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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Tourism appropriation of Sámi land and culture

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### ABSTRACT


This article addresses cultural and other forms of appropriation related to tourism in the Sámi areas of Norway (Sápmi). Tourists are chasing and consuming otherness – places, culture and nature different from their home environments. Thus, exposures of arts, culture, nature and places are vital parts of tourism production. Within this context, indigenous cultures are praised. When the use of land and culture is conducted by those from outside the culture, appropriation take place, and it is shown how this occurs in different ways within Sámi tourism. The article is based on a Nordic research project, where the relations between tourism and Sámi culture were addressed. Tourism providers were interviewed. Through these conversations, cultural appropriation came up as one of the challenging issues. Some of the topics and examples given are referred to in the empirical part of the article. The interview data are supplemented by observations and media clips from recent years. In the discussion part, ambiguities, ambivalences, and complexities related to the tourism–culture nexus are discussed. The article is a contribution to this discourse, addressing issues to be aware of, both in the production and the analysis of indigenous tourism.

### KEYWORDS

Sámi; tourism; Arctic; cultural appropriation; Norway

## Introduction

Tourism is often blamed for being culturally insensitive and ignorant. In the 1960s, Boorstin (1964) claimed that tourists are more engaged in their inner travel than in the cultures and communities they visit. Since then, debates related to tourism impacts, mass tourism and more recently, over-tourism, have been raised, and tourism is accused of perverting local cultures and transforming them into spectacles for travellers (Crick 1989). In this context, cultural appropriation is a topic. Cultural appropriation is to take something cultural, making some sort of performance or business thereof in another context (Young 2005). Young does not see appropriation as automatically wrong (Young and Haley 2009; Young 2021). Rather, it is wrong when it is tied to oppression and unequal power relations (Matthes 2019; Young 2021). According to Arya (2021, 1) the topic has increasingly been focused on, as it is “... powerfully present within public awareness usually because of... commercial use of marginalised and/or indigenous cultures...”. Young (2021, 307) holds it started with discussions related to art, but “[n]ow

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appropriations of clothing styles, hairstyles, dance moves and a variety of other cultural products are sources of controversy". One of them is tourism. In Norway, this has particularly been addressed in public debates related to tourism and Sámi culture.

In 2018, the Norwegian Minister of Finance showed up at a party dressed as Pocahontas, a character from American colonial history and a figure in a Disney film. In the public debate that followed, the appearance was denounced as cultural appropriation and condemned by many, among them the Norwegian Sámi president at that time, Aili Keskitalo, who called it detestable. However, the public debate soon changed, and many, among them a local newspaper in Tromsø, claimed that such reactions were too touchy or tetchy (Nordlys 2020), something the paper later regretted. Since the 1990s there has been a series of incidents where the issue of cultural appropriation has been raised, related to Sámi tourism. One episode was when a theme park in Kárášjohka was labelled *Sápmi*, the name of the Sámi nation. Many interpreted this as offensive. Other examples include a hotel chain in Finnmark (the northernmost region of Norway) that, in the 1990s, used the Sámi sun sign in their logo, and more recently, a silversmith who tried to patent the sun sign as their brand symbol, giving the company an exclusive right to the sign. This was dismissed by the courts (Utsi 2019). In 2020, the Municipal Assembly of Tromsø turned down a ski area project in the middle of a Sámi heritage area (Brattland and Viken 2020). These incidents, together with many others, show that cultural appropriation of Sámi land and culture is a recurrent issue, both as a general topic and as an issue in tourism. It could also be argued that the topic should be addressed both within the tourism sector, public debate and academically – it is about paying respect to culture and cultural differences.

Due to a history of oppression and racism, the Sámi community has developed a vigilance towards all sorts of use and misuse of their culture. Registering this attentiveness, a group of international researchers raised this as an issue, asking whether and how more sensitive tourism could be developed. A project called ARCTISEN was started, financed by the EU's Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (Olsen et al. 2019). As part of this, the term "sensitive tourism" was discussed by Viken, Höckert, and Grimwood (2021). They noted awareness of the legacies of the past, such as stereotyping and cultural appropriation, and recognition, respect and reciprocity, as central to culturally sensitive tourism. This article does not discuss this term but demonstrates some of the reasons why such attentiveness is required.

