


Sámi agency in economic development processes in the Norwegian High North

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Research Article

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Abstract

The emergence of the Sámi Parliament has lifted Norwegian Sámi politics into an international discourse on indigenous peoples. The clearest imprints of the new Sámi political space are found in the High North region of Norway, where the Sámi account for a significant proportion of the population. The article shows to what extent and how Sámi agency affects governance structures and business development in the north in an increasingly globalised economic setting. From its origin, Sámi agency has influenced development in the High North through three processes: the first is through the Sámi institution building and strengthening of Sámi communities; the second is through its links to local and regional societal development; and the third is through the role of Sámi politics in globalised development processes. One main finding is that the boundaries between these links to the surrounding environment have become more diffuse. Sámi agency is taking a more important role in the economic development processes in the High North, often in terms of the local and regional processes, and now also within the increasingly important globalised economic modernisation processes in which inclusion in new multi-level governance structures is important.

Introduction

From the 1960s, Norway's indigenous policy was closely linked to the national political and administrative level. The Sámi gained more influence since Norway adopted an actual Sámi Act in 1987 and established the Sámi Parliament in 1989. The Norwegian Constitution imposes a special responsibility on the state to create the right conditions for the Sámi to protect and develop their language, culture and society. The article analyses recent development trends in the role of Sámi agency within a state and a region that is increasingly included in “multi-level governance” systems and pinpoints how Sámi agency is included in development processes in Norway's High North related to these profound changes in the governance system, and this governance system's interaction with the increasing economic globalisation.

An important aspect of the Norwegian government initiative from just after the start of the new millennium has been to make the High North attractive to global businesses. Large-scale industrial projects within petroleum, mining, wind power and aquaculture encounter a Sámi role with stronger legal protection than before, and that gives weight to protecting small-scale traditional industries in local Sámi communities. The article discusses the extent to which, and in what way, the Sámi – with the Sámi Parliament as the core institution – are linked to such development processes, and the power base from which the Sámi Parliament originates.

The Sámi Parliament's position in Norway is connected to the improved legal status achieved by indigenous peoples under international law since the 1980s. The Sámi impact has increased in scope and, as part of an increasingly globalised indigenous field, has augmented Sámi rights in terms of what “it is possible to do”, particularly in the core Sámi areas. It is by far the strongest of the Sámi Parliaments in the Nordic countries, both in terms of economic resources and formal position (Falch & Selle, 2018; Mörkenstam, 2021). At the same time, the Sámi are highly integrated into Norwegian society (Selle, Semb, Strømsnes, & Nordø, 2015). This is also apparent within Sámi politics, whereby national political parties participate in elections to the Sámi Parliament, in contrast to Norway's neighbouring countries. In Norway, Sámi politics is part of the “normal politics” to a higher degree (Falch & Selle, 2018). In Sweden and Finland, there are no “co-governance institutions” like *Finnmarkseiendommen* (FeFo) (the Finnmark Estate), which the state made to Norway's largest landowner in 2006. Sweden and Finland have not ratified the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 (ILO 169), which has played an important role in the development of Sámi rights in Norway, even though strong Sámi interests in our neighbouring countries have sought this (Mörkenstam, 2021).

The article links this development to the increased political and economic attention the High North and the Arctic have attracted globally. This concerns how the new Sámi political strength affects the Norwegian High North policy, and how the Norwegian High North policy in turn

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affects the Sámi scope for action. The analysis provides insights into how politics is more generally unfolded when global, national, regional and local levels are interconnected in different ways than before, and where the global level takes on a new and more direct significance at the local and regional levels. The state is also taking new roles, but now as something broader than decentralisation of state power (Hooghe & Marks, 2016; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016). These profound changes mean that what is happening in the High North and in Sámi politics can be construed as a new form of multi-level governance, with clear elements of governance between actors at different administrative levels (vertically), but also horizontally, where both business operators and the Sámi Parliament are involved in new ways. The government model, or “government” axis, is no longer as dominant as before (Enderlein, Wältz & Zürn, 2010; Hooghe & Marks, 2016; Hooghe, Marks, & Shakel, 2020; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016; Sørensen & Torfing, 2008, 2018; Zürn, 2020). The changes also entail that regional innovation politics addressing regional based innovation systems has been receding, compared to attracting new global production networks and developing new indigenous peoples’ institutions (Eikeland, 2016).

In the extensive “multi-level governance” literature, which is often also called post-functionalist, there are two main directions and various combinations of these. One emphasises the functional aspect, i.e., which geographical space and institutional solutions are considered most functional and effective when there is a significant change of scale due to the economic globalisation and new combinations of relationships between the local, regional, national and global levels. The second main direction arises from new institutional solutions related to ethnic and territorial conflicts in mainly nations, with a strong emphasis on territorial or region-based identity caused by these tensions. Here, emphasis is given to the necessity of co-governance arrangements that may conflict with the size ideal within the more functional approach, because they require the transfer of power to a more limited geographical area than required by the functional approach’s efficiency thinking (Hooghe & Marks, 2016; Kleider, 2020). These “multi-level governance models” and especially the second one set the overall framework for how we approach the relationship between Sámi agency and development processes in the High North (Hooghe & Marks, 2020; Hooghe *et al.*, 2020).

The emphasis on a more holistic and macro-oriented approach means that the article is not intended to be a hypothesis-based article in which we pursue a specific, core hypothesis. Our aim is rather to analyse main factors and their interconnections influencing the profound changes that are taken place in Norwegian High North by particular addressing the emergence of Sámi agency. We have published extensively within this research field, including two books (Angell, Eikeland, & Selle, 2010, 2016) and several articles, and have followed development processes in the High North for more than 30 years as well as social and political analyses of this period. Our approach, based on broad and deep knowledge of what is going on, is primarily empirical, although we do not as part of the article delve deeply into statistical data or individual cases of which we have extensive knowledge. Moreover, most of the data included in the analyses is based on own and others use of qualitative methods in published empirical case analyses, but we also include research results made by published statistical analyses. The overall aim for our analyses and use of this enormous amount and knowledge made by many researchers is to show more generally that new actors, particularly Sámi actors, at different levels in the governance system play an important role,

and that the relationships between key actors are changing in character and strength. As we will see, this is changing the political dynamic in the High North.

