

(Lack of) government policy for indigenous (Sámi) sport: A chain of legitimating and de-legitimating acts

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Abstract

While colonization as policy is formally a historic phenomenon in Norway and elsewhere, many former structures of state organization – including their relationship to sport – remain under post-colonial conditions. This paper is concerned with how the Norwegian government contributes to creating a situation, which includes the Norwegian sports confederation (NIF) but excludes the indigenous people Sámi's sports organisation. Based on existing data and literature, we analyse how the state favours NIF through a chain of legitimating acts. Thus, sport is a preserve of colonization, where a one-sided legitimation parallels a de-legitimation of the overarching sport policy goal of sport-for-all. However, there are signs of change whereby actors are challenging NIF's monopoly and 'older' state-sport regimes.

Keywords

Indigenous sport, legitimation acts, Norway, sport policy, sport organization

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Introduction

Colonization as government policy is formally a historic phenomenon in most corners of the world. Nevertheless, under current post-colonial conditions, many former structures of state organization, including its relationship to civil society, hereunder sports, remain (e.g. Forsyth, 2007; Forsyth and Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 1995; Te Hiwi, 2014). This paper is concerned with how these structures and the cultural elements that underpin them impact Indigenous sports' opportunities to be recognized by and gain support from state sport agencies. The analysis shows that for any societal actor to be considered worthy of public support, the actor itself and its activities must be considered legitimate in the eyes of the state. However – and this is the main contribution of the paper – they also need to fit in with the legitimacy defending, maintaining, and enhancing activities in which *the state* is engaged, in order to secure and justify its position, processes, and outputs. While this may very well involve promotion of minority populations' cultural activities, it also leads to their crowding out in favour of mainstream activities with a larger cultural and numerical footprint, simply because the state's legitimacy stake in supporting them is higher.

The analysis of state sport policy focuses on the situation in Scandinavia with its Indigenous Sámi population. The Scandinavian countries are recognized for having a holistic, united, and universal political approach pursuing opportunities for all (Kuhnle and Selle, 1990). Norway is a welfare regime with long traditions of social democratic ideology and high levels of equality, including a large tax base, a strong state, and a vital civil sector (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Norway, in particular, is in addition often seen as a forerunner in its relationship with its Indigenous population (Falch et al., 2015). Against this background it is especially interesting to find that the Indigenous Sámi population's opportunities to organize sporting activities is limited by structural conditions established by the Norwegian state. In that respect, we conduct a sport policy analysis of (post)colonialism. The core focus in this paper is how the legitimizing acts that make up Norwegian government sport policy result in a (lack of) recognition of the Sámi sport organization, and thus the possibilities to provide those sporting activities that are linked to Sámi cultural identity and traditional way of life.

As will be developed throughout the paper, the lack of recognition for Sámi sport in Norwegian sport policy can be explained with reference to the privileged position that mainstream voluntary sport has gained in that same policy. In Norway, as in the other Scandinavian countries, voluntary sport is organized under a single monopolistic umbrella sport organization, the Norwegian Sports Confederation (NIF) (Fahlén and Stenling, 2016; Green et al., 2019; Skille and Säfvenbom, 2011; Strittmatter et al., 2018). Due to its inclusivity in terms of the sports (via national federations) and levels (elite and mass) included, and its geographical, demographic, and class-related reach, NIF is a strong societal and political actor in the sport and culture domain. In 1996, NIF's inclusivity was further enhanced when the Norwegian Olympic Committee was merged into the organization, further emphasizing the organization's comprehensive mandate (elite and mass for all sport disciplines). Similarly, the 2008 incorporation of the Paralympic Committee symbolized the equality between the abled and the disabled (Skille and Säfvenbom, 2011).

The expansion and monopolization of NIF's role created a mutual dependency between NIF and the state (Skille and Säfvenbom, 2011), which has been described as corporatism (Rommetvedt, 2002) or a 'family relationship' (Selle, 1995), enabling the development of mutual understandings and reciprocal relationships (Goksøyr et al., 1996; Hanstad and Goksøyr, 2005). The close relationship between the state, here represented by the Department of Civil Society and Sports (DCSS) in the Ministry of Culture and the Government, and NIF may certainly be beneficial for both parties. However, it also undermines the position of other actors, such as the Norwegian Sámi sport organization (SVL-N), which are neither welcome nor willing to be part of the state–NIF 'family'. This close relationship between the state and NIF, and the SVL-N's determination to remain autonomous from NIF (Skille, 2012), are important premises for our study. So is the paradox of a social-democratic regime's omission of an organization that, if supported, would promote equality among groups.

