

Cultural sensitivity: Engaging difference in tourism

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ABSTRACT

Cultural sensitivity is highly relevant but inadequately conceptualized in tourism contexts. This article explores and advances understanding of cultural sensitivity in relation to Arctic tourism where local and Indigenous livelihoods and environments are tethered to dynamics of recent tourism growth and decline, climate change, and colonial power relations. Framing cultural sensitivity as a subjective orientation towards otherness, the article illuminates differences between ethnocentric and ethnorelative orientations and discusses the importance of relational tourism processes. By advancing the conceptualization of cultural sensitivity, the article offers a framework for developing tourism services and products, and approaching tourism encounters, in ways that can enhance recognition, respect and reciprocity towards otherness in Arctic tourism and beyond.

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Introduction

The task we have set for ourselves in this paper is a delicate one. Indeed, to weigh in on the meanings of cultural sensitivity in tourism feels like a project destined for failure, one that must rely on a degree of coding or classifying what is an utterly visceral, affective, perceptual, and relational dimension of human experience. Cultural sensitivity, in other words, cannot be grasped easily—and certainly not fully and completely—by language. Both ‘culture’ and ‘sensitivity’ evade representation. Moreover, insofar as any representation of cultural sensitivity we put forward will be partial, it is inevitable that our efforts will overlook the nuance, vitality and richness of cultures and their becoming (see [Amoamo, 2011](#)). These are persistent problems in much social science research. As Māori scholar [Linda Tuhiwai Smith \(2012\)](#) observes, imperial, Eurocentric visions of order, classification and progress underpin prevailing norms within academic research, including what or whose knowledge counts and what procedures for generating knowledge are accepted. Indigenous epistemes have all too often been diminished, marginalized or erased completely as a function of these power relations in knowledge production ([Chambers & Buzinde, 2015](#); [Kuokkanen, 2007, 2017](#)).

Tourism scholars have been alert to such issues for some years now. The *hopeful* ([Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011](#)) and *moral* ([Caton, 2012](#)) turns in tourism, for instance, advocate for taking greater responsibility in research such that knowledge production is reflexively situated, creating conditions for social change, and accountable to the fields of power within which it operates. Despite these important shifts in some streams of tourism scholarship, tourism processes seem to follow the Western liberal ideology of self-contained individuals with minimal responsibilities towards one another. Indeed, diverse complaints within tourism discourse often boil down to the stereotype of tourism, tourists and researchers being driven by insensitivity; an attitude of ‘what is in it for me?’ (see [Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016](#); [Lemelin, Dawson, & Stewart, 2012](#); [Stone & Nyaupane, 2020](#); cf. [Tucker,](#)

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2016). These kinds of orientations to tourism encounters maintain injustices and hinder recognition of and care for different worldviews (Ruhanen, Saito & Axelsen, 2021; Biddle & Swée, 2012; Jamal, 2019; Ren, van der Duim, & Jóhannesson, 2018).

A classic in travel writing, *Arctic Dreams* (Lopez, 1986; see also Abram & Lund, 2016) discusses how travellers throughout the centuries have projected their expectations to the 'white canvas' of the Arctic. Our article extends upon recurrent concerns associated with how Indigenous cultures are enfolded within Arctic tourism contexts (Grimwood, Muldoon & Stevens, 2019; Lüthje, 1998; Viken & Müller, 2017) and in various land and water governance, development and research contexts (Lehtola, 2015; Smith, 2012). These apprehensions include the various ways Indigenous practices, symbols, and customs are misrepresented (see; de Bernardi, Kugapi & Lüthje, 2017; Dann, 1996; Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016); the inadequate consultation with Indigenous peoples and communities (Hinch & Butler, 2007; Notzke, 1999; Ryan & Aicken, 2005; Viken & Müller, 2017); and the extraction or dispossession of Indigenous epistemes and resources for imperial, Eurocentric benefit (Bruner, 2005; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Crick, 1989; Kuokkanen, 2017). Romantic and essentializing perceptions of the Arctic, its people and livelihoods are harmful in many ways; not least as they impede us from seeing the destructive consequences of colonialism and the Anthropocene in the region (Huijbens & Gren, 2016; Holmes, Grimwood, King, & the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, 2016; Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017; Rantala et al., 2019). Recent studies have called attention to how Indigenous tourism actors resist these kinds of 'authentic' and 'whitewashed' images and reconcile with their colonial pasts by telling locally embedded stories (Kramvig & Førde, 2020) and asserting their presence within tourism landscapes (Grimwood, Muldoon & Stevens, 2019; Amoamo, 2011).

We use this paper to explore and advance the conceptualization of cultural sensitivity and situate it in relation to Arctic tourism involving Indigenous communities. In the following pages, we discuss the meanings associated with cultural sensitivity and how these can enhance understandings, address current challenges, and open up new possibilities for tourism. While cultural sensitivity has been discussed extensively in education, social work and healthcare literature (Kirmayer, 2012; Sousa & Almeida, 2016; Swendson & Windsor, 1996), there is a dearth of conceptual clarity of the notion within tourism studies (see Donohoe, 2011; Hurst et al., 2020; Saari, Höckert, Lüthje, Kugapi, & Mazzullo, 2020). In order to advance the conceptualization of cultural sensitivity in tourism, we build on the phenomenologically informed model of intercultural sensitivity developed by Milton Bennett (1986), where cultural sensitivity is seen as a way of relating to cultural diversity. We understand cultural sensitivity as a subjective orientation towards otherness that simultaneously shapes, and is shaped by, different kinds of social processes, narratives and encounters, including those associated with tourism. In this paper, we illuminate differences between ethnocentric and ethnorelative orientations and discuss the importance of relational engagement in culturally sensitive tourism processes.