In Norway’s northernmost county, Finnmark, the clearest imprints of the new Sámi agency are evident from the establishment of the Sámi Parliament (in 1989) and other Sámi institutions. Here, the Sámi account for a significant proportion of the population, and the state has given the Sámi Parliament power and influence, without this being based on territorial autonomy as in federal Canada’s north (Wilson, Alcantara, & Rodon, 2020). Experience from Norway’s High North is therefore particularly interesting to study from a multi-level governance perspective, in which the ethnic dimension is central to the interaction between indigenous politics and more general political and economic development processes (Hooghe & Marks, 2020).

The article gives weight to the role of Sámi agency in Norway from the turn of the millennium, which is proving to be particularly challenging in the tension between more rights for indigenous people and economic modernisation and globalisation. These are challenges that generally place high demands on indigenous people in meeting with global industries and public institutions trying to attract such industries. Such adjustments take different forms in different countries, as there are clear distinctions between federal states and unitary states such as Norway (Selle & Wilson, 2022). In this article, we do not have an overarching comparative aim and only sporadically address variations in how states have adapted their institutions to the development in international law and indigenous peoples’ rights.

The article first shows how the scope and nature of Sámi agency in general has changed, and links this to the political and economic development in the High North to which Sámi politics must relate and of which it is also part. Then we discuss why the gap between general economic development and the nature and character of Sámi politics is widening, even with a stronger Sámi legal position. We then address how the interaction between actors is changing nature and exerting pressure on Sámi agency, highlighting structural challenges to the Sámi role. In a concluding section, we discuss whether a new Sámi role that protects fundamental Sámi interests is at all possible in a more complex environment of which the Sámi now are an important part.

Sámi politics altered scope

Modern Sámi policy is increasingly linked to the global level through indigenous peoples’ networks and the international conventions to which Norway is committed. The UN system is emerging as increasingly more central to the co-governance of which the indigenous dimension is part. In this regard, the UN’s various human rights conventions (in particular SP 1 and 27), the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent States (ILO 169) from 1989 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples from 2007 (UNDRIP), are particularly important. Several of the UN’s oversight bodies are also important in the work of ensuring that a nation’s indigenous policy is in accordance with international legislation (Falch & Selle, 2018).

Sámi politics has changed from being an internal Sámi agenda in the 1980s to take an increasingly important role in local and regional development processes, as part of greater Sámi autonomy and self-determination, and Sámi agency sought to play an important role when economic globalisation became relevant in the new millennium. Increased Sámi influence has given rise to

conflicts, both locally and regionally, and within Sámi institutions and communities. The core issue in larger development processes is often that they affect the land available for reindeer husbandry, but also broader changes related to major development projects affect Sámi society and way of life (Eriksen & Falch, 2016; Riseth, Eilertsen, & Johansen, 2021; Riseth & Lie, 2016). Since 2009, the Sámi Parliament has had a right to object under the Norwegian Planning and Building Act (Broderstad & Josefsen, 2016; Riseth & Nygaard, 2018). This new position in local and regional development has led to conflict concerning the building of new industrial plants and infrastructure. Since 2005, the Sámi Parliament has also had its own consultation agreement with the state, adopted by legislation in 2021 (Broderstad, Hernes, & Jenssen, 2015a; Falch, 2022; Hernes & Oskal, 2008). This does not give any veto power, but consultations have become an institutional breakthrough for co-governance between the Sámi Parliament and public authorities at all levels, and gradually also in relation to large global companies (Allard, 2018; Falch & Selle, 2018).

An important expression of greater Sámi influence is Norway's adoption of a separate Finnmark Act in 2005, based on international law on indigenous peoples and acceptance that the Sámi have special rights to land and water in Finnmark. An important consequence of the Act is the transfer of property and administrative land rights in Finnmark from the state-owned *Statskog* to FeFo. FeFo was formed under the Finnmark Act and almost 96% of the land in Finnmark was transferred to it from *Statskog*, which until then had managed the land in the county on behalf of the state. At the same time, the Finnmark Commission was established to review use and property conditions in the county. This very extensive work is not expected to be completed until 2033 (Gauslaa, 2021). A separate court, the *Utmarkdomstolen* (Outland Court) for Finnmark, has also been appointed to rule on disputes. Its rulings can be appealed to the Norwegian Supreme Court.

The Sámi Parliament, together with the Finnmark County Council, is FeFo's "owner institutions", and each appoints three board representatives. This is an important expression of increased Sámi influence, since the Sámi are a clear minority also in Finnmark (Broderstad, Josefsen & Søreng, 2015b; Falch & Selle, 2018; Hernes & Selle, 2021; Selle, 2016).

New types of cooperation agreement have led to increased contact and cooperation between the Sámi Parliament, county council and municipalities. This means new arenas for negotiation and co-governance that contribute to "normalising" and "routinising" Sámi politics in the High North's political and administrative institutional landscape (Falch & Selle, 2018).

Sámi agency from the late 1980s and the emergence of the Norwegian High North policy from the turn of the millennium were parallel processes for an extended period. But now these two increasingly encounter and influence each other through the institutionalisation of Sámi politics, which has created new links between Sámi politics and development processes at all levels. To understand the growth and importance of these links and thereby of the new multi-level governance structures appearing, we distinguish between three main types of Sámi connection to these general change processes, of which the time dimension is important. The categorisation is meant to help concretise the main characteristics of ongoing development processes (Angell, Eikeland, & Selle, 2016) and must be understood as ideal types. In practice, however, there will be porous boundaries between these categories and significant changes over time.