To gain a deeper understanding of the state's role in creating this situation, and the prospects of alleviating it, this paper addresses the following question: *How do the Norwegian government's actions contribute to creating a situation which includes NIF but excludes SVL-N?* We trace this question using a theoretical approach that assists us in identifying government actions as a series of legitimating acts (Deephouse et al., 2016; Strittmatter et al., 2018). Empirically, we draw upon existing literature on Sámi sport in Norway which we analyse with an eye towards identifying legitimacy-related governmental actions and their 'for Sámi sport' exclusionary effects. The theoretical perspective of legitimating acts and the empirical narrative of Sámi sport in Norway are merged in the main section of this paper – 'Analysis'. Before that, we offer some notes on methods, review the literature on sport policy legitimation, and provide contextual descriptions about the Sámi.

A few notes on methods

In order to capture government actions and the legitimation acts underpinning them, we drew upon existing literature on Norwegian Sámi sport and applied a theoretical framework to provide analytical clarity, coherence, and comparability regarding the role of legitimacy in sport policy processes (Deephouse et al., 2016; Strittmatter et al., 2018). Original data included policy documents (from the government, the Sámi parliament, and SVL-N), and field notes from observations in SVL-N meetings and events (see author reference for details), on the topic of the relationship between state sport policy and Sámi sport and the relationship with Norwegian organized sport. The focus of the analysis was to identify previously unidentified patterns regarding the way in which the Norwegian state legitimates its actions in a manner that protects the relationship with NIF but obstructs the relationship with SVL-N.

Our tool in pursuing the analysis was conceptualizations around the six constitutive elements of legitimating acts, namely the legitimacy-seeking organization, the subjects of legitimating acts, the sources of legitimacy, the base upon which legitimacy may be created, the overarching strategy according to which legitimating acts are carried out, and the scenario in which these acts take place (Deephouse et al., 2016). Following Strittmatter et al. (2018), we also focused on the consequences of legitimating acts in

terms of recognition of SVL-N. The meaning of the concepts are explained throughout the analysis. Being cautious about how an over-reliance on theory may obscure empirical messages, we aimed at employing theory to address sense-making, because 'it keeps us from getting caught up in rendering accounts dismissed as travelogues or personal diaries' (Wolcott, 1995: 184). A theory-driven analysis facilitated negotiations about the suppositions (Collins and Stockton, 2018), and a more efficient use of that power since it draws on well-defined concepts (Wolcott, 1995).

Legitimizing sport policy

As we conduct a sport policy legitimization analysis of (post)colonialism, we reviewed the literature on legitimation of sport policy more broadly, which covers three broad categories of legitimacy-seeking actors: states (Dickson, 2017; Haut et al., 2014; Matsuo, 2019; Meier and Mutz, 2018; Sam, 2015; Sam and Ronglan, 2018; Stuij and Stokvis, 2015; Zheng, 2016), sport organizations (international, national, and local) (Berg and Chalip, 2013; Fahlén, 2017; Macris and Sam, 2014; Meier and Garcia, 2013; Ronglan, 2015; Stenling and Sam, 2017), and others, including Bergsgard's (2018) study of one country's sport field, Mendez's (2020) review of the international sport field, Dowling and Washington's (2017) inquiry into the legitimation of sport policy programmes, Dart's (2017) examination of national activists within a state, and Geeraert et al.'s (2013) study of sport governance networks. Since we are concerned with the exclusionary effects of the Norwegian state's legitimation efforts, our focus hereafter is on the literature in the first category.

These studies were carried out in a wide variety of national contexts, not least that of Meier and Mutz (2018), who drew upon a 33-country-wide survey in order to assess whether 'the authoritarian character of a regime makes it more likely that it pursues sport centered identity policies' (p. 528). They found 'only partial support' (p. 539) for the hypothesis that authoritarian regimes gain more output legitimacy (based on performance measurements, e.g. participation rates, international medals, etc.) in its population than do more democratic regimes. The review revealed differences between regimes (Meier and Mutz, 2018), between apparently similar democracies (Sam and Ronglan, 2018), and even between states in the same country (Berg and Chalip, 2013). It also shows that state power is often economic (Stuij and Stokvis, 2015), that state interests in sports are usually extrinsic – often related to health (Matsuo, 2019; Stuij and Stokvis, 2015), and that the perceived support in the population counts for state actors (Berg and Chalip, 2013; Dickson, 2017; Sam and Ronglan, 2018). Berg and Chalip's study illustrates the importance states attach to public perceptions concerning their activities, which is useful relative to our ensuing analysis insofar as they point to recognizing legitimating actions as having constitutive effects (see also Forsyth, 2007). Thus, opportunities to organize and participate in sport are not only affected by *de facto* policies, but also by the ways in which policies are legitimated.