We position cultural sensitivity as highly relevant in Arctic tourism contexts, where climate change, recent trends towards growth, and industry lockdowns due to COVID-19 have burdened local livelihoods and environments in unpredictable and potentially irreversible ways (Abram & Lund, 2016; Kramvig & Førde, 2020; Lemelin et al., 2012; Ren, Jóhannesson, Kramvig, Pashkevich, & Höckert, 2020; Viken & Müller, 2017). The conceptual work in this paper is informed and enriched by collective efforts within the *Culturally Sensitive Tourism in the Arctic (ARCTISEN)* project (Olsen et al., 2019). This project has enabled ongoing partnerships among Arctic tourism entrepreneurs, agencies, academics – including First Nations, Inuit and the Sámi peoples – and the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA). By focusing on cultural sensitivity, our tourism knowledge collective (Ren et al., 2018) aims to foster tourism enterprises and experiences that are respectfully orientated towards difference. It is clear that the call for cultural sensitivity is not limited to Indigenous cultures or Arctic places, but is relevant more broadly when different languages, rights, political organizations, influences, economic conditions and worldviews are encountered.

Cultural sensitivity and tourism

For decades, tourism academics have been occupied by the negative impacts of tourism and have searched for alternative ways and mindsets for tourism development. As part of this discussion, Donohoe (2011) has provided a rich analysis of the cultural sensitivity concept in ecotourism through a Delphi study involving expert voices from tourism industry and academia. Donohoe's definition points to both the necessity and complexity of the concept:

Cultural Sensitivity is the extent to which those who implement, support, and participate in ecotourism: minimize impacts to the natural and cultural environments, foster intercultural awareness and respect, contribute to the protection of built and living cultural heritage, foster the informed participation and empowerment of local and Indigenous Peoples, and respect the socio-cultural value systems of the host community (p. 37).

Besides Donohoe's research, tourism literature has approached cultural sensitivity in two general ways: as a vulnerability and as a competence. With the former, sensitivity is used as an adjective to characterize something as threatened or at risk—that is, as something vulnerable that needs protection. In this way, cultural sensitivity is akin to the notion of vulnerability used widely in social-ecological systems and resilience research to depict communities, environments or social institutions and contexts threatened by various forces of change (Harrison & Price, 1996). Butler (2018) adopts this meaning of sensitivity in regard to tourism expansion under the guise of sustainability. Specifically, Butler argues that the discourse of sustainable tourism threatens "sensitive environments" with a "high degree of vulnerability to change, particularly irreversible change, which may be reflected in permanent loss of elements of biodiversity because of the varying impacts of tourism" (p. 1). Butler's argument reveals the paradox of environmentally sensitive areas like the Galapagos Islands, Machu Picchu, Angkor Wat and Venice, slowly being degraded as a function of their popularity. Others argue that the situation is even worse, as destinations and attractions are vanishing due to

environmental changes. The discussions of last chance tourism (Lemelin et al., 2012) are based on the common concern of visiting 'sensitive' human and non-human communities while they still exist.

Sensitivity as it relates to culture has also been used in reference to the commodification of cultural heritage through tourism. For instance, Handapangoda, Madduma Bandara, and Kumara (2019) connect the idea of cultural sensitivity to the process of creating and using physical artefacts in contexts of heritage tourism. Using the example of Sri Lanka's traditional mask art, Handapangoda et al. call for a more open and undefined approach to cultural authenticity (see also de Bernardi, 2020). Relatedly, Hall, Mitchell, and Keelan (1992) have examined tourism promotion and preservation efforts that make Māori heritage more accessible to travellers, calling for heightened awareness of the laws and rights connected to Māori culture. Hall et al. underlined how "[t]he Māori are now in a strategic and sensitive position in which the future must hold greater participation for them in the whole field of heritage tourism and management" (Hall et al., 1992, p. 125).

In the second approach to cultural sensitivity, sensitivity is used as an abstract noun that refers to an attitude or virtue one might acquire—for example, to behave in a way that demonstrates understanding and care for the other. Thus, cultural sensitivity reflects a disposition, a level of awareness, or a mode of practice. Conceived in this way, cultural sensitivity is used rather inclusively, such that it encompasses various knowledges, skills, dispositions, competences or behaviours. For instance, in a tourism methodology article, Schuler, Aberdeen, and Dyer (1999) underline the importance of sensitivity and responsiveness to contingency when conducting research with Indigenous communities. They write how '...cultural and personal sensitivity called for is not simply passive sentiment but a mode of ethical engagement with Indigenous people, which underpins research practices' (Schuler et al., 1999, p. 59).

The aforementioned study by Donohoe (2011) discusses the role of staff education and training in order to accelerate cultural sensitivity in tourism planning and management. The values of cultural knowledge and cultural competence has been emphasized especially in hospitality management, wherein one-size-fits-all strategies are criticized, and tour operators and hosts are encouraged to adjust to the cultural backgrounds of their guests (see Lashley, 2017). The preparedness that cultural knowledge and awareness represent is part of professional behaviour (Lashley, 2017). Other studies have echoed this sentiment. Becherel and Cooper (2002) have illuminated the value of both social and cultural sensitivity in human resource management, while others emphasized the need to accommodate guests' interests, knowledge (Komatsu & Liu, 2007) and language skills (Hogg, Liao, & O'Gorman, 2014) when providing information about attractions or destinations more generally. Research has also attempted to model sensitivity in terms of cultural competencies and their cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. For instance, Yu, Weiler, and Ham (2001) situate cultural awareness and knowledge primarily in the cognitive domain. Yu et al. explain that "tour guides' cultural awareness is defined as their understanding of host (Australian) culture, their knowledge of the host (Australian) society, and their awareness of cultural differences between China and Australia" (p. 81). The affective component, in contrast, "enables an individual to be sensitive enough during intercultural interactions to acknowledge and respect cultural differences" (Yu et al., 2001, p. 81), while the behavioural dimension is principally about communication skills.