The internal dimension

The first type of connection arises from the internal orientation of Sámi politics and is the very basis for Sámi power and influence. Without legitimacy and strength in the core of Sámi society, Sámi politics will not have the power to play any great role in major development processes outside of these areas. In the first years after the Sámi Parliament's emergence from the end of the 1980s, the Sámi were not included to any great extent in processes with other stakeholders of the High North.

The strengthening of Sámi agency is rooted in national and international law, which makes it a national responsibility to safeguard indigenous peoples' community life economically and culturally. We see decentralisation of authority to the Sámi Parliament as well as transfer of administrative tasks, but this is nevertheless taking place within a Sámi public sphere in which the Sámi have increasingly stronger national and international legal protection, which differs fundamentally from customary interest-based politics (Allard, 2018; Falch & Selle, 2018). In this "internal" field, the Sámi Parliament is the core institution with its modern bureaucracy (160 employees and a budget moving towards one billion Norwegian kroner) and 39 democratically elected representatives

There is no doubt that without the extensive state transfers and the significant Sámi institution building that has taken place since the 1990s, the Sámi political centre in Norway (the municipalities of Karasjok and Kautokeino) would have developed differently and would have had a significantly lower population than the almost 3,000 inhabitants they each have today. There are almost 900 new "Sámi jobs" in the Sámi Parliament, Sámi University College, Sámi media and theatre, Sámi language centres, Sámi health institutions, etc. The majority are publicly funded, requiring a high level of expertise, and well-educated women and men find relevant jobs there. By far most workplaces are in the core Sámi areas of inner Finnmark (Angell, Gaski, Lie, & Nygaard, 2014; Angell & Lie, 2016).

The Sámi Parliament also has its own instruments to stimulate business development, for which the priorities are based on a strong traditional and small-scale orientation, with emphasis on primary industries and combination thereof (Angell, 2016; Nygaard & Kårtveit, 2021). The area covered by the Sámi Parliament subsidy schemes for business development is called the STN area. The STN area has been constantly expanded, and new municipalities want to join, while the Sámi Parliament's budget remains fixed (approximately NOK 35 million per year). This results in great pressure on these limited fundings, leading to questions about their impact on Sámi society. The Sámi Parliament has recently made important changes to the support system, whereby ethnic criteria are strengthened (Falch, 2022).

This "internal" dimension is crucial for the Sámi Parliament to be able to play a role in the broader economic development in the High North and to have clout in relation to other administrative levels and actors. This is particularly important because the Sámi in Norway do not live in their own enclaves like many other indigenous peoples and are deeply connected to the general political and economic development in society at large (Selle et al., 2015).

The regional dimensions

The second main type of interaction concerns Sámi politics' connection to local and regional societal development. Co-governance thereby now concerns something more and different compared with originally relationship between the Sámi

Parliament and the state to increase Sámi self-determination. Cooperation agreements between the Sámi Parliament and county councils, municipalities and other bodies contribute to expanding the binding cooperation and co-governance, mainly concerning language, culture and industry (Falch & Selle, 2018).

An important and challenging field in regional development is reindeer husbandry's extensive use of uncultivated land that conflicts with other use of the same areas, as exemplified in road construction, cabin construction, mineral development and energy development (particularly wind power) both in Finnmark and further south (Riseth & Lie, 2016; Nygaard, 2016; Nygaard, Carlsson, & Sletterød, 2017; Riseth et al., 2021). Increased Sámi rights to land resources also entail increased regional self-determination rights in areas where the Sámi have previously had little say. Examples of this increased Sámi influence are clearly apparent from FeFo, which since 2006 has managed the land in Finnmark for the benefit of the entire population, but with a special responsibility for safeguarding Sámi interests (Hernes & Oskal, 2008; Hernes & Selle, 2021; Selle, 2016). Furthermore, the Sámi Parliament gets an important role in land-use planning under the Planning and Building Act (Broderstad & Josefsen, 2016; Riseth & Nygaard, 2018), as well as in small-scale fjord fisheries (Hersoug & Mikkelsen, 2016).

This is Sámi agency with economic implications that may be strongly contested locally and regionally, as is virtually always the case when ethnopolitics are institutionalised. This is because the Sámi position arises from "something" that local and regional authorities may perceive as originating "from outside", from the national and global level, and because of how the legalisation of indigenous rights increasingly impedes compromises in development matters. The legal orientation therefore changes the framework for local and regional politics and affects the balance of power. This is perceived by many as special Sámi rights that violate the general democratic understanding of "one person one vote", i.e., a move from individual to group rights. This brings a whole new and, for many, foreign dimension into local and regional politics. This is also a dimension that no longer can be overlooked or swung around in the co-governance system that has emerged, where economic globalisation also exerts pressure on local and regional decision-making power more generally (Eikeland 2016; Falch & Selle, 2018). The Sámi role expresses a new type of multi-level governance whereby local and regional politics, and not only nations, must adapt to the globalisation of indigenous agency.

The global dimensions

The third main type of institutional interconnection is the Sámi impact on major global development processes. These processes are the focal point of our forthcoming analysis, and we will therefore only briefly describe the main features here. In such processes, for a long time Sámi interests played a very limited role. Now we can see clear upheavals precisely due to major changes in the Sámi political environment, from which Sámi politics can no longer operate independently, and which puts pressure on ways of thinking and tradition in Sámi societies. The political and economic system is obliged to accept that the Sámi have a new and important role to play, while the Sámi Parliament and Sámi politics are forced to be part of this new multi-level governance system, to safeguard Sámi interests. There is mutual dependence whereby Sámi agency becomes an integral aspect of overarching new political and economic processes. However, economic globalisation and the

globalisation of indigenous politics are completely different forms of globalisation that do not point in the same direction: one towards globalised large-scale business operations and the other towards traditional and small-scale activities supported by indigenous international law (Falch, 2022; Falch & Selle, 2018).