Cultural appropriation can be approached in different ways. The focus can be on the very act of appropriation, what it means, types and degrees. Matthes (2019) describes cultural appropriation in this way:

It might plausibly be thought to include occurrences as varied as (1) the representation of cultural practices or experiences by cultural "outsiders" (sometimes called "voice appropriation"); (2) the use of artistic styles distinctive of cultural groups by nonmembers; and (3) the procurement or continued possession of cultural objects by nonmembers or culturally distant institutions. (Matthes 2019, 343)

Converted to Sámi tourism, this would include outsiders performing the traditional song genre, *yoik*, outsiders reproducing items from Sámi daily life or handicrafts – this covers much of the souvenir trade – while possessions by non-members of the cultural group is mostly related to state-based annexation of Sámi land.<sup>1</sup> The last two aspects are also

major elements of this article: the appropriation of land and space and cultural appropriation, in Troms and Finnmark, the northernmost areas of Norway.

Tourism in the area of concern is significant. The summer tourism has long traditions. North Cape is the major destination, with about 270,000 visitors per year in the period before 2019. Winter tourism is relatively new, mostly related to the northern lights. It has increased significantly in recent years, and an industry serving this market has emerged. The traveling pattern is different for the two seasons. Tromsø is the hub of the northern winter tourism, with 1.2 million overnight stays in 2017, a value-adding estimated to 2.3 billion NOK, and 2600 people employed in the sector (Jakobsen et al. 2018). The surrounding districts and the Sámi core areas also take part in these tourism activities, and Sámi culture and activities constitute a significant part of the winter experience production. For instance, the tour operators in Tromsø often combine the hunt for the northern lights with visits to Sámi camps and experience providers. Thus, during recent years, Sámi experiences and experience production have attained a more prominent place in the region's tourism, either as a major point of interest or as a backdrop for the touring in the area.

The next two sections briefly present the colonization and assimilation processes in Sápmi, and appropriation as a theoretical field. Thereafter, some methodological implications of researching this issue are raised. This is followed by a section demonstrating tourism appropriation of Sámi land and space, and of culture, including souvenirization of Sámi culture. In the discussion part, the findings are analyzed in light of contemporary cultural complexity and moral challenges.

## Assimilation and colonial processes in Sápmi

The Sámi in Norway are formally recognized as an indigenous group according to the ILO Convention 169, a UN treaty concerning indigenous groups, that the governments of Norway and 23 other countries have signed. As such, the Sámi are protected by this and a series of laws and treaties. The Sámi are also part of the Norwegian welfare system. For centuries, Sámi and Norwegians lived side by side more or less all-over northern Norway (Andresen, Evjen, and Ryymin 2021). However, the authorities were Norwegian, and at a certain point, it became state policy to erase the Sámi culture. Today, the authorities have asked for forgiveness for the humiliating policies of the past, and in most respects, the Sámi have equality with Norwegians. However, the history of suppression and patronizing of the Sámi is not forgotten, and the authorities are often mistrusted. Additionally, practices similar to colonization still take place, as also observed for other indigenous groups in the Arctic (Grimwood, Muldoon, and Stevens 2019). Among these processes are the appropriation of land and culture.

Assimilation is the “single most important threat to minority cultures”, according to Young and Haley (2009, 279). Lehtola (2015, 5) described the assimilation of the Sámi in the Nordic countries as a process related to competition between the national states, and as land acquisition, nation-building, governing, religious practices and mission work. At a certain point, the Sámi areas became parts of the national states of Denmark/Norway, Sweden (including Finland until 1808) and Russia, and their legal and taxation systems. This can also be seen as a process in which the Sámi society became colonized (see Hansen and Olsen 2004, 2014). The period from 1850 to 1970

was dominated by hierarchical ideologies and worldviews inspired by Darwinism and racist philosophy. In Norway, from the mid-1800s on, assimilation was “a pronounced government strategy” (Spangen, Salmi, and Äikäs 2015, 7). Minde (2003) identified five phases in the Norwegianization of the Sámi. The first was when these ideas were established (1850–1870), followed by a consolidation phase (until 1905) and a culmination phase (until 1950). During the last period of assimilation (1950–1980), a growing awareness emerged – both among the authorities and in the public – of the Sámi still being a vital culture and language, at least in the core Sámi areas.<sup>2</sup> In the last phase that Minde (2003) identified, the period after 1980, the national policies changed and focused on recovering the Sámi culture and language, and on the building of Sámi institutions.<sup>3</sup>

