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# **The role of sport organizations for local and national community – the case of Sámi sport organizations**

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## **Abstract**

**Research question:** This paper investigates 1) how representatives of Sámi sport clubs understand local and national communities, and 2) and the role of the sport organization in the creation and perception of local and national community. The study contributes to the research field by showing how sport organizations are the basis of the community, locally and nationally.

**Research methods:** Interviews were conducted with seven board members representing five Sámi sport clubs in four municipalities. The sport clubs were all members of the Sámi sport organization, and located in core Sámi areas where Sámi language and culture is manifested in everyday life. Sámi are the indigenous peoples of the northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and north-west Russia.

**Results and findings:** For sport club representatives, Sámi sport refers to specific activities associated with Sámi husbandry heritage, and to the Sámi sport organization. Sport clubs function as community organizations at the local level. Moreover, through affiliation with the Sámi sport organization, the sport clubs are the link to the Sámi national community. Sámi indigeneity is played out internally in the local community as well as on the borderline to other communities with other ethnic compositions.

**Implications:** The study revealed a complex relationship between the local and national elements of indigeneity, and between the internal and the external elements. These elements of multiculturalism and sport clubs require to be taken into account in future sport management and policy-making in addition to multicultural policies towards immigrant sport participation and organization.

## **The Role of Sport Organizations for Local and National Community – The Case of Sámi Sport Organizations**

### **Introduction**

In this paper, we argue that a more refined understanding of community is vital for an informed sport management practice. Two main reasons for this is that the concept of community has been thought of as both an outcome of (e.g., Burnett, 2006; Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008; Warner, Dixon & Chalip, 2012), and a prerequisite for (e.g., Jarvie, 2003; Misener & Doherty, 2013; Sharpe, 2006) the provision of sport activities. Consequently, the concept is used interchangeably, without much consideration, as both input- and output, as both the independent and dependent variable simultaneously ([author(s)]). This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, taking community as a plausible outcome of participation in organized sport without acknowledging that community as the outcome is dependent on, or at least related to, the constitution of the community in question not only risks corrupting the alleged causal links between provision, participation and expected sense of community, it also runs the risk of jeopardizing the overall legitimacy of sport's ability to deliver against the wider spectrum of sport-for-development ambitions launched by policy-makers and practitioners alike (Meir & Fletcher, 2017). Second, treating community as a uniform and unchanging keystone of organizations providing sport activities is misleading since not all sport organizations are concerned with conveying, fostering or instilling a sense of community (consider the wide variety of drop-in, pay-and-play and on demand activities).

Nor are they capable of matching their specific notion of community to all kinds of target groups (Amara & Henry, 2011; [author(s)]).

We address these problems by proposing a more specific and applied use of the community concept showing how sport organizations are links to the community at different levels: local/concrete and national/abstract. By so doing, we add to existing conceptualizations in the sport management literature often associating community with local phenomena. For example, as with sport participation for local people (Misener, 2015), how sport facilities have a ‘geographical distribution’ (Parnell, et al. 2018, p. 6) or are spread ‘across geographic regions’ (p. 7), or perhaps most telling when community is linked to ‘identity and belonging’ (MacIntosh et al., 2016, p. 38). We do so by studying an indigenous people residing in the northern parts of Scandinavia, northern Finland and north-west Russia<sup>1</sup> posing the following research questions: 1) How do representatives of Sámi sport clubs understand local and national community?; 2) What role does the sport organization play in the creation and perception of local and national community? We show how Sámi sport organizations relate to community at different levels (local and national) by articulating Sámi indigeneity internally and externally. While having a specific interest in indigenous sport and sport provision for underrepresented groups more broadly, we argue that the findings from this study contribute to the wider discussion about the role of sport in social improvements and about the expectations placed on sport organizations as suppliers of social goods. More specifically, it has the potential to provide decision-makers (in sport and politics alike) with knowledge making them better equipped to consider whether their actions might lead to the momentum of processes that they essentially find unwanted and adverse to politically articulated needs and wishes.

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<sup>1</sup> Sámi are the indigenous peoples residing in the geographical territory of Sápmi. Similar to many indigenous groups around the world, the Sámi have endured colonization and assimilation measures but also more lately enjoyed revitalization and legislation for indigenous self-determination.