This generally expresses a broader Sámi political interest in what is happening in society at large, where the Sámi Parliament is part of a wider regional, national and global context. As the "multi-level governance" literature emphasises, changes in governance structures have increased the links between different levels, and setting boundaries between local and regional, and national and global is far more difficult than before. The global dimension is applicable in a new and decisive way, affecting the framework conditions for development (Hooghe & Marks, 2016; Zürn, 2020).

The new development in the High North

The Norwegian High North policy that gradually emerged from the early 1990s concerned political strategies developed nationally by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an adjustment to global neoliberal economic trends and a new foreign policy and economic situation in the High North after the Cold War (Angell, 2010; Pedersen, 2018). It was an important aspect of a broad national strategy to give the High North a new global position and to open it up towards, and attract, external actors, with the oil and gas sector and the mineral industry at the centre. These are industries on which the state has a strong impact via granting of rights and approval of development plans and ownership.

A central aspect is the geopolitical changes in the Barents Sea, where the maritime delimitation agreement with Russia in 2010 and the opening of the Barents Sea for leasing, development and operation of oil and gas fields are crucial. Geopolitical changes highlighted the need for a new Norwegian High North policy attracting global players. New institutions within education, research and administration have emerged. Foreign and defence policy, together with climate and environmental policy, is also an important aspect, although for a prolonged period they received less attention (Angell, 2010; Angell, Eikeland, & Selle, 2010; Pedersen, 2018). This has deeply changed with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Foreign and defence policy has become core priorities and economic cooperation with Russia has dramatically declined (Teräs, Eikeland, Koivurova, & Salenius, 2023). It is a new situation, but it is still too early to conclude how exactly it will influence the economic globalisation of the area we have emphasised, and not the least the role of the Sámi within it.

Despite the current geopolitical situation, the relevance of the former Icelandic President Grímsson stating that the High North could become an "intellectual frontier" for knowledge and solutions to the profound global challenges that our planet faces is still as relevant as ever (Grímsson, 2009). He emphasised that this frontier must also include those who live in the areas, including indigenous peoples, and where external interests are no longer free to come in from outside at no cost. In other words, this concerns a new type of "frontier", in which the relationship between the external and the internal is intertwined in new ways (Eikeland, 2016). New ideas and new actors with access to the multi-level governance structures no longer make it possible for "external economic forces" to simply set up shop, since the rights of indigenous peoples apply in a whole new way.

This new understanding contrasts with how the national policy aimed at the High North after World War II mainly concerned developing the region as a “homeland”. Until around 1980, this policy was aimed at a population whose ethnic divisions were not viewed as decisive, and where it was assumed that the Sámi were assimilated or at least closely integrated into Norwegian society as “Sámi-speaking Norwegians” (Selle et al., 2015). Key policy areas such as state-initiated industrialisation after 1945, and later the Norwegian welfare and rural politics with particular emphasis on the High North, focused on improving living conditions for the inhabitants through a national income transfer system whereby no real distinction was made between Norwegian and Sámi (Eikeland, 2016).

In recent decades, the national development and innovation policy became regionalised (Angell, Eikeland, & Selle, 2016). Money and political power moved from the state to the regional level. A regional system for industrial development emerged based on interaction between regionally rooted industry, where many businesses in the High North are small and operate without major growth ambitions; a regionally oriented education system; and regionalised policy instruments for business support, where the county councils gained a more important role as facilitators of industrial development. This was an important shift in the relationship between different levels of the governance system, with a strong element of decentralisation (Eriksen & Falch, 2016; Eikeland, 2010, 2016).

The Sámi Parliament’s financial support schemes for business development were often not closely linked to the regionalised development system that emerged towards the turn of the millennium. The Sámi Parliament’s policy was nevertheless built on parallel ideas based on a small-scale and traditionally oriented Sámi business sector (Angell, 2016; Eriksen & Falch, 2016). Nevertheless, the Sámi Parliament engaged, if not always centrally, in regional development partnerships, which consisted of public actors from the county councils, regional state actors often with extensive regional autonomy and representatives from local and regional partners in industries and municipalities. Together they developed regional development programmes. A new regional co-governance system emerged in which interaction between regionally rooted actors would be the centre of gravity to ensure innovation from below to a far greater extent than through previously large and centrally managed national programmes. Here, the Sámi Parliament could move in through an active and local-oriented use of instruments that increasingly pointed beyond the internal Sámi and core Sámi areas, and which led to a shift from the more internal towards increased interest in local and regional aspects, without coming into conflict with its own basic small-scale and traditionalist position. The development was adapted to the legal development and the emphasis on traditional and small-scale business operations (Falch & Selle, 2018).

This marked an important institutional change that became particularly evident in the High North, where the state has historically held a decisive position due to particular focus on industry and the welfare state, and since 1986 with specific instruments for attracting individuals and businesses to the area through the action zone for Finnmark and North Troms (Angell et al., 2012). Neither the state industries or specific welfare arrangements nor individual target policies have, with few exceptions, specifically addressed the Sámi and Sámi communities. In other words, the understanding of the preconditions for development had deeply changed and become far more regional

and local than before, with responsibility also transferred to a greater extent from the state to the local and regional level (Eikeland, 2016).