In a comparative study, Sam and Ronglan (2018) investigated legitimacy of sport policies in New Zealand and Norway, taking their point of departure in the observation that over the last three decades, 'sport's legitimacy as an area of public policy has become entrenched in the governments of many western democracies' (p. 550). They found that

New Zealand follows an output legitimacy logic where policy is made due to (expected and) measured outcomes of the policy (i.e. international medals and participation rates). The Norwegian state instead employs an input legitimization logic supporting NIF because of its ‘alignment with public values’ (p. 558) since NIF ‘maintains its broad agenda combining competition, inclusion and health aims’ (p. 564), and keeps ‘the image of being less corporately influenced and autonomous’ (p. 565). In an earlier study, Sam (2015) showed how the New Zealand government legitimized its target-based sport policy with reference to the country’s small size. In particular, the government agency in charge of sport policy argued that rather than being a disadvantage, smallness should be recast into the aspiration to be ‘wiser and savvier’ (p. 413). In that sense, the view that New Zealand ‘punches above its weight’ (p. 414) is engrained in the country’s national identity, which culturally is very much tied to its colonial past.

Sámi and Sápmi

The Sámi is an Indigenous people, residing in the mid-parts of Norway and Sweden, and north over to Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia (Hansen and Olsen, 2004). As other Indigenous peoples, the Sámi are defined as a group that has preserved its traditional ways of living similar to the Tuareg people in the Sahara, the Inuit people in Canada, and the Maori people in New Zealand (Kent, 2014). The Sámi Institute (2008) estimates a total of 50,000–80,000 Sámi, of which approximately 2,000 reside in Russia, 7,000 in Finland, 20,000 in Sweden, and 40,000-plus in Norway. Because different measures are used (Pettersen and Brustad, 2015), one being registered electoral rolls (Young and Bjerregaard, 2019), quantitative estimates only tell part of the story. Perhaps more important is the collective history of the Sámi people, who were exposed to an approximately century-long period (1850–1950) of severe wrongdoings by the Norwegian state, including the prohibition of the Sámi language in schools, the coercive conversion into Christianity, the sterilization of Sámi women, land/water rights and tax exemptions to settlers willing to move to Sámi-dominated areas, and laws limiting the size of houses that the Sámi people were allowed to build. It should be noted, though, that the Sámi was not colonized by forceful relocating of an Indigenous people, like many other places in the world.

A revitalization process – referring to a new ‘awakening’ of Sámi identity and culture – developed during the 1960s, leading to the forming of the Norwegian Sámi Association (established 1968). Tensions peaked when the state forcefully implemented policy on Sámi territory around 1980. At that time, ‘a large-scale hydroelectric development . . . which runs through the core Sámi areas, offered a clear target for Sámi mobilisation’ (Falch et al., 2015: 129). Pursuant to that conflict, both sides saw the need for a coordinating organ between the Sámi and the Norwegian state. Thus, following ‘classic Norwegian corporatism, a public committee . . . was quickly established’. The Sámi Rights Committee suggested ‘the creation of a directly elected representative body for the Sámi in Norway’ (Falch et al., 2015: 130). As a result, Norway included Sámi rights in its constitution in 1988 and established the Sámi Parliament in 1989. In 1990, Norway ratified the UN Convention Relating to Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO Convention 169). These actions have provided the Sámi with a degree of self-determination, defining

Norway as a forerunner (comparatively) in promoting Sámi rights (Berg-Nordlie, 2015; Josefsen et al., 2015).