Next, we describe the context of the Sámi community and organization of sport in Norway, outline our theoretical arguments, and describe the methods used to perform the enquiry. Our main arguments for limiting the analyses to the Norwegian context are primarily a question of access to informants. Since the majority of the Sámi population resides in Norway, suitable respondents are more accessible. However, there are also contextual variations, outlined below, between the countries that make up Sápmi warranting focus. One is Norway's extensive (relative to the other countries) legislation of Sámi issues that offers significant particularities in relation to community. Another variation is sport-specific and relates to Norway's larger number of Sámi sport organizations, in turn contributing both to access and to impact.

### **Context: Norway, indigeneity and the organization sport**

There are no official statistics covering the Sámi population, but estimates point to some 80–100,000 individuals, distributed throughout Norway (50–65,000), Sweden (approximately 20,000), Finland (approximately 8000), and Russia (approximately 2000) (Nordisk samekonvensjon, 2005). Predecessors of Sámi, Norwegians (and Swedes, Finns and Russians) have cohabited for some 10,000 years, while Sámi ethnicity per se is estimated to date back some 2000 years (Hansen & Olsen 2004). Nevertheless, the Sámi population was colonized when state borders were drawn across the land of the Sámi – Sápmi (Broderstad, 2008; Selle et al., 2015), aiming at unifying the nation-state population through assimilation. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, considerable resources and efforts were invested by the Norwegian government to eradicate the Sámi culture. This 'Norwegianization' process included banning the use of the Sámi language, especially in schools, and indoctrinating the Sámi population to believe in and respect Norwegian superiority regarding language and culture (Hovland, 1996; Stordahl, 1996).

From the 1960s and onwards, however, the Sámi undertook a revitalization process, striving for more autonomy, protecting and promotion of the Sámi language and culture. Parallel to these grass roots efforts, the Norwegian state, pressured by the international community, legislated for indigenous self-determination and committed to protect and facilitate the development of Sámi culture and organization. This resulted in the Sámi Act in 1987 followed by the establishment of the Sámi parliament in 1989, and the ratification of ILO convention no. 169<sup>2</sup> concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in 1990 (Berg-Nordlie, 2015). The Sámi in Norway today is an integrated and relatively acknowledged people, residing in all parts of the country. Sámi attend public schools and engage in sports, thus Sámi take part in activities arranged in the public and voluntary sectors as any other citizen. However, the Sámi also strive to keep and protect their own specific community, for example by organizing themselves in specific Sámi organizations – including Sámi sport organizations.

Regarding sport, Norwegian sport refers to organizations affiliated to and arranging activities under the auspices of the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committees and Confederation of Sports (NIF). Owing to substantial financial, political and symbolic support from the state, NIF has reached a monopolistic position in the sporting landscape ([author(s)]), regarding non-profit, membership-based club sports. Consequently, newcomers in the field – being these new activities such as skateboarding and parkour, or organizational forms such as drop-in sport and Sámi sport – have struggled to become acknowledged ([author(s)]). Nevertheless, a Sámi sport organization has existed in Norway (Sámi abbreviation: SVL-N) in its current form since 1990.<sup>3</sup> Compared to NIF-affiliated

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<sup>2</sup> The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, is an International Labour Organization (ILO, a UN agency) Convention, and a forerunner of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

<sup>3</sup> Sámi sport has its own umbrella organization, SVL, (equivalent to NIF) with three branches: one in Norway (SVL-N), one in Sweden (SVL-S) and one in Finland (SVL-F).

sport, SVL-N is a small organization. While NIF embodies 11,500 sport clubs with more than 2 million memberships (NIF, 2018), SVL-N affiliates 23 member clubs with 3785 members (SVL-N, 2018). Half of the SVL-N affiliated sport clubs are also affiliated to NIF ([author(s)]), hence Sámi sport organizations relate to community at different levels.

### **Theory: Community and organization**

Tönnies (1963) and Durkheim (1964) described how societal change entail new forms of human interaction and social relations. For Tönnies, using industrialization and urbanization as examples, the transition from a traditional community to a modern society implied moving from living a natural and local everyday life to rational interaction regulated by formalized conventions. This was a transition from a community based on personal interaction to a society characterized by bureaucracy. Durkheim described the traditional community as one based on *mechanic solidarity*, where small groups were held together by shared norms and values. As such, the community reflected ‘togetherness’ and a common identification based on geographic entities and family ties, whereas in modern society *organic solidarity* is instead founded on specialized roles and complementary relationships (i.e. producer–customer, employer–employee).

