomy for the parliament as it limits the formal and informal opportunities to be regarded as an equal and autonomous party or to explore and voice Sámi interests towards the Swedish parliament and government. Concerning the election system, the four-year intervals of the Sámi parliamentary elections are not parallel to those of the Swedish parliament as elections are held at different dates and years. In 2020, one constituency covered the entire country, but parties may present several lists of candidates. Representatives in the Sámi Parliament so far have been elected from parties unique to Sámi politics. The parties have been mostly small and reflected the historical divisions in Sámi politics with few similarities with the parties represented in other decision-making bodies in Sweden (see Chapter 6, Nord & Grusell). In the 2017 election, the Party for Hunting and Fishing Sámi returned the largest number of mandates, however, after the election, the Swedish Sámi Association formed a majority coalition consisting of several parties.

The Sámi parliaments in Norway and Sweden are founded on similar legal provisions, yet there are substantial differences between the two. The role of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden as a government agency makes it subordinate to the state, a role that is impossible to combine with being an independent voice for Sámi interests. In Norway, the Sámi Parliament has formal political

autonomy but limited economic resources and at best variable influence over decisions concerning Sámi interests and exploitation of traditional lands. Other differences relate to the party and election systems.

Mörkenstam (2019) argues that the restricted power and voice of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden is the main reason why the courts have become important political actors for resolving Sámi rights issues. Several Sámi groups, specifically reindeer herding communities (“sameby” in Swedish), have taken the Swedish state to court to contest both land and cultural rights. A reindeer herding community is an economic and administrative entity and a reindeer pasture district, and they make up a political structure parallel to the Sámi Parliament. In 2019, there were 51 Sámi reindeer herding communities in Sweden.

Within each community there may be several enterprises consisting of several reindeer owners. Every reindeer herding community has a board that is responsible for managing reindeer husbandry within its own geographical area. According to the Reindeer Husbandry Act (Rennäringslag, 1971), only those who are members of a reindeer herding community have the right to live by reindeer herding, and the members make up approximately 10 per cent of the Sámis in Sweden. Temporarily culminating with the Girjas Case, in which the High Court in 2020 ruled in favour of the reindeer herding community Girjas for holding the right to manage hunting and fishing resources within its lands, there are several court cases pending in which reindeer herding communities contest rights to land and water. In this context, it should be stated that the Sámi living areas in Sweden have for decades, if not centuries, been major sources of hydroelectric power, minerals, and other natural resources.

Politics is not only policy formation but a question of networking and extracting windows of opportunity. In addition to the differences between the Sámi parliaments, the Sámi party systems in Norway and Sweden are not similar. As already mentioned, in Sweden, the category split defined reindeer herders as Sámi and all others as Swedes, and it is still the most significant political cleavage among voters and parties. The parties represented in the Sámi Parliament in Sweden are all to some extent related to this conflict and not to the left-right axis that is central to Swedish politics in general (Saglie et al., 2020; see also Nord & Grusell, Chapter 6). Unlike the Sámi Parliament in Norway, until 2020, only Sámi parties have run for Sami Parliament elections in Sweden. Sámi parties claim to be political workshops of their own without any strings or obligations towards Swedish party policies formed by non-Sámi party members and leaderships.

In contrast, in Norway, where the category split does not apply – as historically, all Sámis were subjected to racist and assimilationist state policies – a mix of parties have been represented in the Sámi Parliament. Some of the Norwegian parties that run for election in local, regional, and national decision-making bodies also seek representation in the Sámi Parliament, whereas other