However, this does not mean that all sorts of assimilation have ended. Even today, Sámi interests are set aside or marginalized in many national policy fields (Angell, Eike-land, and Selle 2016), including tourism (Viken 2016). In a chapter in an international report on indigenous youth, a young Norwegian Sámi witnessed how he experienced assimilation policies during his own adolescence as part of Norwegian school practices, in the way Sámi interests were set aside in modernization projects, and also from encounters in which prejudices were demonstrated, towards him as an indigenous person (Lifjell 2019). This is a testimony of contemporary assimilation or colonization. In Australia and Canada there is a parallel called settler colonialism. This is, according to Grimwood, Muldoon, and Stevens (2019, 234), quoting Wolfe (2006, 388), “a particular form of colonial domination whereby invasion transpires as ‘... a structure not an event’”, and “... an ongoing form of occupation exerted through the enduring social, political, and economic structures built by the invading society”. The colonialization of the Sámi in Norway dates back to the Mediaeval period, having the character of both economic and political appropriation of Sámi land (Sandvik 1980; Hansen and Olsen 2004, 2014). Since the eighteenth century, the colonial domination of Sápmi mostly has been tied to the expansion of the nation-state and modernity (Andresen, Evjen, and Ryymin 2021).

Within this colonial frame, tourism visitors were disciplined to perceive and experience indigeneity in ways that “obscure and deem out-of-place contemporary indigenous practices, meanings, and mobilities within a landscape (...)”, and that “translates into tourism representations that stereotype particular characteristics of Indigenous cultures and communities with images catering to ‘exotic’ and ‘primitive’ ‘otherness’” (Grimwood, Muldoon, and Stevens 2019, 235). Thus, tourism is one of the areas where processes similar to colonization still take place.

## **Tourism as appropriation**

Tourists consume the nature, culture, land and societies of others. Thus, aspects that underline the apparent uniqueness of a destination are normally highlighted. In this, the indigenous groups often are central. Their distinct lands, traditions, industries and performing arts are transformed within tourism into something tradeable. Basically, there are two major discussions concerning tourism as an area of appropriation. The first is the appropriation of land and the second is cultural appropriation. Both processes are related to commercialization, commodification and objectification, vital to most tourism and reflecting the neoliberal economy. The traces of these processes in Sápmi will be discussed here.

As an activity premised upon consumption of places, tourism demands space. Tourism facilities, tourism activity areas, tourist resorts and destinations are spatial expressions of the phenomenon. Land is frequently sold to serve tourism purposes – for the construction of hotels, to develop tourist resorts or as areas for second homes. Another tourism-related process, implemented by the authorities, is to proclaim land as protected areas. Such decisions are often examples of a process called *commoning*. Commoning is to transform an area that has been closed or reserved for a particular activity, or been undefined, to something dedicated for everybody (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017). The state annexation of the reindeer pastures that were never subject to ownership, is an example. In the 1700s, the state formally transferred land to people settling as farmers, and the rest was seen as unmatriculated (not formally registered) state property (Tønnesson 1972; Sandvik 1980). In this process, the rights of the traditional users were weakened, and the land changed its character from being almost purely a grazing land to becoming a common ground for all sorts of activities, and in particular tourism. This was also facilitated by a principle of freedom to roam, manifested in a law (*Friluftslova* from 1957) providing everybody with access to uncultivated or unsettled land, including grasslands. This principle is emphasized by *Innovation Norway*, an organization marketing Norway abroad, on their web page announcing that “In Norway everyone has the unrestricted right of free access in the countryside ...”. An even bigger challenge for the Sámi society is that this is a general pattern; all sorts of industrial development and urbanization require land and are processes that also take place in peripheral areas, such as Sápmi. Among academics, these processes are known as land acquisition, land-grabbing or land appropriation and are often referred to as silent, hidden and slow processes (Zoomers 2010; Nef 2021).