Drawing on these conceptualizations, Delanty (2010, p. 23) theorized the concept by introducing ideas about community as ‘a “master system” of relationships’. In our analysis, we use two analytical dichotomies proposed by Delanty (2010) in order to pinpoint and illustrate the complexity of community as an expected outcome of sport participation, and its potential relation to the constitution of the community in question providing that very participation. Community is both concrete and abstract. On the one hand, it concerns concrete locality and belonging. On the other, ‘community has a transcendent nature and cannot simply be equated with particular groups or a place’ (p. xii). An equally ambiguous notion is proposed by Cohen (1985) who sees community as symbolically constructed around

conceptions of similarity – which can be both concrete and abstract. Anderson (1983) applied a similar line of reasoning on the nation-state by arguing that people do not necessarily need to interact directly in order to share values and identity. A nation, he underscores, is an imagined community, thereby emphasising the abstract or symbolic aspect of community. Jenkins (2008), on the other hand, accentuates community as based on local and specific practices; community is much more than just symbolic or imagined elements.

Adding an ethnic component to the concept, Barth (1969) holds that community is constructed on the border where one ethnic group meets another. While later theorizing claims that ‘Barth’s idea of boundary construction as the chief feature of community is only one aspect of culture’ (Delanty 2012, p. 34), it still highlights how community can be related to boundary (Cohen, 1985). Inclusion simultaneously implies exclusion, and the divide is constructed on the boundaries of the community in question (Jenkins, 2008). In turn, boundaries are established and affirmed by insiders who confirm their sense of community by shared values and meanings, through common and internal symbolic construction.

Taken together, community can be both concrete and abstract, and be both constructed on borders and defined within boundaries. Our position is not mutual exclusivity. Resembling the actor-structure or nature-nurture debates, we find it useful to consider both sides of dichotomies as helpful bannisters in our analysis. On that note, Lash (2002) shows how apparently dichotomous types of association can indeed work alongside each other: specific practices create local belonging *and* imply symbolic belonging to an imagined community. Conversely, Delanty (2010) shows how general societal developments can lead to the development of specific communities such as multicultural ones. That is, societal changes do not necessarily lead to the disappearance of communities but more plausibly to changes in them (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Modernity implies a need to search more carefully for the ground in the groundless, though a ‘ground that challenges the groundless of ... high



modernity abstraction' (Lash, 1999, p. 9). In this paper, sport organizations are something that people relate to, concretely. Thus, we employ both the concrete and the abstract to understand the notion of community and its function when discussing the role of sport organizations.

## **Method**

Paying heed to ideals of decentring, reciprocity and indigenous benefits, ethical standards in indigenous methodology (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2009) guided our research process. In addition, we followed more conventional ethical standards of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Decentring refers to leaving the researcher in the background in order to bring the indigenous to the fore. Reciprocity describes a mutually beneficial relationship between researcher and indigenous community, prioritizing that the research should benefit the indigenous people (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2009). Following Stronach, Maxwell and Taylor (2016), we invested much effort into framing our study according to such ideals striving to avoid treating interviewees paternalistically or as objects to be 'observed' (p. 12).

## ***Sample***

The first author conducted interviews with seven board members representing five Sámi sport clubs in four municipalities. The strategic sampling (Bryman, 2016) of clubs was based on two criteria. First, the sport club had to be a member of SVL-N. Based on classic definitions of sport, which include institutionalization (Coakley, 2009; Guttmann, 1978), the affiliation criterion constitutes whether a sport club is a Sámi sport organization. Four of the five clubs also affiliate with NIF. Second, the sport club must be located in the core Sámi area, a criterion based on how ethnicity or indigeneity – or 'Sámi-ness' – influenced community sport or sport (in the) community (see [author(s)]). Five clubs qualified for being able to construct the data needed to reach saturation (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Subsequent to the first step in the data analysis, it became evident that this assumption was valid. For sparsity

and analytical depth (along the lines of concrete versus abstract, internal versus external), two of these five sport clubs are highlighted.