organisations are unique to Sámi politics. The degree of support or resistance to Sámi self-determination is the main political cleavage in Sámi politics in Norway (Saglie et al., 2020). The Progress Party's voters are the strongest against, and the voters for the Norwegian Saami Association are the strongest in favour, of Sámi self-determination (Saglie et al., 2020). This mixed-party system, with both Sámi and Norwegian parties, provides Sámi politicians with gateways into the Norwegian decision-making system on all levels. It does not guarantee acceptance for Sámi views and interests, but it secures that Sámi politics will in one way or another be part of the party's policy. For example, the Progress Party would abolish the Sámi Parliament, and have for years promoted this view both in the Norwegian and Sámi parliaments. Other parties with more positive approaches to Sámi rights and politics have included it in the party structure. The Labour Party has established a separate Sámi party group within the national party structure and integrated Sámi politics into election programmes for national and many regional and local elections. As pointed out above, these differences between Norway and Sweden can only be explained by reference to the two states' former segregationist and assimilationist policies. The historic experiences of Sámis in the two countries were different and had lasting effects on the political institutions. Research has also shown that there are huge differences in trust in state authorities between Sámi citizens in Norway and Sweden (Nilsson & Möller, 2017).

In short, the differences between the Sámi political institutions and Sámi political actors in Norway and Sweden are much larger than the differences between the national and local governments in the two neighbouring countries. To illustrate, the Norwegian and Swedish parliaments are similar representative and decision-making bodies; the national, regional, and local election systems show mainly similarities; the party systems are similar, if not identical; and the left-right conflict is the main dividing line in both Norwegian and Swedish politics (see Chapters 1–6). In contrast, the Sámi political systems in the two countries are similar only in name: the two Sámi parliaments have different powers; the election systems are different; the party systems share few similarities; and as mentioned above, the main conflicts are substantially different. Conclusions drawn by researchers on Sámi politics in Norway and Sweden point to the same: while studies in Norway have, for example, emphasised that the Sámi Parliament has to some extent influenced Norwegian state policies; that Sámi voters express relatively high trust in Sámi and Norwegian political and media institutions (Josefsen & Skogerbø, forthcoming); and even point to a hint of routinisation in Sámi politics (Josefsen, 2015), research in Sweden points to marginalisation (Mörkenstam et al., 2016) and a low degree of trust (Nilsson & Möller, 2017).

Mörkenstam (2019) highlights the decoupling of values laid down in international law and concrete political actions regarding the exploitation of

traditional Sámi land and the displacement of Sámi industries in Sweden. In Norway, there are numerous examples of the same (Sámi Parliament, 2018), including resource exploitation projects such as mining and wind turbines, which the Sámi Parliament in Norway argues are in violation of both Norwegian and international law (Sámi Parliament, 2020a, 2020b). Such issues are usually on top of the Sámi political agenda, yet only rarely reach the headlines of Norwegian and Swedish news media.

Media institutions and Sámi political journalism

Sámi political parties, politicians, organisations, and other actors communicate with Sámi voters through many different channels, personally and mediated (Josefsen et al., 2017b). Sámi issues and politics are reported by journalists (Skogerbø et al., 2019), talked about among friends and family, and discussed and distributed by social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and the like (Lindgren & Cocq, 2016). Popular culture plays a major – and it seems, increasingly important – role also for indigenous political communication: music has always been a channel for voicing interest (e.g., Mari Boine, Sofia Jannok); and increasingly so is television drama (*Midnight Sun*, *Thin Ice*); gameshows and competitions (e.g., *Muihte Mu*, *Eurovision Song Contest*) (Sand, 2019); documentaries; talk shows (e.g., *Mu Jiena*); film (e.g., prize-winning *Sámi Blood*, 2017); and many other forms of popular culture (DuBois & Cocq, 2019). Sámi journalism is performed both within and across state and institutional borders. The status as indigenous peoples entails certain rights when it comes to media access and representation, such as subsidies to media institutions that practise indigenous journalism allowing for storytelling and news reporting from a Sámi perspective as opposed to being reported about from the outside. In the Nordic countries, public service broadcasters have for decades had indigenous (for our purposes, Sámi) newsrooms, thus providing a test case for the practice of indigenous journalism (Plaut, 2014). Generally, the news media's reporting and production of political news are important for Sámi political parties, organisations, and citizens.