This structure has now deeply changed with the new High North policy that opens for extensive economic globalisation. Global industry actors quickly responded to the state’s new facilitation. The first instance was Equinor’s development of the Snøhvit gas field in the Barents Sea, with an LNG plant at Hammerfest, which at around NOK 60 billion was the largest industrial investment to date in Northern Norway (Eikeland, Karlstad, Ness, Nilsen, & Berg Nilssen, 2009). The field came on stream in 2008. The first oil field in the Barents Sea, Goliat, came on stream in 2016, when the operator, Italian Eni Norge, gained the central authorities’ support for an offshore solution. Regional spin-off effects in the development phase are considerable and the development of other petroleum fields is in process (Nilsen & Karlstad, 2016). Local and regional-based development processes, such as the regional business and innovation policy, were now overshadowed by regional spin-off effects of the entry of the petroleum industry.

This development is a major leap in scale, with new actors that are not adapted to traditional Sámi business practice and not even to the more regional business policy. In other words, the co-governance system based on the region level and with the Sámi as an increasingly important part that had emerged is breaking down, and something new on another scale and with new types of interconnections is emerging (Angell et al., 2016; Paasi, 2004). This development is particularly problematic for a Sámi business model that originates from the strong traditional and small-scale orientation that is an important aspect of what it means to be indigenous, and which is supported by international law (ILO 169, UNDRIP 2007) (Falch, 2022; Falch & Selle, 2018).

Economic globalisation supported by state policies and strategies has uncertain long-term consequences for Sámi societal development and increases the perception of cultural and economic risk associated with large-scale industrial development. How can Sámi politics adapt to such a profound change in the surrounding environment when small-scale business development in rural areas is their core position? Is the Sámi’s adjustment to the new situation at all possible without themselves being transformed and ridden with external and internal conflict, and how strong are the forces that do not want to be transformed?

The difficult adaptation of Sámi agency to economic globalisation

The increasing economic globalisation is challenging Sámi business life and perceptions in the Sámi public domain of what this business sector should be (Angell, 2016; Eikeland, 2016). Development in the High North entered a phase with a new mix of economics and politics at the regional level, in which the links between the local, regional, national and global changed character. For many, the Norwegian initiative in the High North was a dramatic expression of a change in scale, apparent from the entry of the major global players not only in the oil and gas industry but also in the minerals sector, aquaculture, wind power and the knowledge sector (Angell, Eikeland, & Selle, 2016).

Sámi politics, with its strong emphasis on cultural protection rather than economic growth, is now increasingly exacerbating conflicts of interest between the Sámi and “the others” and internally in Sámi society. This has created a politicised and

conflict-ridden field in which Sámi agency is increasingly squeezed between traditional cultural protection and large-scale economic development, where it is very difficult to find a new position that safeguards the Sámi culture and way of life within an increasingly more differentiated Sámi society (Angell, Nygaard, & Selle, 2020; Selle & Wilson, 2022).

A key aspect of this situation is that the High North policy is closely linked to increasing economic globalisation, and at the same time to Sámi politics and a more globalised and legalised indigenous field. This is not just new but also deeply challenging, because the “leap in level” has made it difficult to find common solutions if the Sámi position is so strongly traditional and small-scale oriented and thereby does not play on the same team as the very essence of the new policy (Angell, 2016; Eriksen & Falch, 2016).

The High North policy can be viewed as an attempt at a new variant of major government initiatives in the High North, as we previously saw in the industry and welfare field, but now in a globalised context, with the state taking on new roles. The state is still very much involved but in other ways than before. The overall orientation is different, and the micromanagement is less extensive (Lægneid & Rykkja, 2016; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018).

Sámi agency, based on strong legalisation and orientation towards tradition, is increasingly seeking influence by trying to prevent the planning of, or postponing or even stopping, major land-based industrial projects in the Sámi areas (Falch, 2022). This takes place by connecting closely to international law and using the power inherent in the right of objection in the Norwegian Planning and Building Act. This strategy has been used for mining and for wind and hydropower, while the conditions for exercising Sámi power are more limited when it comes to the development of power lines and petroleum activities (Angell et al., 2020; Falch & Selle, 2018).

Sámi politics and the Sámi Parliament have thus gained a new formal and legitimate role that arises from a different form of globalisation – emphasising the legalisation of indigenous rights. In the understanding of indigenous people’s rights, emphasis is given to the great affinity between culture, language and industry to safeguard key features of a distinctive culture with a long historical tradition. This deep-seated connection between culture, language and industry defines the Sámi as an indigenous people with the support of international legislation and gives the right to maintain and develop self-determination and to draw boundaries in relation to others. Supported by law, the interests of the indigenous people, here represented by the Sámi Parliament as the legitimate Sámi’s elected body, enter the global development processes in completely new ways. This is taking place in a hinterland that is increasingly more integrated across levels and is thereby to a lesser extent exclusively local and regional. Sámi agency is becoming far more visible, while at the same time major economic trends and social development are making it increasingly more challenging to achieve economic growth in local Sámi communities without breaking out of the small-scale, traditional orientation, with its strong emphasis on primary industries (Eriksen & Falch, 2016).

It is in this challenging and complex political and economic landscape that conditions are changing character, where the strengthening of a Sámi public sphere in some areas allows for political processes with accompanying investments and public financial transfers that would not otherwise have been possible. This strengthens Sámi institution-building and self-determination,

which is now actively being used politically in a wider hinterland than before, without it being any easier to achieve penetration, due to the increased complexity and because strong interest groups are on the scene in society-transforming processes.

This position leads to greater conflict in a hinterland that is desperate for new jobs and enhanced dynamics in economic life, and where there are considerable demographic problems. This is reinforced by the significant challenges to democracy and legitimacy associated with the ethnopolitical development, not least since not only the Sámi Parliament but also FeFo enjoys limited support from the population of Finnmark, including from many Sámi (Broderstad et al., 2015b; Falch & Selle, 2018).