The selection of board members as representatives of sport clubs rested on the assumption that sport club board members are involved in both policy-making and practice. They relate to policies and requirements from public sector policy-makers, superior sport organizations, while simultaneously meeting participants and others in face-to-face situations since they frequently double as coaches ([author(s)]).

### ***Procedure***

The interviews were based on a guide consisting of five main parts: 1) the activities of the sport club, 2) the organization of the sport club, 3) the policies of the sport club, 4) local identity, and 5) nation-building. Although interviews and analyses do not illustrate a perfect one-to-one relationship, the findings presented below take sections 2–4 as the point of departure. These included ‘What does [SVL-N] membership mean for the club’s activities?’ (Section 2), ‘How does [the club’s policy] unfold in practice during training sessions, meetings, and in the local community?’ (Section 3), and ‘How can sport create belonging?’ (Section 4). Following up, probes were used (e.g., ‘How?’; ‘Please exemplify’) to obtain more detailed responses and clarifications. Moreover, one author conducted fieldwork in the municipality where the two selected sport clubs were located, and at the Sámi sport organization’s central office. Findings from the field notes are published elsewhere ([author(s)]), and not quoted in this manuscript; they serve as supplementary information and as a validating source.

### ***Data Analysis***

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to a qualitative analysis software (MaxQDA) for a five-step phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Although ground-up descriptions of data are the ideal in an inductive

approach, most phenomenological analysts today are aware of the influence of the theoretical lenses. In Step 1, the authors familiarized themselves with the data through several readings of each interview. Based on these readings, field notes and comments on immediate reflections ([author(s)]), we chose to apply a community theory framework. In Step 2, we identified meaning-units based on the texts of the seven interviews. In the transition between phases 2 and 3, we decided to focus on two sport clubs. At this point, we realized we were moving into a more case study approach (Yin, 2009), focusing on few cases in order to shed light on a larger phenomenon and including several types of data in so doing (the knowledge constructed from field notes in the same area [author(s)]). In Step 3, the words of the sport club representatives were transformed into applicable expressions to enrich and support the draft text. At this point, we also translated all quotations considered relevant for this particular paper into English. As there are no objective meaning-units to be bracketed in phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 2012), step 4 was the key to describing the structure of community with the views expressed by the sport club representatives. At this point, quotations representing meaning-units were selected and included in the draft text. While ‘it is quite possible that terms not found in the transformed meaning-units are required to describe the structure’ (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 253), theoretical terms were used in order to complete step 4. In step 5, which constitutes the interpretive phase (Giorgi, 2012), theory was applied more concretely to engage with the findings.

## **Findings**

In the material, we identified three main themes, each consisting of a number of subthemes: 1) Sámi sports and organization (with the subthemes Activity and SVL-N); 2) The Sport club (subthemes Language, Community Association, Physical Activity); 3) Belonging and Identity (subthemes Place and Nation). We present the findings in two main parts. The first concerns Sámi sports and organization; the other refers to sport clubs, belonging and identity. As the

merger of topics indicates, there are many interdependent relationships between the themes. Moreover, we used two approaches to convert the elements of this complexity into more holistic units of scrutiny. First, empirically, sport organization is the core explanation for the understanding of the Sámi. This is valid at both local and national levels, as shown on the left side of Figure 1: the main theme ‘sport club’ links to the main theme ‘sport and organization’ (labelled with the sub-theme SVL-N) which links to the main theme ‘belonging and identity’ at the national level (labelled with the sub-theme ‘nation’). Second, the main theme ‘belonging and identity’ with its sub-theme ‘nation and place’ are intertwined with the concept of community. In other words, we draw the complexity of the real world together by the concept of community (right side of Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

### ***Sámi sports and organization***

Sámi sports refers to specific activities rooted in traditional Sámi livelihood, particularly activities connected to reindeer husbandry such as reindeer racing and lassoing. Reindeer racing has a limited number of participants because it requires access to reindeer. According to the Reindeer Husbandry Act, only Sámi with family traditions can own reindeers ([author(s)]; SNL, 2017). None of the sport clubs investigated in this study organize reindeer racing. Lassoing, on the other hand, is much easier to organize and is arranged by all the sport clubs investigated. Lassoing is often combined with skiing in the winter season and running during the summer season. Second, Sámi sport refers to sport clubs affiliated to the Sámi sport organization, SVL-N. The relationship between the specific activities and the affiliation is that sport club representatives justify membership in SVL-N by the specific Sámi sport activity. So does the Norwegian state. SVL-N is the only sport organization offering reindeer racing and lassoing ([author(s)]).