The institutional frameworks for indigenous journalism follow from the diverging policies of each state. First, across the Nordic countries, public broadcasters have indigenous journalism either as part of their remit or, in the case of Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa Greenlandic Broadcasting (KNR), as a main objective to make programmes for the Greenlandic population. The Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish public broadcasters all have Sámi divisions – YLE Sápmi, NRK Sápmi, and Sameradion & SVT Sápmi, respectively. The Sámi public broadcasters thus have unique positions, with nationwide coverage and the potential to reach most Sámi citizens. They broadcast daily in multiple languages (several

Sámi languages, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish) through radio, television, the Internet, mobile apps, and social media. They produce programmes and content in a variety of genres, among them news and political journalism, such as the 15-minute television news programme *Ođđasat* that have been (and in 2020 still was) co-produced by NRK Sápmi, SVT Sápmi, and YLE Sápmi five days a week since 2003. *Ođđasat* broadcasts to Finland, Sweden, and Norway in Sámi languages and is subtitled in the majority languages.

Another factor rarely touched upon in studies on indigenous journalism is the relationship between journalism as a practice carried out by professional news media, such as the Sámi editorial teams within the public broadcasters, and civic journalism. Social and digital media offer cheap, accessible, and easily available platforms for communication and are of increasing importance for the development of journalism, as information sources and as arenas for political communication. Indeed, the most recent studies of Sámi parliamentary elections show that Facebook is a relatively much used – but not trusted – source by the voters in the Sámi Parliament elections (Josefsen et al., 2017b). The more specific characteristics of Sámi media structures and institutions in Norway and Sweden are outlined below.

In Norway, two daily Sámi newspapers are supported through the press subsidy system. One, *Ságat*, is published mainly in Norwegian, and the other, *Ávvir*, in North Sámi. Both have consistent and extensive political journalism (Josefsen & Skogerbø, 2013). From 2017, a weekly news magazine, *Sámi Magasiidna*, has also been published in North Sámi in print and online. Further, two local newspapers are subsidised for producing news in South Sámi and Lule Sámi.

The public service broadcasting remit is articulated slightly differently in Norway and Sweden. In Norway, NRK is a state-owned corporation with a license to broadcast that is legally enshrined. The remit is comprehensive and specified in five main points: strengthen democracy; provide universally accessible programmes; strengthen the Norwegian and Sámi languages, identity, and culture; strive for quality and innovation; and be non-commercial.

NRK Sápmi defines itself as an indigenous broadcaster, realised through active international cooperation to increase and develop programme exchange, creation, and development with other indigenous stations around the world. There are a number of district offices in various parts of Sápmi and one in the capital Oslo. North Sámi is the primary language of radio broadcasts, with permanent and recurring inserts in South Sámi, Lule Sámi, and Norwegian. Unlike many other indigenous broadcasters that must serve a linguistically diverse indigenous audience (e.g., Hafsteinsson & Bredin, 2010), NRK Sápmi uses Sámi both as the primary broadcasting language and a working language.

Studies have shown that Sámi political issues were marginalised in nationwide political news during the same period in which the Sámi newsroom grew (Ijäs, 2012), indicating that more extensive Sámi political journalism does

not necessarily provide access to the national public sphere (Eide & Nikunen, 2011; Eide & Simonsen, 2007). Coverage of the Sámi Parliament elections have posed dilemmas for NRK Sápmi – namely, to what extent the Sámi language should be used in the reporting on the election and whether using Sámi should be prioritised over the objective of reaching all Sámi voters (Skogerbø et al., 2017). Over the years, the combination of languages and multi-platform and multi-media programme productions seemingly have eased or resolved much of the tension between universality and use of Sámi languages, observable in online and programme formats where languages are mixed (e.g., the NRK Sápmi news website, the slow-TV production *Giddajohitin*, 2017).

In Sweden, concerning print media, no Sámi daily or weekly news media exists; however, the magazine *Samefolket*³ in 2020 had seven issues per year and reports extensively on Sámi culture and politics, mainly in Swedish. In northern Sweden, studies have found some coverage of Sámi politics in local newspapers (Gottardis, 2016; Mörkenstam et al., 2012), and over the past few years there seems to be an increasing number of reports on Sámi land rights issues also in national media, such as *Svenska Dagbladet*'s series of articles in 2018 and 2019 (Svenska Dagbladet, 2019).