Cultural sensitivity in this vein is conceptualized as an outcome of learning and development: it is a desired competence that one can attain and enhance. Wells' (2000) model, for example, suggests that as individuals in health care sector acquire knowledge and awareness of cultural differences, they move through stages of development ranging from cultural incompetence to cultural proficiency. This approach is consistent with the general view of cultural sensitivity in the pedagogy and social work sectors, which seem to paint a picture of sensitivity as a professional quality among those working with students, co-workers, clients or patients from different cultural backgrounds (see Sousa & Almeida, 2016). In these literatures, responsibility and agency associated with cultural sensitivity seems to be reserved for those taking care of cultural 'others'. In other words, in these kinds of settings, sensitivity is expected from professionals without customers or patients being culturally sensitive towards the professional in return.

However, as Kirmayer (2012) argues, cultural competences can be expected from everyone who engages with cultural differences. While the convention in tourism is that those serving and guiding others must be culturally sensitive (Aikio, 2018; Tsaud & Tu, 2019; Yu et al., 2001), it is not only the responsibility of hosts to develop a culturally sensitive orientation. In tourism, the onus of being culturally sensitive ought also to be assumed by tourists, developers, marketing organizations, and researchers (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; de Bernardi, Kugapi, & Lüthje, 2017; Höckert, 2018; Länsman, 2004; Ren et al., 2018). We agree with those who approach cultural sensitivity as a facet of one's identity construction or worldview; that is, as a disposition that can be enhanced and mobilized through reflection on one's own pre-assumptions, cultural norms and values (Hurst et al., 2020; Jamal, 2019; Saari et al., 2020).

Conceptual framework

While the concept of cultural sensitivity has been used in tourism, there appears to be limited theoretical framing of the concept. Hence, we have opted to search elsewhere in the social sciences for guidance on theoretical grounding. Bennett's (1986) development model provides instructive grounding for the conceptualization of cultural sensitivity as a relational construct. While Bennett's focus is on developing intercultural sensitivity among those working in multicultural settings, we see value in adapting it into multiple host-guest relations. Bennett's model adopts a phenomenological approach with the intent of disentangling and clarifying the various ways people experience cultural differences and attach meanings to them. In its simplest form, sensitivity is understood, by Bennett, as an ability to sense and engage with difference—that is, as one's relation to otherness. According to Bennett, people's behaviour in intercultural interactions is a consequence of the meanings assigned to cultural differences.

For instance, when people feel threatened by cultural difference, it is often a function of undesirable characteristics attributed to those associated with that cultural difference (Bennett, 1986).

Bennett (1986) suggests that developing cultural sensitivity requires not only knowledge and skills, but also self-reflection that leads to new understanding, awareness and attitudes. Bennett further submits that the more individuals can recognize and give non-evaluative meanings to cultural nuances and different perspectives, the more culturally sensitive they are. Thus, enhancing intercultural sensitivity implies not only the acquisition of new competences, but also the development of one's consciousness. In the same spirit, Moscardo (1996) has used the notion of mindfulness to describe visitors "who are active, interested, questioning and capable of reassessing the way they view the world" (p. 382).

Bennett's (1986) model hinges on a conceptual split between what he labels ethnocentric and ethnorelative experiences of difference. While the ethnocentric realm involves essentializing difference, the ethnorelative realm is based on openness to diversity. As illustrated in Fig. 1, both ethnocentric and ethnorelative experiences of difference are characterized by three stages, such that a person can move through a total of six possible development steps. The ethnocentric extreme of intercultural sensitivity is *denial*. This is characterized as a parochial perception of culture, whereby an individual ignores, discounts or disavows that their worldview is one among many multicultural perspectives. In the next stage, other cultures are experienced as threats, which leads to *defence* of one's own culture and assigning negative attributes to other groups. *Minimization*, the third mode of cultural insensitivity, refers to the strategy de-emphasizing cultural differences and highlighting cultural similarities. The ethnorelative stages in Bennett's model include *acceptance*, *adaptation* and *integration*. While *acceptance* involves accepting cultural difference as fact and something one has to live with, *adaptation* occurs when cultural differences are taken into consideration in an empathetic manner. Acknowledging and responding to the experience of multiple cultures is an example of such adaptation. Finally, *integration* represents the ultimate involvement in another culture, where aspects of cultural difference become integral to one's identity (Bennett, 1986).

The main argument of this article is that in order to understand cultural sensitivity in the tourism context, it is important to acknowledge the fundamental ontological and epistemological difference between ethnocentric and ethnorelative orientations. By ethnocentric orientation, we refer to self-centeredness, where cultural differences are categorized, perceived as inferior to one's own, or reduced to sameness. Ethnocentric strategies detach us from others. Conversely, ethnorelative approaches are based on openness to new relations and mutual change. In other words, the ethnorelative orientation is a relational approach, other and becoming-oriented, where the possibility for sensitivity occurs in relations between the self and the other (see also Veijola, Germann Molz, Pyyhtinen, Höckert, & Grit, 2014). While the solipsistic, self-centric worldview is often seen to form the basis of Western understandings of the good life, relational, other-oriented ontologies locate ethics and responsibilities in the relations between self and the other, including more-than-human others (Kuokkanen, 2007).