In addition to this specific understanding of Sámi sport, there is a more abstract notion in the material. In response to the interviewer's question whether 'some of the activities are Sámi activities', one interviewee replied: 'Well, I think it is Sámi anyway' (Sport club 1, Interviewee B). Another states that 'the Sámi is not a topic for us' because it is a natural element in the sport club and the local community's everyday (Sport club 2, Interviewee A). Judging by such statements, it would seem as though all activities organized by a Sámi sport club per definition is Sámi sport. This includes football and skiing (as the two most popular sports in Norway [NIF, 2018], including these two sport clubs). For sport club board members in a Sámi context, Sámi sport is 'just natural' in the everyday setting: 'I think that everything we do is Sámi, too. Because we are, where we are and do what we do. We do not distinguish between [Sámi from the rest]' (Sport club 1, Interviewee B).

We should note that Norwegian culture is equally present as Sámi culture in the local context. Still, one of the interviewees notes: 'There has not been ... specific interest in the Sámi culture [in the sport club]. It might be because it is so omnipresent that [it is natural]' (Sport club 2, Interviewee B). Present within the local context is also comparisons across borders. For example, Sámi sport is conceived as more laid back with regard to sporting performances compared to 'Norwegian' sport.

It is more serious and competitive in the Norwegian [sport organizations]. While in the Sámi, it is different. There are competitions, but not in the same way. In addition, it is always the cultural element in addition. While the Norwegian is only competition. So perhaps it is therefore, therefore we do this cultural stuff. That it is something about Sámi (Sport club 1, Interviewee B).

Such generalized reflections of Sámi versus Norwegian sport have their counterpart in concrete comparisons. One interviewee talks about the neighbouring municipality's perception of Sámi sport activities:

To us it is very visible for lassoing and skiing. Those in [neighbour village in another municipality] see the activity as very exotic ... When we have that kind of event, we often get [media] coverage in about it, because it is so exotic (Sport club 1, Interviewee B).

These quotations represent dichotomies in the understanding of the Sámi community corresponding to the theoretical lenses of community and ethnicity as internal cultural stuff (Jenkins, 2008) versus ethnicity as identified on the border to other ethnicities (Barth, 1969). The respondents talk, albeit indirectly, both about the cultural content defining their perception of Sámi community and the Sámi community as something else than the 'outside', which in turn contributes to their perception of the Sámi community.

Regarding organization, the affiliation of sport clubs in SVL-N is, as previously described, grounded in the specific Sámi activities. One of the respondents expands on this particularity: 'Well, SVL-N has some activities that we want to partake in while NIF has some other activities' (Sport club 1, Interviewee A). In other words, the affiliation to SVL-N can be considered as simply 'to participate in the specific activities' (Sport club 2, Interviewee B). Having said that, there are nuances in the reasons provided by the respondents for the affiliation to SVL-N. There is an ethno-political dimension to the SVL-N affiliation. Although some sport club representatives are unaware of, oblivious, or indifferent to SVL-N, others consider the relationship as natural as the relationship to NIF (field notes). However, the generally expressed view is an awareness of the benefits of being a member of several sport organizations. For one thing, there are different cultures characterizing Sámi sport and the Norwegian sport organizations. In that respect, the social identity and socializing elements of sport participation seem to be broader for people participating in several sport organizations. One of the respondents illustrates the socializing elements of participation in Sámi sport activities:

It is ... about belonging and I think as I see it for my children; it is about learning to know others. It is about socialization. That is one very good thing in my opinion. We get out of here and have many friends around, in [four named places], and the Sámi and especially [one specific Sámi area] (Sport club 1, Interviewee A).

Belonging is both local and national. On one hand, ‘there are some with very tight connection to that specific sport club and that specific place. There are not many from [location x] being member in sport club from [location y] and vice versa’ (Sport club 2, Interviewee B). On the other, participation in the Sámi sport organization includes sport competitions in Sápmi and makes visible that sport cultures cross state borders.