Public service broadcasting is organised in three independent companies owned by a managing foundation (Förvaltningsstiftelsen, 2018): SVT, SR, and Sveriges Utbildningsradio. They are obliged to produce and broadcast universally accessible programmes for the public. SR's and SVT's remits include the provision of a multifaceted and broad programme offering with a particular responsibility for the Swedish language and must provide content in the national minority languages of Sámi, Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani chib, and Yiddish. Sameradion & SVT Sápmi belongs to SR and SVT, respectively, and is the largest and most important Sámi news producer in Sweden. The two editorial teams were merged into one in 2014, producing Sámi journalism and other programmes on radio, television, and the Internet. Sameradion had its main editorial team in Kiruna and employees in several localities including the capital, Stockholm, and was broadcasting in several Sámi dialects and Swedish. A comparative study of election coverage in NRK Sápmi and Sameradion & SVT Sápmi revealed that the objective of universal reach made Swedish the main language for election coverage, as more Sámi voters would understand the majority language (Skogerbø et al., 2019).

A striking difference between the two public service institutions is the positions they occupied in the organisational structure of their respective parent companies (Skogerbø et al., 2017). While NRK Sápmi in 2020 was a department under the immediate responsibility of the CEO of NRK, Sameradion & SVT Sápmi was a subdivision placed much lower in the organisation. NRK Sápmi and Sameradion & SVT Sápmi both heavily emphasised their responsibility to practise political journalism from the inside, but there were considerable differ-

ences in the resources set up for journalistic production and in the production outcome, measured in hours of television and radio broadcasts. The editorial teams in Sweden were not only much smaller but also divided between two companies, and accordingly initially had fewer opportunities to draw attention to the Sámi community. The marked difference in resources adds to explaining the differences between them. By far, NRK Sápmi had more journalists and resources to provide multilingual content, whereas their Swedish sister organisation had to choose.

As reported by Skogerbø and colleagues (2019), the fact that Sámi stories were rarely told by mainstream, nationwide media was the very motivation for doing Sámi political journalism. The public broadcasters had the most extensive coverage of Sámi politics and, in Sweden, were the only media that reported Sámi news on a daily basis. The situation was somewhat different in Norway, as Sámi and, to some extent, local newspapers in northern Norway, reported regularly on Sámi politics and elections. Both Sámi editorial teams described their practices as indigenous journalism, while they highlighted and emphasised different dimensions. On both sides of the border, they were acutely aware of their position as the main producers of Sámi political journalism and the main mediated public spaces for Sámi politics.

Owing to the differences between the two countries' electoral systems, the frameworks within which the two teams produced Sámi political journalism also differed. NRK Sápmi must report two election campaigns simultaneously, as the elections for the Norwegian parliament and the Sámi Parliament are held on the same day. Therefore, journalists had an opportunity to connect the two campaigns and, for example, confront parliamentarian candidates for the Norwegian parliament with questions about Sámi issues, thereby giving voters information about the power relations between the Norwegian and the Sámi parliaments. In Sweden, the election period for the Sámi Parliament did not run concurrently with that of any other governing body, and the journalists did not have the same opportunities to establish connections between different levels of decision-making.

Sámi journalism is constrained not only by limited resources, immense distances, and scattered audiences, but also by the institutional frameworks of the two countries: differences in politics towards the Sámi; different status of the Sámi as an indigenous people; different powers of the Sámi Parliament; different election and party systems; and different media institutions. As such, indigenous journalism challenges the Nordic public service broadcasting remit: it tells the story of a divided people across borders, where indigenous journalists must operate within the constraints of both national public service institutions and separate political systems (Marklin & Husband, 2013; Skogerbø et al., 2019).