The profound changes in the surrounding environment, and the new multi-level governance structures of which the Sámi are an important part, mean that more and more of what is happening “out there” will have a strong impact on Sámi culture and society, almost regardless of how the new scope of opportunity is used. In view of the sparse business environments, low population counts and demographic challenges (Broderstad & Sørli, 2011; Angell & Lie, 2016), the chances of a significant local and regional Sámi impact on the activities of these new global industry players, even with the backing of national and international law, are likely to be limited. Powerful economic trends are not easy to resist even when backed by international law. This applies even if individual projects can be influenced and, in some cases, stopped. The new global economic dimension and the local conditions do not point in the same direction. It is nevertheless easier for the local and regional level to adapt by emphasising new jobs and economic growth, even without being the economic driver, than it is for the Sámi Parliament, through their strong traditionally small-scale orientation, to ensure that they stand out from “the others” to present themselves as indigenous people.

It must be emphasised that much of what is presented in the public sphere as a common Sámi understanding is characterised by considerable internal variation and even internal conflict between various Sámi interests and institutions. This is clear, for example, from the controversy in Kvalsund municipality concerning the establishment of the Nussir mining company, where the Sámi Parliament is against the building of a cobber mine and FeFo and Kvalsund are in favour. FeFo and Kvalsund municipality are in many contexts understood as Sámi-dominated institutions (Eriksen & Falch, 2016; Angell et al., 2020). The different conclusions taken by the Sámi Parliament and FeFo are particularly interesting in a Sámi political context and arise from different views on which business development is needed in Sámi areas to safeguard Sámi culture and society in the longer run (Angell et al., 2020; Falch & Selle, 2018).

In other words, the challenges and conflicts concern something more than the relationship between the Sámi and “the others”. They increasingly also concern who within the Sámi community should have the final say in the event of conflicting interests, and where the individual Sámi have varying affiliation to the labour market. The politics which best ensures Sámi society’s development in both the short and long term has therefore become conflictive and difficult to define, and the strategic challenges associated with the new economic change processes are substantial.

Core structural challenges

The Sámi Parliament has gained an important role in the new multi-level governance system that has emerged in the High North, but as we have seen, this is a challenging role. There is increased

Sámi interest in what is happening within oil, gas, mineral activities and wind power, where Sámi actors, backed by international law, are increasingly linked to processes whereby powerful large-scale industry players enter a region with strong Sámi interests.

In modern democracies with indigenous peoples, it has gradually become common for serious companies that want to build a good reputation to have dialogue and consultations with the indigenous peoples. In Norway's case, this means the Sámi Parliament and relevant reindeer pasture districts. For example, Eni Norge, operator of the Goliat field in the Barents Sea, has a specific Corporate Social Responsibility approach to operating in indigenous peoples' areas (Rødeseike, 2016) and has conducted consultations and dialogue with the Sámi Parliament and relevant reindeer pasture districts. In, e.g., Canada, there are several relevant examples of how territorially based self-determination schemes have been developed that provide tax laws and regulation opportunities and, to some extent, extract profits locally from companies in indigenous peoples' areas (Treaty federalism) (Wilson et al., 2020). In the Canadian areas, there are often also separate economic corporations, owned by indigenous peoples, built up through significant federal transfers to make up for historical injustices. These companies play an important role in the area's economic development and can conclude cooperation agreements with global companies (Papillon & Rodon, 2017; Wilson et al., 2020; Wilson & Selle, 2019).

Economic institutions and investment capital of this type are however not found in the core Sámi areas of Norway, in which the Sámi are a more integrated part of the national economy than indigenous people in, say, Canada. In other words, the scope for action is different and economically more limited in a unitary state like Norway, where the Sámi Parliament has no territorial and financial autonomy and must pursue a policy for the Sámi throughout the whole country (Selle & Wilson, 2022).

International indigenous peoples law sets a new and important framework for what is possible and "legal", even though Sámi institutions have no formal veto power (Semb, 2015, 2021). In Norway, ILO Convention 169 and increasingly also the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), with its emphasis on "Free, Prior and Informed Consent" (FPIC), are playing an increasingly important role that points beyond the internal and local aspects and towards the global dimension, addressing issues such as veto power in matters that particularly concern them (Falch & Selle, 2018; Papillon & Rodon, 2017, 2019).

As we have seen, the Sámi Parliament is taking an increasingly stronger position when it comes to this large-scale business development, where due to the strong traditional and local orientation, this is mostly apparent as attempts to use deferral power or even embargo power, often with the support of the UN's various oversight bodies (Falch, 2022; Falch & Selle, 2018). Conflicts concerning mining, as in Kvalsund commune, are a clear example of how such processes unfold, and after more than 10 years of investigations, and with final state approval of the project (in 2019), the first sod has not yet been turned and strong political opposition and difficulty finding investors are presenting challenges. There is no doubt that in this case the Sámi Parliament has exercised a considerable degree of deferral power that in practice may prove to be embargo power (Angell et al., 2020; Falch & Selle, 2018; Nygaard, 2016; Nygaard et al., 2017).

Sámi influence cannot only be exerted within the mineral field, of which examples are the battle to establish a gold mine in Kautokeino and a copper mine in Kvalsund (Nygaard, 2016). Within oil and gas, aquaculture (Hersoug & Mikkelsen, 2016) and

tourism (Viken, 2016), so far, the Sámi position is not as visible and strong, and the level of conflict is lower than within mining. For land-intensive wind and hydropower development, however, the level of conflict may be reminiscent of what we see in the mineral field. Here, strong mobilisation linked to international law has in several cases stopped development plans, including some that were far-advanced (Eriksen & Falch, 2016; Falch 2022; Riseth & Lie, 2016). Of particular interest is the Fosen ruling from 2021, where the Norwegian Supreme Court concluded that a major wind power development project completed in southern Sámi reindeer herding areas violates human rights (SP 27). How this case develops further will give important insight into how strong Sámi law stands in meeting strong national and global interests.