SVL comprises Norway, Sweden and Finland. In Finland. They have completely different rules than we have. In Sweden, they have different rules. In that respect, it is a compromise between people from Norway, Sweden and Finland. They are not members of NIF of course, and they are therefore not complying with NIF’s regulations [especially regarding children’s sport] (Sport club 1, Interviewee A).

The children, one of the respondents points out ‘just become aware of a difference’ (Sport club 1, Interviewee A). The interviewee conceives it as beneficial that children learn that there are differences between contexts without judging them normatively: ‘I just think they become conscious that there are rules. Rules are rules. ... Then you follow them’ (Sport club 1, Interviewee A). These expressions explicate that Sámi sport is practiced in Sápmi, which covers several countries. As we return to below, participation in SVL-N is at the same time both practical and symbolic. Nevertheless, as we will show, the notion of community and belonging primarily relates to the local everyday life.

### *Sport clubs, belonging and identity*

The subthemes we identified with sport clubs: language, community association and physical activity, generate some reflections about sport clubs as “only Sámi” versus “just activity”. Sport clubs seem to function at several spots along an axis, where ‘doing indigeneity’, (i.e. practicing Sámi language) is at one end and physical activity is at the other. Covering both is the view of sport clubs ‘as a kind of community association. It is something more [than sport]’ (Sport club 1, Interviewee B). Another interviewee holds: ‘There would probably not be much of a national day celebration, if there was no sport club’ (Sport club 2, Interviewee A). The sport club organizes social activities ‘[which] creates belonging. It is not only competitive sports. For example, we arrange a Halloween party every year. That is the sport club’ (Sport club 1, Interviewee B). In general, the respondents view the sport clubs as community associations, organizing social as well as sporting activities (field notes). Nevertheless, the approach to belonging and identification differs between Sport club 1 and Sport club 2. One of them appears more introvert, retrospective, and inclusive of all generations, while the other appears more open and involves locals, sojourners and immigrants. They are inclusive in different ways.

For both clubs, the community aspect connects to local culture and nature. For one thing, there is a local tradition that all sport clubs in Norway adhere to; sport clubs are local phenomena ([author(s)]). Here, the locality is Sápmi, and the two focal sport clubs play it out differently. Representatives of Sport club 1 perceive themselves as an integrative community association because ‘in [the sport club] there are so many. In fact, almost all who live in [village] are members and contribute in one way or another’ (Sport club 1, Interviewee A). Both sport clubs aim at including the inhabitants, Sport club 1 by lowering the fees for memberships. One representative explains: ‘There should be a low cost for participating.



Everybody should take part' (Sport club 1, Interviewee B). In order to keep fees low, the sport club arranges social fund-raising events.

We try to do most of it [cover most costs] by arranging larger voluntary fund-raising projects in order to avoid having to sell lottery tickets. We have [the sport club's] 'food day' ... And we have a large flea market once a year (Sport club 1, Interviewee B).

Sport club 2 has a slightly different approach, focusing on being open to newcomers. Sport club 2 is located closer to the municipality centre and with more sojourners and immigrants than Sport club 1. Inclusion through participation 'as is' and with a low threshold for participation is emphasised. One interviewee commented:

I see that it is very important to have a sport club. In such a small place, one needs to get involved for something to happen. So I think it is very good to contribute ... So here it is the sport club which is most important (Sport club 2, Interviewee A).

The local sport club and the community seem to be two sides of the same coin. The sport club is almost the only option for organized leisure activity in small communities. Therefore, sport equals and symbolizes community for many local villages and their inhabitants. Since the local community of this study is both Sámi and Norwegian, some of the sport club's activities are very specific: 'It is usually the sport club, which organizes the [Norwegian] national day celebrations ... and the Sámi national day' (Sport club 2, Interviewee A). These are thus strong symbolic events.

The focus on sport clubs in this paper enables a discussion of broader identity issues. Thus, we draw attention to two main points. First, both local attachment and national identity is about community. Second, the notion of community has an indigenous element. Elaborating

on the relationship between sport club and community, the next quotation includes a number of phrases used to define community.

[The sport club] is more than a sport club. I would claim it is a community too; like a big family in our area, and it works as a glue in the local society. ... The sport club creates the local belonging. It creates a sense of pride of coming from [place] and feeling one belongs to [Sport club] and which is also clear on the Sámi dimension of the identity (Sport club 1, Interviewee A).