Turning attention to sport, the revitalization processes of Sámi identity involved the establishment of many civil organizations during the 1960s (Hovland, 1996; Minde, 2003), and a growing recognition of Sámi culture. As part of such developments, a (Nordic) Sámi sport organization was established in 1979 and the Sámi sport organization in Norway, SVL-N, saw daylight in 1990 (see Nørdø et al., 2015; Skille, 2012, 2013). These organizations were established to support specific Sámi culture activities and to protect the particularity of Sámi sport such as reindeer racing and lasso throwing (Skille, 2013). Today, approximately 4,000 members in 23 sport clubs are affiliated to the organization (SVL-N, 2020) comprising three broad types: general Sámi clubs; specific Sámi sport clubs exclusively affiliated to the SVL-N; and sport clubs also affiliated to one or several Norwegian sport federations and NIF (Skille, 2012).

Sámi sport activities are supported by government funding – distribution of gambling revenues – channelled through the Sámi parliament. By that, Sámi sport contrasts Norwegian sport – NIF and its affiliates – receiving gambling revenues directly from the DCSS. The funding system indicates that ‘regular’ sport organizations are legitimate in the eyes of the DCSS because they are affiliated to (and conform to the rules and structures of) NIF. Sámi sport organizations, on the other hand, with their own culturally defined rules and structures, struggle to gain this legitimacy. This form of coercion is also identified in the analysis of Canadian governmental actions that define how Indigenous should participate in society and thus in organized sports (Forsyth, 2007; Paraschak, 2015). It is perceived as a dilemma for Indigenous sport participants and policy-makers to fit into (post)colonial structures and simultaneously pursue self-determination and unique identity (see Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Te Hiwi, 2014).

Analysis

Deephouse et al. (2016: 32) define legitimacy as the conceived ‘appropriateness of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms, and definitions’. On the contrary, illegitimacy refers to an organization which is called into question and that actors therefore hesitate having dealings with. To understand the Norwegian state’s sport policy towards Sámi sport, we scrutinize six elements of legitimating acts that are in play: (a) the legitimacy-seeking organization, (b) subject, (c) sources, (d) strategy, (e) bases, and (f) scenario. Thereafter, following Strittmatter et al. (2018), we discuss the consequences of these acts and elements for the possibilities of pursuing Indigenous sport.

The legitimacy-seeking organization

The first element of the theoretical framework distinguishes the organizational actor seeking legitimacy that is under analytical scrutiny. Although recognizing that multiple organizations are seeking legitimacy at the same time, this element thus helps focus the analysis on a single organization. In sport, legitimacy-seeking organizations could be central, regional, and local public authorities and sport organizations at these varying levels. In the context of the interrelation between Sámi sport and public policy, multiple

organizations might be seeking legitimacy, such as SVL-N, NIF or the Department of Civil Society and Sports (DCSS). However, because our focus is on the state actions and their implications, the legitimacy-seeking organization in the current analysis is the Norwegian state. An inherently broad concept, we consider the state as comprising two parts: a group of politicians with varying levels of sport-related knowledge, elected every four years, and a professional bureaucracy with a stable workforce and sport-related competence. The ministers responsible for sport – the Minister of Culture – have historically often had other cultural interests and competencies than sport (e.g. media, art, theatre). They have therefore delegated much of the power in the sport field to the DCSS bureaucrats (Goksøyr et al., 1996; Hanstad and Goksøyr, 2005). Nevertheless, formally, politicians make policy and bureaucrats implement it. For our analytical purposes, we therefore refer to the state as a single unit unless stated otherwise. In practical terms for sports policy analysis, the state most often equals the DCSS.

The subject of legitimacy

Another element of the framework inquires *what* is to be made legitimate – the subject of legitimizing acts. In this study, the subject is arguably the authority the state gains from the overall policy-making and implementation process, and from the substantive content of policy outputs. In Norway, policy goals develop in the interplay between the DCSS bureaucracy, which, subsequent to monitoring and research, prepares draft policy documents that form the basis for decision-making. Although disagreements on both the means and ends of sport policy is possible, all political parties in the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) agree on the sport-for-all goal, and have done so during the past four decades (Seippel and Skille, 2019). Sport-for-all has been a prominent objective in seven white papers – submitted by both left- and right-leaning governments since the 1970s (Skille, 2010), including three white papers exclusively dedicated to sport (St. Meld. Nr. 14, 1999–2000; St. Meld. Nr., 26, 2011–2012; St. Meld. Nr. 41, 1991–1992;). The 2011–2012 white paper, for example, stated that ‘the state’s overarching goal for the sport policy can be summarized in the vision of sport and physical activity for all’ (Meld. St. 26, 2011–2012: 13).