One philosopher who dedicated much of his work to articulating distinctions between self-centred (ethnocentric) and relational (ethnorelative) orientations was French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas (1969) directs his critique towards Western philosophies' celebration of the individual, self-centred subject, and in particular, the way ethics and morality are framed as an extension of such an individualistic cosmology (Kuokkanen, 2007; Levinas, 1969; Smith, 2009). Smith (2009) has lamented that this idea of human existence is "so self-centred that it initially seems difficult to reconcile with any kinds of ethics at all" (p. 264). Similarly, the search for cultural sensitivity seems rather impossible in the sphere of ethnocentrism. Levinas' alternative view posits that ethical subjectivity is contingent on openness to otherness and responsibility for the other. Levinas (1985) spoke of responsibility as "the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity" (p. 95). As his ideas have been formed against any conception of subjectivity as totalized and dominant over the other, his thinking has been pertinent to postcolonial philosophy (Dussel, 2013; Kuokkanen, 2007). Following Levinasian thought, the ethnorelative subject is one whose ethics are not about rules or guidelines or laws, but about responsibility for the other, and being for the other. As ethics are based not on the self but on the intersubjective relationship with the other, it is between the self and the other that the possibility of cultural sensitivity occurs (Levinas, 1969; Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018). In effect, sensitive processes require us to become "radically" open to the other (Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018).

While Bennett's (1986) model provides an instructive framework for understanding ethnocentric and ethnorelative ways of relating to cultural differences, including the impossibility of enhancing cultural sensitivity by remaining within an ethnocentric worldview, it does not translate seamlessly into a conceptualization of cultural sensitivity in tourism. This leads to the crux of how our conceptualization of cultural sensitivity evolves from Bennett's. In our conceptual framework, illustrated in Fig. 2, we suggest that ethnocentric ways of orientating with cultural differences include assimilation, stereotyping and appropriation, which somewhat overlap with Bennett's ethnocentric categories. These are the terms that tourism scholars are commonly using to address the ethnocentric ways in which authorities, tourists, and companies have treated Indigenous groups (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Heldt Cassel, 2019; Hurst et al., 2020; Viken & Müller, 2017).

By presenting our conceptual framework in circles, we wish to suggest that insensitive ways of relating to difference are not vanishing but rather taking new forms. In order to break the negative circle of ethnocentric ways of being and knowing, we wish to draw attention to the ethnorelative notions of recognition, respect and reciprocity. By choosing these concepts, we propose that sensitivity becomes possible in different kinds of encounters between the self and multiple others.

In line with the outcomes of Donohoe's (2011) study referred to earlier, the ethnorelative relations include recognition and respect of multiple realities and value systems. Recognition and respect have also been central to recent discussions of ethics and justice in tourism (Hurst et al., 2020; Jamal, 2019; Saari et al., 2020). By visualising our thought with circles, our conceptualization takes distance from Bennett's suggestion that cultural sensitivity somehow peaks, or becomes manifested in the most desirable way, when an individual integrates cultural otherness into the fabric of their identity (Levinas, 1969). Instead of aiming

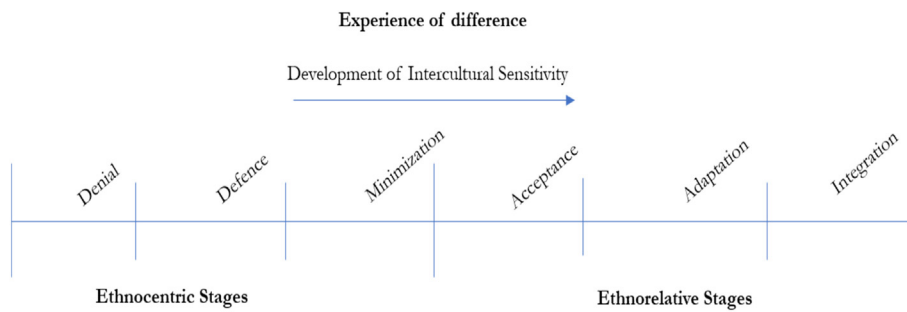


Fig. 1. Bennett's (1986, p. 182) development model of intercultural sensitivity.

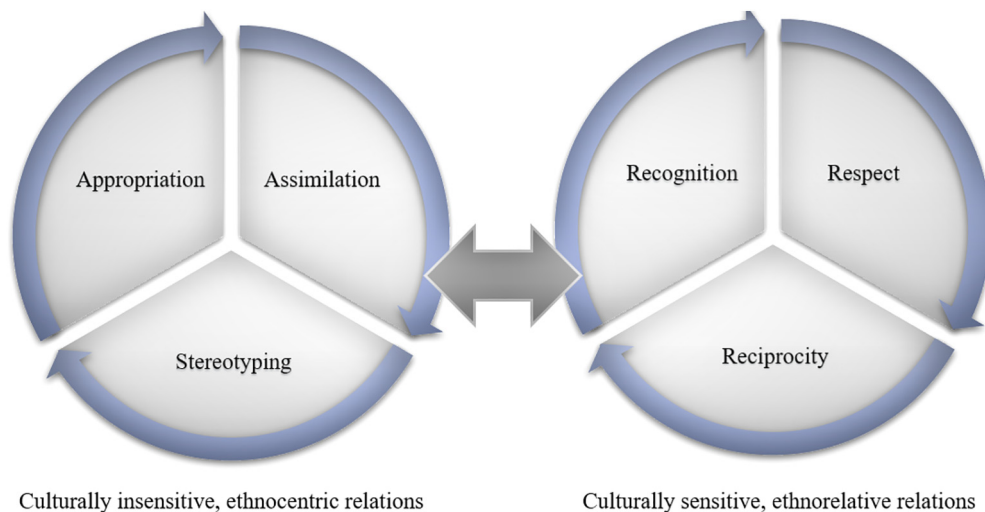


Fig. 2. A conceptualization of cultural sensitivity in tourism.

for integration, assimilation or knowing the other, we locate cultural sensitivity in the discussions of hybridity that challenge essentialism and resist homogenization (see Amoamo, 2011; Bhabha, 1994). With the notion of reciprocity, we wish to draw attention to the ways in which identities, ideas and affinities can be continuously formed between self and the other, hosts and the guests. By reading Bhabha's (1994) theory of 'third space', Amoamo (2011) encourages tourism actors to explore the possibilities of tourism as a creative collaborative site where new cultural contestations and configurations can occur (see also Ren et al., 2018). Amoamo's research with Māori tourism operators shows how the hybrid, in-between forms of culture can emerge in tourism encounters – in settings where the contours of cultural difference are always shifting.