The before treated inclusiveness relates to an indigenous aspect, as one of interviewees notes:

If you think about the Sámi element, in [place] it has always been like that when people move here. It is okay that they wear [Sámi clothes] although they are not of Sámi heritage. ... That is a fine quality with the [place's] community and the [place's] culture (Sport club 2, Interviewee A).

The perception of a transparent, open and inclusive community is articulated in comparison with other communities. Comparing itself across municipal borders, the sport club becomes even more important as a community organization. According to one representative, 'there are huge differences between sport clubs here and in [neighbour town]. In [neighbour town] ... they struggle to get volunteers. ... They look at us and we get volunteers. That is local belonging' (Sport club 1, Interviewee B).

Sport club 1 has more volunteers than the neighbouring club, including others than the parents of the athletes, which further emphasises the function of the club as more of a community club (field notes). The interviewee explains the differences between the town and their own village in terms that may well have been taken from Tönnies himself. In the village, the *Gemeinschaft*, the atmosphere is 'down to earth. Everybody hangs out with everybody ... You are who you are, not based on the roles you have'. He adds, 'I think this is good, a good

community to grow up in' (Sport club 1, Interviewee B). The belief that it is a good community to grow up in is shared by leaders of different sport clubs in different communities (field notes), and generates some interesting analytical and theoretical implications.

### **Concluding discussion**

The ongoing discourse in the sport clubs reflects various elements of community. Although we started out with relatively simple research questions (How do representatives of Sámi sport club understand local and national community? What are the roles of the sport organization in the creation and perception of local and national community?), the answers are complex and intertwined. First, the descriptions of community by the interviewees are abstract and symbolic on the one hand, *and* they are both practical and substantial on the other. Second, culture and ethnicity are about both internal *and* external elements. Third, an empirical premise permeating both these overarching answers is that sport organizations play a significant role, as the link to both local and national community (sport club and SVL-N in Figure 1).

Regarding the abstract and symbolic versus the practical and substantial, data show that Sámi sport is practical. It refers to physical movements; it takes place in geographical arenas and is conducted by specific individuals. Similarly, sport clubs and local contexts are practical. Sámi sport is at the same time abstract because it symbolizes the imagined community of Sápmi. The link between the practical (activities) and the abstract (the imagined nation), is organization – or rather, organizations. Organizations refer to both local sport clubs and to SVL-N. SVL-N is a Sámi organization, and as with other Sámi organizations, it contributes to the development of the imagined Sámi community of Sápmi. In other words, Sámi sport is as substantial as it is symbolic. Through the organizational link to SVL-N, sport club participants contribute to the development and maintenance of the imagined community, Sápmi; but through the SVL-N affiliation, they also access new

practical sporting events such as training camps together with other SVL-N clubs and competitions across countries. In that respect, one can talk about social cohesion in different layers of the community (cf. Meir & Fletcher, 2017). Community, then, refers to shared characteristics rooted in local society while identity is indigenous and national.

Regarding internal versus external, the following threefold answer emerges. First, the concept of belonging and identity is internal in both sport clubs as they work with affirmative elements internally (Delanty, 2010). In that respect, the two focal sport clubs build social interaction on what can be called mechanic solidarity (Durkheim, 1964) or *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1963). Moreover, both sport clubs construct belonging, identity (cf. Delanty, 2010) and cohesion on an awareness of ethnicity. Second, because there are two Sámi sport clubs in one municipality, a ‘within-municipal comparison’ becomes apparent. Representatives of both sport clubs refer to the other sport club as both a co-operator and a competitor (field notes); hence, neighbouring organizations are an influencing factor for a local sport organization and for local (place) identity. Third, viewing belonging and identity as constructed through comparisons across borders, begs a return to Barth’s (1969) view on ethnic construction as a border phenomenon. This study reveals a complexity of community and ethnicity, and between the two. Our findings show how the sport clubs build social inclusion on how ‘the ethnic boundary defines the group’ (Barth 1969, p. 15). This applies especially to Sport club 1 since it is located closer to a town and a municipality with another distribution of ethnic groups than in the villages and the municipality of the two focal sport clubs.