The state’s main tool in realizing this policy is its economic muscle (cf. Stuij and Stokvis, 2015) and Norwegian politicians support the public sport policy funding schemes in place. Directly or indirectly, these position the NIF system as the prime beneficiary. Out of 290 million euros annually, 150 million are allocated to facilities which are adapted to sports in NIF federated associations. Of 110 million euros for sport organizations, 100 million are earmarked for NIF and NIF federated organizations. The state allocates 4 million euros for outdoor activities, and 10 million euros for self-organized activities (Ministry of Culture, 2019). The Government allocates 150,000 euros to Sámi sport, distributed through the Sámi parliament (see ‘Strategies’ below).

Legitimacy sources

Legitimacy is a relational social evaluative phenomenon, meaning that legitimacy-seeking organizations cannot confer legitimacy on the subject in question (Suchman, 1995).

Instead, various sources – stakeholders or spectators – are in the position to grant legitimacy. Sources vary and can include other organizations, ‘society-at-large’ or ‘the general public’. In the case under study here, the sources include the public, government bureaucracy, and sports organizations. Stretching the understanding of an actor far, even the cemented institutionalization of these can be conceived of as sources. At least, some actors reinforce each other’s ‘source value’.

For the Norwegian state, public sport policy is not a contentious or fragmented domain. This is in contrast to, for example, Canadian public sport policy (Sam, 2011) and other policy domains in Norway (e.g. foreign affairs and defence, the economy, health, and education). Sport is not a divisive political issue and thus not something that has been exploited in the public political discourse for political gain amongst voters. NIF, on the other hand, with its 55 national sport federations, 11,500 sport clubs and over 2 million individual memberships (out of a population of 5 million), is an important and efficient source of legitimacy. Norway shares with Sweden ‘that at the bottom of club-based, federative structures is individual membership in one or more sport clubs, and these individuals are *de facto* voters (or the children of voters) in wider electoral processes’ (Stenling and Sam, 2019: 450). Thus, the numerical reach of NIF-associated sport implies that sport club members constitute an interest group to take into account in politics.

In comparison, SVL-N accounts for fewer than 4,000 members (SVL-N, 2020). Consequently, SVL-N appears to not carry the numerical weight required to be considered as a source of legitimacy in the sport policy. However, political significance may also be derived from the importance accorded to an activity’s cultural imprint. Concerning this aspect, Fahlén and Skille (2016, 2017) identified more interest for Sámi sport in the Department of Sámi and Minority Affairs (DSMA) and in the Ministry of Local Government than in the DCSS. A representative of DSMA enthusiastically claimed that ‘sport strengthens the identity of Sámi youth . . . regarding self-esteem, self-confidence, to be able to live in two cultures and to stand up as a Sámi individual’, adding that NIF would never attract the same people and provide them with the Sámi culture (Fahlén and Skille, 2017: 181). Nonetheless, Sámi identity and cultural standing appears to be without sufficient impact *vis-à-vis* ‘mainstream’ Norwegian society and political structures. Although supportive of SVL-N and Sámi sport, the DSMA does not have the same political ‘muscle’ as the DCSS in the fields of sport policy.

As a result, should the state acknowledge SVL-N as a source of legitimacy in the sport domain, it risks challenging NIF and its membership base as a legitimacy source. Although the recognition of one agency does not automatically negate another, the NIF–state relationship has long been one of taken-for-granted exclusivity. Thus, when state subsidies to Sámi sports were established in 2005, it was after years of negotiations in which NIF too showed their scepticism and reluctance to SVL-N as worthy of state support. By way of example, in a 2001 letter to the Ministry of Culture, where the DCSS is located, NIF requested the Ministry’s view on the fact that NIF is open for everybody, while the SVL-N is an organization solely for Sámi people (Skille, 2012). This example illustrates how the state’s inclusion of SVL-N breaches the previous exclusivity of the state–NIF relationship.

Legitimacy bases

The ‘bases’ element (Scott, 2014) captures the context-dependent components, ‘criteria’ (Deephouse et al., 2016) or ‘dimensions’ (Suchman, 1995) of legitimating acts, hereunder regulatory, pragmatic, moral, and cultural-cognitive bases for legitimacy (Deephouse et al., 2016; Stenling and Sam, 2017). For example, Sam and Ronglan (2018) showed that in Norway, the primary sport policy legitimacy base refers to representative membership (cultural-cognitive), while in New Zealand it is policy outcomes (pragmatic). Thus, ‘From the Norwegian government perspective, sport has been seen as a means to other ends . . . connected to the welfare state project’ (Bergsgard, 2018: 657). Although SVL-N is very similar to NIF in aligning with the state’s view on societal values gained from sport, such as health, socialization, anti-racism, anti-homophobia, gender equality, etc., it appears to not add anything in the eyes of the state (Fahlén and Skille, 2016, 2017; Skille, 2012; Skille and Fahlén, 2020; Broch and Skille, 2019b).