It is not a given, but not unlikely either, that over time the Sámi Parliament will have an increasingly more visible and important role in such major development processes, due to the national and international legal developments in the indigenous field. Opposition from indigenous peoples could not only impose major economic costs in conflict-ridden environments on developers and authorities in modern Western democracies but also major reputational costs if the projects are pushed through irrespective of whether such projects have the support of the state and regional authorities. This is nonetheless highly challenging because in a unitary state like Norway, the Sámi do not live in "isolation" but are integrated into a hinterland on which they are also economically dependent. This type of influence is exerted without the Sámi Parliament so far having any formal authority to stop such projects. A difference between formal and real power in the indigenous field is increasingly apparent, as underlined in the multi-level governance literature where ethnopolitics often is a driving force (Hooghe & Marks, 2020). At the same time, a strong "internal" position that sets the framework for Sámi politics is core to how the Sámi Parliament can work to achieve economic influence, whether this concerns greater local and regional clout or is linked to the new economic globalisation. Without enough strength to set boundaries that ensure Sámi differences, they will quickly become engrossed in (co-opted into) the attempts to influence more general development processes in which strong societal forces are involved (Falch & Selle, 2018).

Today, Sámi politics is developed within the Sámi Parliament, seeking to adapt to the considerable changes in the surrounding environment, in which economic globalisation is fundamentally changing the framework conditions. In a highly integrated unitary state such as Norway, it is not possible for the Sámi Parliament and Sámi politics to operate outside general development processes over time, and the increasing globalisation makes this even more difficult than before, because it is sought to safeguard something that is less and less in line with society's more general development. The economic globalisation is also affecting the local communities in core Sámi areas (Falch & Selle, 2018).

In other words, Sámi politics has become more visible and relevant within a relatively short period of time and appears to be less closed towards the general development of society in the High North. Despite these changes resulting in increased complexity and participation in governance arrangement, it is nevertheless a strengthened traditional orientation that dominates the thinking of the Sámi Parliament. When there are no clear alternatives other than seeking to stop major industrial projects in the Sámi areas, this can be understood as a rational response to the increased pressure on Sámi culture and way of living (Angell et al., 2020; Selle & Wilson, 2022). This traditionally oriented Sámi understanding determines a position in increasingly more challenging encounters

with society at large, and not least the encounter with large global corporations and state interests. This is a difficult position, not only externally but also in Sámi society since, as we have seen, there are profound internal tensions concerning economic modernisation issues. This is closely linked to increased challenges related to migration and the deeply felt need for a larger and more differentiated business sector in core Sámi areas (Angell et al., 2020).

Reindeer husbandry, as the only major culture-specific Sámi industry, occupies a key position in cultural survival and development thinking and has a decisive impact on what can be accepted by the Sámi Parliament. In this respect, the Norwegian and Nordic tradition differs clearly from the situation in North America and Greenland, where there is no equivalent to the land-intensive and culture-bearing reindeer herding. Combinations of tradition and modernity become easier to handle and increase the opportunity space cognitively as well as institutionally in economic politics (Selle & Wilson, 2022). Understanding the great importance of reindeer husbandry for Sámi culture and language, to ensure that they stand out from “the others”, appears to be particularly important in view of the current major changes in the surrounding environment. Increased pressure on the Sámi culture and way of life has made adjustment to and the strengthening of tradition a key political strategy among those who govern.

Nevertheless, there is by no means consensus on this, and many believe that the position of reindeer husbandry sets the terms for the political and economic development and, more generally, for the preservation and development of Sámi culture to an excessive extent and prevents renewal in Sámi areas (Angell et al., 2020; Falch & Selle, 2018). This has led to Sámi institutions such as the Sámi Parliament and FeFo being opposed to each other in industrial matters. This has now also gained important political expression through the *Nordkalottfolket* (*The People of the Northern Cap Party*) party's breakthrough in Sámi politics in the election in 2021, becoming the second largest party. *Nordkalottfolket* is against the strong globalisation and legalisation of Sámi politics, is opposed to strong demarcation processes between the peoples of the High North and critical of reindeer husbandry's strong influence on Sámi society. This position is a fundamental break with what has been at the core of the Sámi politics ever since the first election in 1989, with emphasis on legalisation, land rights and self-determination, and where from the very outset *Norske Samers Riksforbund* (The Norwegian Sámi Association, NSR) has been the dominant player (Falch & Selle, 2023).

The tradition-based orientation entails great Sámi scepticism towards large-scale development projects in Sámi areas, because they put pressure on land use and thereby on reindeer husbandry and are perceived as entailing the risk of undermining the culture. The political leadership of the Sámi Parliament dominated by NSR is increasingly willing to use the power base that has been achieved, whereby small-scale business activity in small local communities is understood as the core aspect of the preservation and development of Sámi culture and society (Eriksen & Falch, 2016; Nygaard, 2016). This is an understandable reaction, not only because it concerns cultural preservation in an increasingly challenging environment but also because there is so little direct economic gain from such projects. The Sámi Parliament has no financial incentives to encourage this type of business activity. Instead, the Sámi Parliament is completely dependent on state transfers to implement its policy. The “fear” of the state in “state-friendly” Norway

seems to be far less than the “fear” of the strong and globalised market forces (Angell et al., 2020). The deep-seated problem is that such a strategy does not resolve the profound economic and demographic challenges in the core Sámi areas, where there appears to be little that the Sámi Parliament itself can do.

This is where FeFo, as a distinctive “co-governance institution” in the encounter between the Sámi and the Norwegian, has emerged with a more large-scale-friendly approach to development that is more in line with the changes in the new economic framework conditions than the Sámi Parliament has been willing to contemplate. FeFo's perspective is that emphasising settlements and jobs and retaining value creation in Finnmark, regardless of sector, could provide funds for the revitalisation of Sámi culture in areas where this has been greatly weakened through the assimilation policy that was previously pursued (Angell et al., 2020; Falch & Selle, 2021).