The Levinasian idea of a moral obligation to recognize, respect and reciprocate can be seen as a vision of ethical subjectivity. We suggest that cultural sensitivity in tourism ought to be understood as a reflexive position and orientation that shifts in relation to different contexts. In more concrete terms, people with a culturally sensitive orientation might use ethnocentric strategies as political tools to express resistance; or, for instance, tourists might embrace Indigenous cultures abroad without recognizing negative policies towards Indigenous groups at home. Hence, culturally sensitive processes are socially situated. Moreover, instead of viewing cultural sensitivity strictly as a learned competence, we find it important to attend to the multitude of tourism encounters, experiences, products, services and representations that shape the dynamic ways we relate to cultural differences. In other words, cultural sensitivity is not something that is ever finally achieved in tourism, but rather something that is constantly negotiated, and continuously and consistently exercised, through various processes and becomings.

On ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism in tourism spheres

This section draws closer attention to different dimensions of ethnocentric and ethnorelative ways of relating to difference in the context of tourism. We begin by showing how ethnocentric practices of assimilation, appropriation and stereotyping continue to be imposed upon Indigenous cultures in and through Arctic tourism specifically. We then turn our attention to illuminating and contextualizing ethnorelative relations within notions and practices of recognition, respect and reciprocity among tourism actors. By doing this, we wish to demonstrate how our conceptualization of cultural sensitivity runs parallel with efforts that tourism actors are making to create productive change in tourism.

Legacies of ethnocentrism in Arctic tourism

Similar to Indigenous peoples in other regions across the globe, Indigenous peoples in the Arctic have experienced injustices associated with colonization (United Nations Declaration, 2007). Despite resistance and reconciliation processes led by Indigenous peoples, and the regrets and excuses expressed by nation state authorities, the mistreatments continue to take new forms (Lehtola, 2015). Assimilation is an ongoing process through which Indigenous groups are subsumed into national political units, and weakened and vanished as distinct cultural groups (Kuokkanen, 2007). While in several places tourism has not been a central arena for suppression and discrimination, it still forms part of the prevailing social and economic systems (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Hall & Tucker, 2004; Jamal, 2019).

In recent decades, the processes and implications of the commodification and objectification of Indigenous cultures through tourism have been widely discussed (Crick, 1989; Laxson, 1991; Lüthje, 1998; Shepherd, 2002; Tuulentie, 2017; Viken, 2008). Since international tourism implies trade between people in different cultural contexts, the outside world has a role in defining and valuing the insider arts, handicrafts, and other expressions of culture (Kugapi, 2014). Such outsider extraction is often called cultural appropriation, simply defined as “the taking of something produced by members of one culture by members of another” (Young, 2005, p. 136).

Concerning tourism, selling souvenirs and cultural performances are widely critiqued examples of how Indigenous cultures become commodified (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Viken & Müller, 2017). Dolls intended to represent Sámi, First Nations or Inuit; bone or feather-based items; copies of drums and other ritual items; copies of tents and igloos; miniatures of polar bear and reindeer: all are common in the Arctic. During the 2010 Winter Olympic in Vancouver, Canada, the Hudson Bay Company offered mass-produced Cowichan-style sweaters—that is, inaccurate copies of a traditional knit from Duncan, British Columbia (Shrumm, 2017). Similarly, non-Sámi employees dressed in Sámi costumes used to welcome guests (through marketing or physically) to tourism destinations in Nordic countries (Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019; Lüthje, 1998). It has been widely debated who has the right to produce and use these kinds of items and to what extent traditional materials and designs can be commodified and modernized. These discussions around cultural appropriation boil down to two questions: Who decides? And who benefits? While outsider exposure may help in the creation of a market, making the aspect of a culture visible, sellable and profitable (Young & Haley, 2009), cultural representations controlled by outside actors tend not only to be aestheticized and exoticized, but also filled with inaccuracy, inauthenticity and stereotypes (de Bernardi, 2020; Gardiner, 2021). Cultural insensitivity tends to occur when cultural products and services are sold by another cultural group without proper consultation and consent (Hinch & Butler, 2007; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009).

Stereotyping, another form of ethnocentrism, is a way of making sense of the world, by subsuming our observations, filtering information into categories and sorting people into groups (Lehtonen, 2005). In such processes, there is a tendency to overemphasize the typical as a “set of inaccurate, simplistic generalisations about a group of individuals” (Lehtonen, 2005, p. 62). Since modern scientific exploration of the North started, Indigenous groups of the Arctic have all been subject to stereotyping by different actors (Abram & Lund, 2016; Lehtola, 2015). Indeed, the stereotypical representations of the Sámi with colourful costumes and reindeer have played an important role in exotic narratives of the European North (Gardiner, 2021; Heldt Cassel, 2019; Olsen, 2003). Schaad's (2008) analysis of tourists' internet accounts shows how such essentializing perceptions of the North become re-constructed in tourists' accounts (see also de Bernardi, 2020). Such “museumizing” (MacCannell, 1992, p. 178) strengthens nostalgic and patronizing ideas of “primitive Indigenous peoples” and “pristine Arctic nature” (Grimwood, Yudina, Muldoon, & Qiu, 2015; Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017).