The Norwegian state’s legitimacy base is a conventional understanding of sport, as understood and implemented within the NIF framework. For elected politicians and the state bureaucracy, it is pragmatic and culturally appropriate to continue viewing NIF as the main implementer of sport-for-all. It is pragmatic and convenient to send one letter and one lump sum of grants to one umbrella organization. Moreover, as cultural-cognitive legitimation includes an element of cognition, it requires acknowledgment and knowledge, and a relationship between them. When politicians and bureaucrats know little about SVL-N, Sámi sport becomes difficult to acknowledge. While these theoretical concepts are challenging to find support for empirically, some indications can be found in studies referring to DCSS’s lack of interest in Sámi sport. For instance, one of the interviewees in Fahlén and Skille’s (2016) study stated that ‘SVL-N has not received any requests nor been a hearing organ in relation to the (development of the) White Paper on sport’ (p. 155). The institutional arrangement with an Indigenous body with partially governmental authority – the Sámi parliament – makes it possible for Norwegian state officials to operate with the assumption that the Sámi parliament takes care of Sámi sports policy.

When individual bureaucrats have limited knowledge of Sámi sport, or assume that Sámi sport matters are taken care of elsewhere, the culture of not recognizing SVL-N is arguably reproduced. In addition, when connecting bases to sources, NIF again is advantaged due to its affiliation of such a large proportion of the population. As suggested by Bergsgard (2018: 658): ‘NIF’s near-monopoly of organized achievement sport after 1945 has made “sport” and “Norwegian sport” synonymous with NIF.’ However, mainstreaming – homogenization and centralization – constrains pluralization and hinders possibilities for the ultimate goal of sport-for-all. In fact, ‘homogenization effects are in direct opposition to [sport-for-all] since they lead to narrower supply of activities’ (Fahlén, 2017: 713).

Legitimizing strategies

Strategy refers to the actual conduct associated with legitimacy-seeking endeavours. Although legitimating acts are active and purposive, they are embedded in institutional

contexts (Stenling, 2014; Suchman, 1995). This is demonstrated not least in studies of Norwegian sport policy that show the state's habitual – rather than rational – practices (Broch and Skille, 2019a; Rafoss and Tangen, 2017; Skille and Säfvenbom, 2011). The state's symbolic use of the discourse around the Norwegian sports movement as all-encompassing (e.g., Meld. St. 26, 2011–2012: 42) established the impression that there is no viable alternative implementer for realizing the sport-for-all goal, and indeed no need for one either. As an illustration, the previous White Paper emphasized that subsidies (which mainly go to the NIF system) were justified by 'criteria as competence, efficiency and accessibility' (St. Meld. Nr. 14, 1999–2000: 19).

Nonetheless, the state is compelled to respond strategically to societal developments, for example the increasing popularity of self-organized sports and the repeated requests from SVL-N for state support (Broch and Skille, 2019a; Seippel and Skille, 2019). Still, the ways in which this is done are notable. In the first White Paper devoted solely to sport (St. Meld. Nr. 41, 1991–1992), the state proposed that SVL-N should cooperate with NIF. This message, arguably underpinned by colonial sentiments around assimilation, was repeated in the later White Paper on Sámi policy (St. meld. nr. 41, 1996–1997):

[The White Paper on sport] suggests that the Sámi sport association of Norway finds a solution to cooperation with NIF which can gain common interest in Sámi sport and other sport and the further development of Sámi sport in Norway. . . . [The] allocations of gambling revenues as a whole should go through NIF (St. meld. nr. 41, 1996–1997, Ch. 12.12)

The White Paper furthermore clearly stated that 'future communication, application and reporting shall go through the channels and routines that are established between NIF and the Ministry of Culture' (St. meld. nr. 41, 1996–1997, Ch. 12.12).