Land-grabbing is mostly discussed as foreignization, which relates to the transfer of land ownership and control from local communities to foreign investors (Holmes 2014, 549). One topic is how this tends to be a process in which poor people are made even poorer, as they lose control over their lands. There is also a part called green grabbing, defined as the “appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends” (Fairhead, Leach, and Scooners 2012, 238; see Gardner 2012, 378). Zoomers (2010) made a list of seven processes of land-grabbing, out of which three are related to tourism: settling related to retirement and residential migration; developing large-scale tourism complexes; and establishing protected areas, which are most often in the charge of authorities but are increasingly also being carried out by private investors and NGOs. Zoomers (2010) gave an example from Patagonia in southern Argentina, which President Carlos Menem noted was “the land that was left over”, where he invited international capital to invest (Zoomers 2010, 436–437). There are three parallels to this in the Sámi areas in Norway. The first is the development of second home areas and resorts in reindeer grazing districts. The second is the invasion of recreational tourists, also in grazing areas. The third is the protection of nature areas, which tends to be an invitation to visit the area. There is evidence from Sápmi indicating that this also changes the ideas about these areas (Skavhaug 2020). In these ways, tourism tends to add to the other land-grabbing processes that threaten the Sámi culture. Appropriation of land is also a weakening of the culture, according to many, and this has recently been addressed by the Sámi Parliament related to windmill projects (Wormdal 2021).

Since tourism implies trading between cultures, the outside world has a role in defining and valuing the insider arts, handicrafts, and other cultural expressions and performances.

The customers, but often also the traders, tend to be outsiders. The process through which outsiders present or trade cultural expressions, activities and items to which they are outsiders, is the essence of cultural appropriation (Ziff and Rao 1997). However, the exposition of Sámi culture and people, for enlightening and entertaining people living in the European south, has a long tradition, and is well documented (Mathisen 2004; Baglo 2017). It is also known in literature and arts – Sámi being characterized or portrayed in ways that reflect prejudices and stereotyped perceptions (Vuolab 2016). Such processes are also described by Young (2005) in Canada, Faye (2001) in Greenland and Lindholm (2014) in Finland. The tourism industry in Rovaniemi and the promoters of the Ski World Cup in Levi, Finland, have been criticized for letting non-Sámi employees appear in Sámi garments (Lindholm 2014). This echoes a debate from the 1990s in Norway: can non-Sámi perform in Sámi costumes in marketing campaigns? Who should be allowed to wear the Sámi costume is a sensitive question (Kramvig and Flemmen 2019a). Most people seem to think that it should be a privilege for the Sámi. Other use tends to be offensive.

Young and Haley (2009) argued that not all cultural appropriation is negative. Outsider exposure may help create a market, making an aspect of a culture visible, saleable and profitable, they claimed. The fact that foreign people want to have such objects, and in fact are attracted by the Sámi culture, is perceived by many as flattering (Viken 2006). The *lavvu*, the Sámi tent, is used all over Scandinavia in a modernized light material version, which is also suitable for reindeer herders. The Sámi knife is reckoned as an excellent tool and is used and sold all over Norway. The *yoik*, the typical Sámi song tradition, has been adopted into modern music. All this seems to be politically and publicly accepted, also by the Sámi. However, in these processes, the uniqueness of the culture tends to be weakened. This is one of the ways cultures develop, influencing and “borrowing” from each other. However, when indigenous groups are involved, there tends to be a power imbalance (Matthes 2019).

## Methodological implications

The basis for this article is in-depth interviews, individual or groupwise, with people that reckoned themselves as Sámi and who were involved in tourism, together with observations of the tourism landscape and public discourse in Northern Norway. The interviewing and major observations took place during the winter of 2019, conducted by the Norwegian research group within the ARCTISEN project. A total of 19 interviews with 26 people were conducted in March–April 2019, in three geographical areas: The urban Tromsø area, the district of Northern Troms, and Kárášjohka, the centre for the Sámi Parliament and its administration in Norway. The interviewees represented 18 small and medium-sized tourism enterprises and five other tourism-related organizations, representing public authorities, cultural organizations, NGOs and research institutes. Two of the interviews were with two participants, two with three and one with four. In Tromsø and Kárášjohka all but three interviews were with reindeer experience providers, while in Northern Troms, the interviewees provided coastal Sámi or local culture experiences.

The topic for the interviews was sensitive tourism, which at the time was not a particularly concise concept, either for the researchers or the informants. Most times we started by asking what the informants associated with “sensitivity”, addressing the fuzziness of



the term. This introduction worked well and elicited several good discussions and data. Not surprisingly, the history of colonization and suppression of the Sámi came up in different ways. As it was a period when appropriation was addressed publicly and in the media, most informants touched on this issue when we introduced sensitivity as a topic. However, as a sensitive topic, the material is used in ways that preserve anonymity.