Tourism activities require space, filling the landscapes with a mixture of Indigenous, commercial and touristic practices and symbols. In these assimilating processes, less and less of the land is available for livelihoods like reindeer herding (Riseth & Johansen, 2018). This is a central feature of what Grimwood, Muldoon, and Stevens (2019), p. 234) describe as settler colonialism:

a particular form of colonial domination whereby invasion transpires as a structure not an event ... an occupation exerted through the enduring social, political, and economic structures built by the invading society. [These structures] include cultural norms and practices that are institutionalized through laws ... and social discourse.

Images of Arctic as an empty, welcoming space, or “the last wilderness” have often been used by the tourism industry in its promotion of the Sámi areas of the North, areas that have been inhabited for several thousands of years (Lopez, 1986). Recycling these stereotypes in tourism discourses can be seen as a good example of touristic appropriation of land (Lämsman, 2004). It is also clear that the terms in our conceptual framework are interconnected as, for instance, cultural appropriation becomes more problematic when it creates or manifests stereotypes of another culture, adding to processes of assimilation. As Wassler and Kirillova (2019) provocatively claimed, “rather than providing factual insight, the (tourist) gaze alienates, stereotypes, objectifies, and ultimately dehumanizes the gazer and the gaze in a power-struggle of interpretation” (p. 124). Thus, there is a need for recognition of the political and public injustices in the past, and how cultural diversity can be handled in more sensitive ways now and in the future. For this purpose, we need to ask how tourism encounters can disrupt, rather than enforce, ethnocentric orientations.

Locating ethnorelativism

In our conceptualization of cultural sensitivity, we have replaced Bennett's (1986) notion of acceptance with recognition, suggesting that recognition should be seen as a baseline for ethnorelative, culturally sensitive ways of encountering cultural difference. Aligning with Levinas (1969), we define recognition here as recognition of the other and otherness. Importantly, the

purpose of recognition is not to know the other or to define the other's identity in a dialectical or hierarchical sense (see Kuokkanen, 2007; Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018; Smith, 2012). Instead, we see recognition as a continuously new possibility of questioning, reflecting and transforming our ways of being, knowing and valuing in relation with others.

In addition to Levinas' metaphysical thinking in relation to recognition, guidance can be sought from those who see recognition as a central part of cultural justice (see Dussel, 2013; Fraser, 1995; Taylor, 1997; Young, 2011). Where different theoretical approaches on recognition seem to converge is that a lack of recognition in the social and political realm inflicts damage on oppressed individuals and communities in cultural realms. To be misrecognized, according to Fraser (1995):

is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others' conscious attitudes of mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural values that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (p. 280).

Different kinds of tourism projects have been aimed at enhancing recognition of cultural traditions, customs and practices in Arctic tourism. These projects have focused, for instance, on creating tourism labels like 'Sámi experience' and 'Sámi Duodji' (de Bernardi, Kugapi & Lüthje, 2017; García-Rosell, 2016), creating guidelines for Culturally Responsible Sámi tourism (Sámi Parliament, Finland) and enhancing product development among tourism entrepreneurs, as in the Johtit, a Sámi tourism development project in Northern Norway. While there is no independent Sámi DMO, the Swedish project VisitSapmi has been used on one hand, as an inspiring example of more institutionalized recognition of Sámi tourism, and on the other hand, as an example of a temporary process depending on project money (de Bernardi, 2020; Viken, 2016). The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) is a similar example of an established Indigenous tourism industry voice that supports marketing, product development and partnerships between associations, and facilitates Canada's nation-wide Indigenous tourism recognition program (Hurst et al., 2020).

In more general terms, Indigenous people have worked hard to create laws, treaties and protocols securing them status and rights as such, both in relation to national governments and internationally. For instance, the *Larrakia Declaration on the Development of Indigenous Tourism* (2012) is founded on the need for different tourism actors to recognize the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007). The *Larrakia Declaration* (2012) underlines the importance of recognizing that Indigenous people are still often "marginalized, disadvantaged and remote from the opportunity for social, economic and political advancement". As most of these groups have been oppressed for long periods of time, recognition cannot be obtained overnight. In several Arctic countries, formal reconciliation processes have been (or currently are being) conducted, and recent research indicates how tourism can play an important part in these processes (Kramvig & Førde, 2020). The search for cultural sensitivity comes, on the one hand, with a challenge of recognizing historical contexts, unequal power relations and previously silenced voices, and, on the other hand, with recognition of and reflection on the consequences of one's actions in relation to others.

While there is a strong tendency within tourism to emplace Indigeneity in strictly historical terms (Olsen, 2003), Indigenous-led tourism development and enterprises are challenging the presentation that shuns contemporary Indigenous cultures in all their nuances, diversity and vitality. As de Bernardi (2020) stresses, Sámi tourism actors are not merely focused on preserving the past, but advocating for recognition as contemporary culture. This has led to ongoing debates under what conditions, and by whom, different symbols, places and practices can be used, sold and celebrated within tourism (de Bernardi, 2020; Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019; Ren et al., 2020). Recently, a growing number of young Sámi have chosen to get involved with tourism to share knowledge about their current lives and communicate their heritage with tourists and the wider public (Leu et al., 2018; Müller & de Bernardi, 2020). For instance, Kramvig and Førde's (2020) research in Northern Norway illustrates storytelling events, where Sámi tourism entrepreneurs engage contemporary issues with Indigenous knowledge. In a similar vein, Amoamo's (2011) research in New Zealand illustrates how Māori tourism operators reclaim their heritage and create new cultural meanings through tourism performances that (re)translate and integrate the old with the new. In recent years, modern everyday Greenlandic life has been recognized in tourism marketing campaigns, blending nature and culture "into a hybrid, playful and often humorous imagery" (Ren et al., 2020).