Following the White Paper, SVL-N made repeated efforts to be eligible for independent subsidies from the state. Although it was initially argued that 'SVL-N's work is of an amount and character (oriented towards Sámi culture) that does not entitle the organization to gambling revenues' (letter sent from the Ministry of Culture to SVL-N, April 16, 2003; repeated in a letter from the Ministry of Culture to SVL-N, July 10, 2003), continuous correspondence between SVL-N and the DCSS enabled change in 2005. Since then, the government annually allocates support to Sámi sport via the Sámi parliament. This change occurred after the Sámi parliament exercised pressure by invoking the Norwegian state's constitutionally manifested responsibility for their Indigenous people (Skille, 2012). As a result, the 2011–2012 White Paper on sport states that 'the grant has its reason in the Constitution's § 110a that regulates the state's responsibility for facilitating and securing the development of Sámi language, culture and civil life' (St. meld. nr. 26, 2011–2012: 96).

Scenario for legitimating acts

Deephouse et al. (2016) state that 'managing legitimacy is important at all times, but different times calls for different types of legitimization activities' (p. 41). Given the historical stability of the Norwegian sport policy landscape (Green et al., 2019; Skille and Säfvenbom, 2011; Strittmatter et al., 2018), the state has been able to focus its efforts on

maintaining legitimacy. However, as suggested in the previous section, changes appear to be taking place, indicating that the state might be moving into a scenario where the legitimacy of its authority and sport-related policy and activities are being challenged. Furthermore, there are signs that the state is responding in an institutionally innovative way to this challenge. Two developments, which are parallel in time but contradictory politically, support this suggestion.

The first is the ethno-political wind that has blown for the last three decades (Hovland, 1996), exemplified constitutionally by the adoption of the Sámi Act and institutionally by the establishment of the Sámi parliament (Josefsen et al., 2015; Minde, 2003; Nørdø et al., 2015). The second development is the neoliberal wind that has blown continually since the 1980s, also influencing sports policy (Skille, 2010). Neoliberalism reappeared in the Norwegian sport policy field more recently, when a conservative Minister of Culture took chair in late 2015. Throughout Minister Helleland's period of service, 2016–2017, the minister surveilled and challenged NIF's use of state subsidies, thereby initiating a new state approach to NIF (Broch and Skille, 2019a). While monitoring of NIF's spending of state money is interpreted as neoliberal behaviour, it was paralleled or followed by other actions.

The minister commissioned a working group to look into 'state sport policy in a new time'. In their 2016 report (KUD, 2016), the group identified the virtual absence of state policy for self-organized sports. The minister can be interpreted as institutionally innovating because she allied with the grass roots of the NIF system, being critical of the allocation of money to the NIF central leadership and administration (Broch and Skille, 2019a), and because she initiated a resource centre for self-organized sport and physical activity in 2017 (Government, 2018b). Directly related to the conditions of Sámi sport, a later minister of culture also signalled transformations when she doubled the assignment to SVL-N in 2018 (Government, 2018a). These Ministers of Culture thus challenged NIF's monopoly while simultaneously suggesting that the state should seek legitimation for sport policy from actors outside of NIF. With these actions, the sport policy (and funding) space has become more crowded and the state–NIF relation contested. The promotion of a policy aimed at facilitating newcomers' activities may, in effect, lead to a de-legitimation of the traditional state sport policy based on a corporatist relationship with NIF. This development is not specifically about SVL-N, but related to all the potential newcomers to the sport policy space.

Consequences of legitimating acts

Consequences in the policy process can be intended, unintended and potentially undesirable effects of legitimating acts (Strittmatter et al., 2018). The scenario section indicated an emergence of a 'new norm' as the state apparently takes on board more perspectives than earlier in its sport policy legitimation processes, resulting in NIF's monopolistic standing being challenged. As a consequence, self-organized sport such as skateboarding is now on the political agenda, and perhaps the current inclination to acknowledge sporting activities outside of NIF's realm represents a necessary – although not sufficient – condition for Sámi sport to be further recognized by the Norwegian government.

Although the Sámi sport organization was not directly asked to provide input to state sport policy processes, the Sámi parliament indeed did so indirectly during an ongoing process of drafting a new white paper on sport. In their input document to the DCSS, the Sámi parliament holds:

The Sámi parliament is pleased to see that Sámi sport is rewarded with annual gambling revenues for activity, and has also an expectation that future allocations will be increased. This also counts for building of facilities, especially for the specific Sámi sport disciplines such as reindeer racing and lassoing. Sport and physical activity is also important in a public health perspective. In times when inactivity and lifestyle-related diseases threaten public health, the need for prevention efforts are more and more relevant. Increased physical activity is one of the most important tools to counteract this. This is something, which in the Sámi parliament's opinion will be important to consider in the state's sport policy, and an increased facilitation of self-organized physical activity should be a prioritized area (Sametinget, 2019).