An important aspect is that major global industry players are exerting pressure on the relatively well-established system for regionally based development and co-governance that had developed at the turn of the millennium. The same actors are putting intensified pressure on natural resources in Sámi settlement areas. This is occurring simultaneously with extensive emigration from Sámi communities to towns and settlements outside the core Sámi areas (Selle, Semb, & Strømsnes, 2020). These profound structural change processes challenge the very foundations of the traditional Sámi culture and way of life, of which an increasingly smaller proportion of the Sámi are a direct part, and thereby also the basic features of modern Sámi agency, which has land rights in the core areas at its heart. This impedes alliances and common positions regionally because different types of economic development are desired (Falch & Selle, 2018; Selle et al., 2015). These are strategic challenges without obvious common Sámi solutions in a hinterland where the level of conflict is rising.

Conclusion: is a new Sámi role possible?

Economic globalisation driven by increased global demand for the natural resources often abundantly available in indigenous peoples' areas puts traditional indigenous economies under pressure. Mobilisation of indigenous voices supported by a stronger legal position is increasingly in conflict with a globalised economy and more intensive extraction of resources (Angell et al., 2020; Bowles & Wilson, 2016; Koivurova et al., 2015). We have shown how Sámi politics has gradually taken a new role in the face of these major changes. The Sámi Parliament is increasingly becoming part of the major business policy in the High North and primarily assumes a role as “delayers” or even “stoppers” of large- and medium-scale industrial projects.

Multi-level governance provides an overarching approach to understanding the evolution of Sámi agency. In the High North, local and regional autonomy has been weakened as part of the economic globalisation, while the Sámi Parliament has emerged as an important player (Angell, Eikeland, & Selle, 2016). One important Sámi impact has been an extension of consultations from being reserved for the state to increasingly also take place between the Sámi Parliament and municipalities and county councils, and with global companies that are being established in the fields of petroleum, wind power or mining (Eikeland, 2016; Falch & Selle, 2018; Nygård, 2016). The basis for this change lies in the support from national and international law on which the Sámi Parliament can rely (Eikeland, 2021).

The emergence of the Sámi Parliament and the institutionalisation of Sámi politics more generally has changed the framework for political processes, decisions and implementation, in which international legal trends play an increasingly more important role, also regionally. New forms of co-governance at regional level are emerging, where FeFo as a co-governing body in land ownerships and management at the interface between the regional Norwegian and the Sámi is a particularly interesting, clearly apparent formal and institutional expression of changed relationships between key actors, not least between those who represent the Sámi and those who represent the Norwegian (Falch & Selle, 2018; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). This significant level displacement also results in changing the multi-level governance systems form and function.

This is altering the relationship between the internal Sámi Parliament system and its surrounding society. The distinction between the Sámi Parliament's various forms of embedding in different Norwegian geographical levels has become less clear cut as the interaction with global economic modernisation processes has increased and where the global connections have become increasingly important for the Sámi Parliament. This makes local and regional demarcations and Sámi demarcation processes ("who is Sámi enough") far more difficult than before. This is particularly challenging for a cultural tradition embedded in traditional Sámi industries. Nevertheless, the basis for Sámi politics and its impact lies in the development of strong Sámi institutions, for which the Sámi Parliament has an undisputed leadership role, and increasingly seeks to deal with changes in the High North through the involvement of new and more actors.

In multi-level governance systems, the state is increasingly emerging as a facilitator of the globalised market economy. At the same time, the state must ensure that the Sámi culture and way of life are guaranteed under the Norwegian Constitution. It is an understatement to say that this is a difficult balancing act whereby in the years to come the Sámi and the Sámi politics may easily become the losing party, despite their relatively strong legal position. The result is nonetheless increased political conflict, where alliance buildings and agreements have become very difficult. The Sámi Parliament may have the power to stop or postpone individual projects that large parts of the surrounding communities want, resulting in conflicts with a hinterland demanding new employment opportunities. However, it is particularly challenging to ensure economic development and change in the Sámi settlement areas in Norway's open and integrated economy, where rural and sparsely populated areas in general, and Sámi core areas particularly, are characterised by migration and ageing. The underlying challenge is that economic development in the Sámi areas is vital for Sámi sustainability and therefore also for Sámi self-determination and degree of self-rule in the longer term (Falch & Selle, 2018).

Despite strengthened Sámi legal rights, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Sámi Parliament and Sámi politics to operate from the outside as preventers of new economic development processes that are based on driving forces other than those that have been dominant in Sámi politics. Increased pressure towards a Sámi reorientation in an increasingly more complex environment is augmented by structural challenges in local Sámi communities that are weakened by demographic and business changes (Falch & Selle, 2018). We may ask how far the Sámi Parliament can go in the direction of being "delayers" or "preventers" without local and regional conflict becoming destructive for all parties in Norway's integrated and largely

trust-based political system. Will an understanding of what the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) entails lead to the informal and indirect indigenous power manifested, for example, in mining and in several wind power projects also being transformed into formal power by strengthening the requirements for "Free, Prior and Informed Consent" (FPIC) (Papillon & Rodon, 2019)? What will it mean for the local and regional political environment in the High North that Sámi agency, through its connection to the global indigenous field, increasingly appears as something different and more challenging than special local and regional interests? What is the actual significance and content of Sámi self-determination in a situation where there is no Sámi territorial autonomy in the increasingly interconnected levels of governance? Is real self-determination possible in a rather centralised unitary state like Norway, with its strongly integrated economic and political system, even with greater Sámi legal protection, supported by international law?

Sámi agency faces a very demanding period of upheaval as part of societally transformative processes in which the challenges are great, and obvious answers are lacking. To further dig into these challenges requires comparative studies that address experience from indigenous peoples' encounters with new economic globalisation in other Arctic countries in the High North.

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