In sum, the starting point for culturally sensitive tourism processes should be, quoting Jamal (2019), that all people are deemed "worthy of equal dignity, respect and recognition for who they are" (p. 72). Alongside the recognition of cultural difference and diversity, we see that respect plays a crucial role in our search for culturally sensitive tourism processes (see Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Holmes et al., 2016). As the late Johnny Edmonds of the World Indigenous Tourism Association summarized, "cultural sensitivity is about respect", and tourism is an area where this is particularly important (personal communication).

The aforementioned *Larrakia Declaration* (2012) calls for respect for the "customary law and lore, land and water, traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions, cultural heritage that will underpin all tourism decisions". Likewise, concerning UNESCO heritage sites, the Parks Canada Agency has published a resource guide aimed at supporting a consistent approach to relating to Indigenous peoples and partners. The guide is also intended to be used as an informational toolkit for operational employees who are engaging with Indigenous partners to strengthen relationships and build capacity. The report is centred around three stages of relationship-building—initiating, growing and stewarding—and calls upon central concepts related to cultural sensitivity such as long-term commitment, trust and mutual respect (Hurst et al., 2020). In a similar vein, the ethical tourism guidelines developed by the *Sámi parliament* (2018) in Finland, define mutual understanding and respect as the prerequisite to develop ethical Sámi tourism.

Also, Donohoe's (2011) definition of culturally sensitive ecotourism draws attention to recognition and respect of multiple realities and value systems. When it comes to respect, essential questions include who ought to act respectfully, and towards whom or what? For instance, the traditional Sámi costume, the *gákti*, can be seen as a boundary object entangled in networks of history, traditions, affect and respect (Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019; Olsen et al., 2019). Kramvig and Flemmen (2019) use the example of a Norwegian grocery retailer, assisted by a local tourism and event agency, who dressed up its employees in fake Sámi costumes during a national company gathering in Tromsø in 2013. When the event raised tensions in the media, as many were obviously insulted, others claimed it should be tolerated, and some even saw it as an act of cultural bonding. As Kramvig and Førde (2020) note, tourism in northern Norway occurs within a landscape inscribed by Sámi ontologies in the form of sacred stones, mountains and places. Kramvig and Førde (2020) suggest that tours in these landscapes, accompanied with cultural narratives, are an invitation to act more respectfully towards each other and the planet.

Increasingly, Indigenous cultures of the north are culturally respected, or at least, there is a growing awareness concerning the aforementioned issues (Olsen et al., 2019). This can be seen, among other things, in new forms of cooperation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism companies that value mutual respect (de Bernardi, 2020). The aforementioned Larrakia Declaration (2012) also draws attention to the role of equitable partnerships between the tourism industry and Indigenous people, including mutual sharing of cultural awareness and skills. Hence, the third notion in our toolbox for culturally sensitive tourism is reciprocity, which calls attention to interpersonal relations between the self and the Other and helps us to reflect on our responsibilities and openness towards the other.

While the idea of reciprocity can be understood as the mutual exchange of gifts, we approach it here as a more fundamental care relationship, where both hosts and guests care for each other's wellbeing (Höckert, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2007; Levinas, 1969). In the words of Sabourin (2013), "reciprocity implies a concern for the others and creates a relationship which produces affective or ethical values, like friendship, trust and mutual understanding" (p. 306). This is the way reciprocity has been approached also in tourism literatures that explore the possibilities of co-producing new tourism knowledges and practices (Buzinde, Manuel-Navarrete & Swanson, 2020; Ren et al., 2018).

Within hospitality studies, reciprocity has a prominent position (Germann Molz & Gibson, 2007; Lynch, Germann Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011). In ancient stories, for instance in Celtic cultures, long before the Romans, hospitality was described as a virtue of opening one's home to a traveller who arrives at the door (Korstanje, 2011; O'Gorman, 2010). Hence, the idea of hospitality includes the call for openness towards strangers and the responsibility to offer them what they need. In Levinasian thinking (1969; Derrida, 1999), we are constantly both hosts and guests in relations with others. This means that hospitality is not seen merely as the duty of a host, but as a mutual demand in responsible encounters. Jokinen and Veijola (2012) use the notion of post-host-guest society, suggesting that tourists and their hosts and hostesses should be seen simultaneously as subjects and objects of care. Hence, the notion of reciprocity can be used to reflect how the roles and responsibilities of the self and the other change in a dynamic continuum, and can help us to understand for instance those situations where the guests overstay their welcome. Interestingly, as Derrida (1999) points out, there is also "a semantic, if not etymological, kinship between *host* and *hostage*" (p. 57). This dualism in hospitality is a prominent characteristic of modern tourism: on the one side, tourists should be treated as guests, friends and family; on the other side, profit-seeking tourism encounters can be experienced as hostile, with only minimal responsibilities towards one another (Lynch, 2011).