In addition to the specific reference to Sámi sport, the Sámi parliament pinpoints the general issue of public health, and more specifically how self-organized sport should be an area of priority in state sport policy (to benefit the general issue). Looking back at what we have described around other elements of legitimating acts, it appears as if organized Sámi sport and self-organized activities may join forces in pursuing lines of argumentation that were traditionally reserved for conventional, NIF-organized sport.

In that sense, recent developments around self-organized and Sámi sport illustrates how advocates of (minority) sports and activities that do not want to conform to NIF structures are nonetheless driven to latch on to dominant sporting culture discourses in order to gain acknowledgement. In effect, the close NIF–state relationship has assimilating consequences that include the subsumption of Indigenous culture and knowledge in sport participation (cf. Broch and Skille, 2019b; Forsyth and Wamsley, 2006). This is problematic not only because these consequences provide a threat for the very existence of culture and knowledge of Indigenous people; it also de-legitimizes their ethnic identity in sports (Skille, 2013). The elements of the chain of legitimating acts all point in the same direction: the state as the focal organization seeks legitimacy for its policy (the subject) through the corporatist relationship with the Norwegian sport organization (the source) and the universal understanding of the Norwegian sport organization as sufficient and appropriate (as legitimacy bases). Thus, other strategies and scenarios are, if not considered inappropriate, just not considered as necessary. Taking this a step further, the analysis of Norwegian sport policy as a chain of legitimating acts points to Norwegian sport policy contributing to the potential extinction of Indigenous culture and knowledge in sport participation.

Conclusion

Focusing on Sámi sport, we have shown how the Norwegian state – through a chain of interdependent legitimating acts – reproduces its sport policy and especially the implementation of it through the corporatist relationship with the Norwegian umbrella sport organization, NIF. In conclusion, we highlight three overarching points. First, sport is a preserve of colonization, in which the legitimization chain of continuously prioritizing

Norwegian organized sport, systematically – via state actors’ interests and competences – excludes Sámi sport, culture, and knowledge, from the sport policy agenda. Consequently, and second, the one-sided legitimation acts may inadvertently de-legitimize the overarching sport policy goal itself: sport-for-all (Fahlén, 2017). By neglecting organizations that are not part of NIF, the state has excluded activities and members that do not fit well within the NIF structure.

The Sámi sport case is just one example of how in order to get the state’s acknowledgement, actors need to assimilate with and play by established formal and informal rules (see also Forsyth, 2007; Forsyth and Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 1995). In that respect, our analysis shows how powerful institutions such as state bureaucracies and sport organizations can work in colonial ways in post-colonial times, not least when they work together (Broch and Skille, 2019a; Seippel and Skille, 2019).

Third, we have identified signs of change as more recent politicians have challenged NIF’s monopoly and the corporatism of ‘older’ regimes. If input legitimacy (Sam and Ronglan, 2018) is insufficient for legitimation, a ‘new norm’ of multiculturalism – in its broadest sense comprising both ethnicities and sport cultures – may develop. We see this trend where a pluralistic norm in the state sport policy environment complements the universal norm. As there are large variations in the ways states legitimize their sport policies (Berg and Chalip, 2013; Dickson, 2017; Meier and Mutz, 2018; Sam and Ronglan, 2018; Stuij and Stokvis, 2015), there are other alternatives to the traditional corporatist Norwegian version. However, all legitimating acts have constitutive effects.

The theoretical framework and empirical sources employed have facilitated the identification of interdependent features of Norwegian sports policy that mostly hinders recognition of Sámi sport. Thus, we have shown how Norwegian sports policy in practice today, because it is based on institutional arrangements from historical times and is underpinned by an ideology of universalism, maintains colonial features similar to those in other countries such as Canada (see Forsyth, 2007; Te Hiwi, 2014). The analysis has, however, also revealed change that might foreshadow recognition of ‘new’ sport organizations, including those by and for Indigenous groups. In that respect, future research into Scandinavian sport policy would do well to explore Sámi sport representatives’ perceptions of the willingness to and strategies for gaining influence on the DCSS. Such an approach could also provide a basis for more specific comparisons with the situation in New Zealand (Maori), Australia (Aborigines) or Canada (Inuits).¹

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