Our empirical material points to a complex understanding of community which complies with a more recent community theorist, Delanty (2010). Delanty identifies three elements in his theoretical understandings of community. First, local belonging refers to a specific local phenomenon; here, the phenomena are sport and ethnicity. Second, community

refers to shared understanding and solidarity, which is present in both focal sport clubs. Third, community is about collective identity. Conceived as an abstract and symbolic feature, collective identity stems from collective action, and feeds back to the practical element of community. Thus, the focal sport clubs, by providing sports, concrete training sessions and competitions, develop shared identity as a real as well as an imagined community. Both are equally important, and interdependent.

Moreover, data show that the phenomena of community and identity contain both Sámi *and* Norwegian elements. The empirical material illustrates a complexity providing a mixture of analytical understandings of community and multiculturalism (Delanty, 2010) – more precisely a liberal communitarian multiculturalism. Liberal communitarian multiculturalism refers to various mutual recognitions. It concerns the status of immigrant minorities versus that of indigenous peoples. This is of particular interest in a context where another national minority (Kven) and immigrants cohabit (field notes). The empirical examples along the lines of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* reflect differences along the notion of postmodern community, including feeling of loss and expressed differences. Sport organizations create a stability of *Gemeinschaft* or mechanic solidarity-like conditions. They also function as the concrete link to abstractions such as nation (see Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

An intertwined point, metaphorically explained in the words of Lash (1999, 2002) as the ‘groundless ground’, is that although human interdependency has taken new routes in a less tradition-based direction (individualization), human interaction needs to be based on ‘something’. This ‘something’, in a sport setting, has been investigated in a previous study of community sport in Norway ([author(s)]):

[S]port clubs operate as part of a civil society which is very similar to the phenomenon that Tönnies (1963) called community. It is where people live their everyday lives in face-to-face interaction with peers who share an interest and most probably share some core values and norms. ... Instead of treating modernity as a move from community to society as described in the literature (Tönnies 1963, Durkheim 1964), contemporary society can be considered as a more complex entity with a number of communities (p. 514).

This point, developed in a study of Norwegian sport clubs, is equally applicable to the current study, although somewhat more complex by including Sámi ethnicity into the analysis.

Relative to the cohabitation of Sámi and Norwegian in Sápmi, sport is a new phenomenon. In that respect, this study adds to the literature by regarding sport as an initiative for community cohesion and integration (Meir and Fletcher, 2017). While the commonly told story is that immigrants and other sojourners enter communities where sport already exists, this study is about sport in communities where integration and peaceful cohabitation already function well. Two points in relation to the existing literature are worth mentioning. On the one hand, everything in this study – including sport and ethnicity – is ‘just natural’ and no big deal to discuss in everyday situations for the research subjects. On the other hand, this study reveals characteristics of community similar to instrumental perspectives into sport and community do (Meir and Fletcher, 2017): local belonging or place attachment, solidarity, ethnicity, national identity.

Despite this study’s small sample and contextual limitation to a core Sámi area, it sheds light on a new and important topic that can be of value for sport politicians and bureaucrats; namely, to consider supporting multiple and various sport organizations. The feeling of community is crucial for individuals and an outspoken goal in Norwegian sport policy (Meld. St. 14, 2011-2012). Support must therefore go to organizations facilitating

individuals' perception of community. While Norwegian sport policy has long been founded on an idea that one size fits all and supported only the monopolistic Norwegian sport organization (Skille, 2008), this study reveals the importance of having an ethnically – including lingual – specific leisure context for the development of the belonging and community. This is both local and national. National, in this regard, refers to Sápmi as well as to Norway.

Nevertheless, more research is needed into Sámi sport. It is already planned to extend the research into other areas of Sápmi ([author(s)]; Green et al., 2019). Especially two approaches hold promise of new results. First, the next step of research is to move to the revitalized areas, especially the North Norwegian coastal areas where Sámi has been reborn in the last two generations after a century of assimilation. Second, the following step is to study urban areas in which Sámi often exceeds that of Sámi in original Sámi villages but nevertheless remain small compared to the rest of the urban population. SVL-N affiliated sport clubs can be found in both these contexts where there may be other solutions or functions for the Sámi community to develop other than those reported here. Third – and in a more long-term perspective – similar studies should be conducted in other countries of Sápmi due to contrasting population sizes and legal status of Sámi throughout Sápmi (i.e. Sweden, Finland, and Russia, in addition to Norway).

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