Reciprocity is commonly seen as central to Indigenous thought (Kuokkanen, 2007). In her discussions on reciprocity, Kuokkanen (2017) calls attention to the act of receiving – learning to receive – rather than taking things arrogantly for granted. More specifically, she writes that an indispensable part of receiving is the ability and willingness to be open to Indigenous epistemologies that continue to shape people's behaviour, thinking and practices today. Kugapi (2014) discusses and envisions these kind of tourism encounters in her research on handicraft tourism in Sápmi. Similarly, Kramvig and Førde (2020) have explored how storytelling within Indigenous tourism settings can create connections between storytellers and travellers and "offer moments of hope" for epistemic decolonialization and reconciliation. In the Sámi culture, general reciprocity is central to an old tradition called *verdde* (Lämsman, 2004; Svensson & Viken, 2017), which can be translated as "beneficial friend", a person that you know, trust and who occasionally gives you a hand. Until a couple of decades ago, during the autumn and spring migrations of reindeer between the coast and inland, people needed help to cross a fjord or a strait, boats and people to look after the animals swimming over. These people often became friends and helpers of the Sámi reindeer herders. In their research on modern *verdde* relations in Northern Norway, Svensson and Viken (2017) discuss how the *verdde* has been challenged with tourism activities and public policies concerning land use, but is simultaneously finding its form and position within modern context. *Verdde* can hence be seen as a dynamic cultural institution – as the Sámi culture and society in general – that continues to form the hospitality thinking in Sámi communities (Svensson & Viken, 2017). While mutual trust and respect are prominent aspects of this tradition, it can be seen as a platform or arena where relationships are thought in reciprocal ways.

Previous research has underlined the importance of reciprocity not only in tourist and tourism entrepreneur relations, but also in development projects among different kinds of tourism experts (Buzinde, Manuel-Navarrete, & Swanson, 2020; Höckert, Kugapi, & Lüthje, 2021; Ren et al., 2018; Schuler et al., 1999). In a Canadian Arctic context, Holmes et al. (2016) provide an illustration of collaborative research designed to support Indigenous governance and management of tourism. Academic and community researchers from the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation used participatory, narrative research to create an Indigenous visitor code of conduct, a set of morally and culturally informed guidelines that communicate Lutsel K'e expectations for responsible visitation to their ancestral lands. The research approach adopted by Holmes et al. (2016) exemplifies how collaborative research can amplify Indigenous voices and interests and support models of Indigenous led tourism practice. The research was thus based on reciprocal benefits for community and academic researchers.

It deserves to be mentioned that while the notion of reciprocity calls for generous openness between self and other, it should not be interpreted as a demand for a completely symmetrical relationship (Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018). That is, while the self has the responsibility to welcome, be open and care for the other, one cannot expect a symmetrical response from the other. Instead, we suggest that culturally sensitive tourism processes occur and thrive in encounters that enable reciprocal exchange between hosts and guests through sharing and receiving, (un)learning and teaching.

Conclusion

This article has explored and illuminated multiple meanings and promises of cultural sensitivity in tourism contexts. Our goal here has been to propose a conceptual approach which can inspire further definitional clarity, debate and application. As Laxson (1991) has suggested in research on tourists' perceptions of Native Americans, brief tourism encounters can actually strengthen stereotypical images of the other, reinforce ethnocentrism, and convince tourists of the correctness of their own worldviews rather than contribute to mutual understanding. In a similar vein, the stereotypical image of the tourist and our ways of visiting places and cultures does not typically include adjectives that describe us as sensitive—that is, as an actor who is thoughtful, subtle, delicate, compassionate, sympathetic or understanding. Hence, while tourism enables face-to-face encounters between otherwise distant others, it comes with an ethical challenge of enhancing one's sensitivity to otherness (Caton, 2012). We argue that sensitivity consists of acknowledging the sins of the past and their remnants in our social structures, worldviews and languages while recognizing and respecting others as equals.

Drawing inspiration from Bennett's (1986) taxonomy of intercultural sensitivity, we discussed the possibilities of disrupting tourism development that appropriates other cultures, presents and preserves stereotypes, and fuels processes of assimilation. Shifting from Bennett's linear, developmental model, we have aimed to visualize how and why ethnocentric, insensitive ways of relating to others are reoccurring and taking new forms in Arctic tourism. In order to break the violent cycle of ethnocentric ways of being and knowing, we have discussed the relational notions of recognition, respect and reciprocity, each of which invites curiosity and care for difference. In doing this, we join the search for new approaches and conceptual tools that can be used to decolonize tourism relations and enhance openness to difference (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Ren et al., 2020).

Researchers could potentially have a central role in fostering cultural sensitivity, instead of speaking for or about others as research objects (Schuler, Aberdeen, & Dyer, 1999; Smith, 2012). While saying this, we recognize that this paper is the outcome of our partial perspectives and positionalities, and that the call for cultural sensitivity does not come without risks. Postcolonial critiques underline that the wish to recognize and listen to the Other can appear as romanticization, paternalism, and other forms of 'othering' and silencing (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Higgins-Desbiolles & Whyte, 2013; Tucker, 2016). As alluded to in our introduction, by taking up cultural sensitivity we run the risk of furthering such epistemic violences. The fear of committing epistemic violence can almost paralyze us, making it difficult to react. Although we cannot separate ourselves from our own cultural backgrounds, values and beliefs, as Jamal (2019) points out, our research suggests that we can enhance culturally sensitive processes through acknowledging and questioning ethnocentric perspectives. This kind of reflexivity is needed in order to gather around common matters of concern (Ren et al., 2018). Moreover, heightened attention to recognition, respect and reciprocity can help us to see when there is a need not to participate and cooperate, but rather to give more space to the other and to cultural diversity in general. By suggesting a conceptual understanding of cultural sensitivity, this paper opens up new ways of addressing timely issues such as last-chance tourism and climate change, post-pandemic tourism, and broader issues of health.

Our conceptualization of cultural sensitivity can help gain an understanding of our social imaginings, and the variety of ways we relate to cultural differences and engage in tourism processes. By doing this, we envision a world of tourism that is not only about trade and profit, but also about acknowledging difference as part of history and culture, and as significant to the reality of contemporary societal institutions and politics. Instead of aiming to say the last word about cultural sensitivity in tourism, we have wished to draft an invitation that keeps the door open for further discussion and critical reflection: how can the tourism industry and academia work on this relationship, and decipher, support and enhance the conditions for reciprocal recognition and respect?

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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