Other political actors

We have so far mainly discussed the “usual suspects” in political communication: governments, parties, media institutions and journalism, and voters, in addition to Sámi reindeer herder communities in Sweden. There are, however, many other cultural and social organisations that make up Sámi civil society and contribute to Sámi political communication. Significantly, three transnational actors need mentioning: the publicly funded Sámi University College; the Sámi Council, which is a non-governmental organisation (NGO); and the Sámi Parliaments’ cooperative body, the Sámi Parliamentary Council. These are important actors safeguarding and articulating a transboundary Sámi community and identity. Moreover, the Sámi have for decades had prominent positions internationally, in particular in the UN. In 2020, the UN Forum for Indigenous Peoples and EMRIP, the expert panel, were headed by two Sámi women from Finland and Norway, respectively. Further, on the national, regional, and local level, Sámi language and culture centres, museums, companies, organisations, and organised Sámi interest groups debate a variety of Sámi issues, forward support and demands, formulate strategies, and implement policies. The total number of Sámi civic organisations and institutions is nevertheless quite low, and there is limited independent civic mobilisation outside the Sámi parliament system and the election canal (Selle & Strømsnes, 2015), both in concrete numbers and compared to the civic society at large in the two countries.

Approaches to analysing Sámi political communication

Many studies show that indigenous peoples are poorly and often stereotypically represented in the majority media, and the coverage of Sámi cultural and political issues has been no exception to this. In the Nordic countries, as elsewhere, there is a long history of marginalisation of ethnic minorities in the nation-wide media (Eide & Simonsen, 2007; Horsti & Hultén, 2011; Skogerbø, 2000). In Nordic research on Sámi political communication, methods, theories, and perspectives from political science, sociology, and other social sciences have been applied, as have approaches from critical and postcolonial studies.

A main approach can be categorised as election studies, as they have been and continue to be carried out in Norway and Sweden. The first Sámi Parliament election study was carried out in Norway in 2009 (Josefsen & Saglie, 2011). In the aftermath of the Sámi Parliament elections in Norway and Sweden in 2013, the research was extended to a comparative study (Josefsen et al., 2017a; Nilsson et al., 2016). The most recent study includes only the Sámi parliamentary election in Norway in 2017 (Berg-Nordlie et al., Forthcoming). With a starting point in a survey study of Sámi voters, extended analyses of

election coverage and practices of journalism, the Sámi election studies have provided insights into Sámi voters' preferences and behaviour, issue salience, political trust, Sámi political news and voters' information sources, and the significance of election systems. Prior to the election projects, a few studies had looked at the development of Sámi politics, power, and influence (Bjerkli & Selle, 2003; Broderstad, 1999, 2001, 2008), and the number of studies also addressing issues of political communication grew over the years (Bjerkli & Selle, 2015). Further, as Sámi political institutions have increasingly been researched, more aspects of political participation and exercise of citizenship have been addressed (Broderstad, 2008; Selle et al., 2015; Semb, 2012), as have the conditions for political communication and political journalism (Skogerbø et al., 2015). The role and influence of the Sámi Parliaments as established political institutions within the Norwegian and Swedish governance systems have been studied by several authors (Falch & Selle, 2018; Falch et al., 2016; Josefsen, 2014; Josefsen et al., 2016; Lawrence & Mörkenstam, 2016; Mörkenstam et al., 2012).

As indigenous and postcolonial perspectives gain ground internationally, they increasingly influence the discussion of Sámi political influence and self-determination (Broderstad, 2014; Kuokkanen, 2009; Lawrence & Mörkenstam, 2016; Minde et al., 2008) as well as studies of Sámi media and journalism (DuBois & Cocq, 2019; Skogerbø et al., 2019), of Sámi journalism (Pietikäinen, 2003; Pietikäinen & Dlaske, 2013; Pietikäinen & Luostarinen, 1997), and of public discourse in Finland (Junka-Aikio, 2016). Plaut (2017) recently found that Sámi journalism should indeed be considered transnational journalism, as it seeks to identify and foster a common sense of identity and nation-building across state borders. To this, we would add cultivating cultural and political images and forging ties across territories, in addition to state-building, which are functions that, for instance, Ravn-Højgaard (2019) foresees for the media in Greenland. This line of thought emphasises indigenous media as instruments for advocacy and cultural revitalisation. Empirically, this trend is rooted in the practices and ideological conviction often expressed by indigenous media producers, which has been quoted in the studies above and also contested. Tara Ross (2017) argues, for instance, that media consumers have many more reasons for using media than ethnicity. The essentialism implicit in the focus on ethnic media may lead to overlooking audiences, and equally important is the fact that ethnic media are often under-resourced and cannot provide their audiences with a full-scale media menu, as Moring (2007) has highlighted. Hokowithu and Devadas (2013), on the other hand, reject the notion that indigenous journalism should be conceptualised as a practice and institution distinct from other forms of journalism or as having inherently emancipatory characteristics.

