



UBMEJEN UNIVERSITIÄHTA

Studier i språk och litteratur från Umeå universitet no. 66

Dress in Gákti – Speak in Suits

Appraising the Strategies and Structural Limits
of Sámi Political Engagement Amid Evolving
Norms and Institutional Maturation

Luke Laframboise

Academic dissertation

Which, with the due permission of the Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University for
the examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is presented for public defence in
Hörsal HUM.D.220 - Hjortronlandet on Wednesday, 27 May, 2026 at 13:00.

The thesis will be defended in English.

Faculty opponent:

Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen

Docent/Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Lapland

Organisation

Umeå University
Institutionen för språkstudier /
Department of Language Studies

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

6 May 2026

Author

Luke Laframboise

Title

Dress in Gákti – Speak in Suits: Appraising the Strategies and Structural Limits of Sámi Political Engagement Amid Evolving Norms and Institutional Maturation

Abstract

The Sámi of Sápmi are a people of one nation who have historically been adept at building relations across borders. To accomplish this and engage meaningfully with state-actors, they developed and relied upon Sámi-led organisations to represent them at all levels of political abstraction, from the local to the international. This process of formalised state engagement has been a key part of the evolution of Sámi politics, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century. Yet today, Sámi–state relations appear strained. To explore this effect, this dissertation examines the evolution of institutionally facilitated Sámi political engagement across domestic, regional, and international arenas, with particular attention to the trade-offs produced by long-term engagement with and inclusion within state-centric governance structures. This dissertation is guided by three research aims. The first aim is to explore and examine the evolving state political norms, state structures, and past relationships that have shaped the state of Sámi political engagement. The second aim of this work is to analyse how institutional maturation has affected the strategies and possibilities of Sámi organisations in the context of long-term engagement with state structures on a formal level. The third aim is to assess what the current state of Sámi–state relations says about the strategies to attain self-determination through state-level engagement. To address these aims, this dissertation draws on three peer-reviewed articles and two supplementary articles, examining Sámi engagement at three levels of political abstraction: from the national in Norway, to the international with the Sámi Council, and within the European Union.

The findings of these articles demonstrate that Sámi political institutions have historically grown through adaptive, relational strategies that enabled significant political gains. However, as these institutions have matured and become embedded within state frameworks, their strategic flexibility has diminished. At both national and international levels, institutionalisation has constrained Sámi agency, limited political outcomes, and exposed a persistent misalignment between Sámi aspirations for self-determination and state-centric norms of authority. This dissertation contributes to Sámi research, Indigenous studies, and International Relations by theorising the effects of institutional maturation on Indigenous political agency, empirically tracing Sámi engagement across borders and governance levels, and critically problematising state-based pathways to Indigenous self-determination. In doing so, it highlights the structural limits and risks inherent in pursuing Indigenous sovereignty through formal political institutions.

Keywords: Sámi, International Relations, Saami Council, Indigenous, political institutions, norms, Sámi Parliaments, European Union, Norway, Europe

Language

English

ISBN

978-91-8070-965-1 (print)
978-91-8070-966-8 (pdf)

Number of pages

137 pages + 5 delarbeten/papers