Conclusion and challenges for future indigenous political communication research

Researching Sámi politics and political communication faces many challenges, of which four are particularly important: recruitment of indigenous researchers; lack of a strong transborder research community; linguistically, culturally, and empirically demanding projects; and integration of postcolonial theories and indigenous studies with political communication frameworks. The points below are made on the basis of our experience with research into Sámi political communication, but we assume that they are equally relevant for research on Kalaallit and Greenlandic political communication.

Recruitment of indigenous researchers

The preface to Veli-Pekka Lehtola's (2004: 5) book on the Sámi people states that "the Sámi are the most studied people in Europe", pointing to the fact that indigenous peoples have been studied as objects of interest for non-indigenous researchers with limited inside knowledge of culture and communication forms. Indigenous peoples' historical experiences of research have been marked by abuse, prejudice, ridicule, arrogance, domination, and even racism (Kovach, 2009). It has not been uncommon for indigenous peoples not to have recognised themselves in the research results and findings (Smith, 1999). In our view, research will always improve by bringing in both outside and inside perspectives and experiences when it concerns indigenous peoples, but we still find examples of where this is not the case. This is also a challenge for political communication research in the Nordic countries.

Lack of a strong transborder research community

Further, one of the most important constraints for Sámi political communication research is the lack of a strong transborder research community on indigenous politics and communication. This chapter, for instance, draws heavily on research done within the framework of the Sámi Parliament Election Projects, yet even these have only once managed to attract funding for a comparative study between Norway and Sweden, and none have included Finland and Russia. Further, whereas there is recruitment to and funding of Sámi research projects in Norway, there are far fewer opportunities for long-term funding, recruitment, and cooperation.

Linguistically, culturally, and empirically demanding projects

Studying Sámi political communication cannot be done without having teams of researchers who, in addition to being well-versed in media and political

communication studies, jointly know Sámi culture and society, have mastered several methods, and know a number of different languages – of which at least one (preferably more) must be a Sámi language, one (preferably more) a Nordic language, and obviously one must be English in order to internationalise, understand, and interpret data across local and transborder contexts. Such teams exist, but are rare and also rarely funded for long periods of time.

Integration of postcolonial theories and indigenous studies with political communication frameworks

As the analyses above show, researching indigenous political communication and indigenous political journalism highlights the need to include indigenous perspectives into mainstream theories on national political systems. Sámi politics and political communication cannot only – neither within or across the borders that divide Sápmi – be analysed with reference to the election and party systems of the nation-states, of which there is an abundant existing literature within the Nordic countries. The Sámi political and media systems simply do not comply; neither do our theories on political journalism and election coverage catch the postcolonial legacy. For example, Sámi elections do not draw massive media attention (Allern, 2011), they are not mediatised (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014), and Sámi top politicians hardly control high media capital (Davis, 2010). Rather, we cannot understand the patterns of political communication without having a theoretical framework that integrates indigenous, postcolonial perspectives with theories on political communication, participation, and representation.

Notes

1. Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen [Truth and reconciliation commission]: <https://uit.no/kommisjonen>
2. The Sámi Parliament in Finland was established by the Sámi Act in 1997. It substituted the former Sámi Delegation [Saamelaisvaltuuskunta] that was established in Finland as early as 1973, a popularly elected advisory body. The Sámi delegation was important for the later demands for Sámi representative bodies in both Norway and Sweden.
3. <http://samefolket.se>

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