Among the informants, some had been or were emotionally affected by the near history of suppression, with troublesome personal and cultural identity negotiations. Thus, we realized that interviews concerning cultural sensitivity were a sensitive matter. Sensitivity as a matter of reciprocal recognition and respect (Viken, Höckert, and Greenwood 2021) is also central to indigenous research methodologies (Wilson 2008; Smith 2012). With a few exceptions, the methodology of the ARCTISEN project was built on already established relations between researchers, tourism entrepreneurs and Sámi communities. In varying ways, through upraising, education, long-time residence and research in the area, we, as researchers, have learned to see our informants as research participants – vital to the constitution of knowledge production in the research (Brattland, Kramvig, and Verran 2018). However, a couple of times we were openly met with scepticism. One of the informants obviously felt insecure about the value of our project and our agenda as researchers. This informant was afraid that we would write in ways that could give competitors knowledge about business secrets. Another informant preferred that the interview was not recorded, claiming that what is said in a conversation tends to change in meaning when it is written out. These people obviously had experiences that made them worry about how the data would be used. Thus, in our reporting from the fieldwork, we have anonymized the participants, also avoiding quoting and other ways through which they could be identified.

One of the observations we made in the conversations with the informants is that they tend to refer to theories and scholars who have written about Sámi issues. Some had acquired this knowledge through their studies, and others by being part of an ethnopolitical public discourse. Additionally, in two of the regions we visited, these debates were present most of the time. Thus, the informants were aware of the research and the academic discourses. Some will say these discourses do not represent ordinary people, whereas others will claim that these contemporary people *are* the ordinary. For us doing social research, it is an advantage, as the discourses into which we invite people are not unknown. However, methodologically this can be seen as a postcolonial trait.

## Tourism appropriation of Sámi society

### *Appropriation of land and space*

The *Lappekodusilen* of 1751 was an agreement between Denmark/Norway and Sweden (including Finland) in which the national borders were decided upon, including to which countries the Sámi areas belong. This divided the Sámi area among four countries, although also giving room for cross-border migration for the reindeer herders. The treaty remains valid but contested, as there are voices claiming that the land should belong to the Sámi, the local communities, or the reindeer herders. A sign of the uncertainty regarding state rights is that the national authorities in the early 2000s transferred the management of state land in Finnmark to a local organization called *Finnmarkseiendommen* – The



Finnmark Real Estate (*Fefo*). In 2019, the so-called Finnmark Commission (*Finnmarkskommisjonen*), a commission that examines property rights related to long-term use, suggested that ownership of the land in Kárášjohka should be transferred to the local community. There obviously is doubt about the legal platform of the state property in Sápmi.

To the authorities, their role as lawmakers is central. A common critique concerning the laws is that they are not as suitable for the periphery as for the centre. Often general rules, for instance concerning fishing, hunting, transport, industrial area use and protected areas, are blamed for displacing reindeer herding or hindering Sámi industrial development, including tourism. For instance, there is a law forbidding use of motorized vehicles in the outfields. As a consequence, it is difficult to establish a mountain camp for tourism in a reindeer herding area. The rules are seen by some – among those a political party called the *North Calotte People* – as a barrier to modernizing traditional Sámi industries like inland fisheries, berry picking and other gathering activities, more or less as if the fishermen should be denied the use of motorized boats. The reindeer herding act allows reindeer herders to go by motorized vehicles where and when they need to, but only for herding purposes. The definition of herding does not include tourism; it is limited to meat production. Thus, to follow a herd on its spring migration – reckoned to be the ultimate Sámi tourism product – is almost impossible. Whereas farmers are stimulated to engage in tourism, the rules hinder reindeer-based tourism, one informant claimed. A widespread view is that state appropriation is narrowing down what the reindeer herders can do for a living and hindering poly-industrial practices that have been part of Sámi livelihood (see Nygaard and Kårtveit 2019).

Land is appropriated within tourism in several ways. One way is the emergence of areas for cabins or second homes. This is a field regulated by the municipalities according to the Planning and Construction Act. In Troms and Finnmark, such development has negative consequences for reindeer herding (Riseth and Johansen 2018). In the municipality of Målselv, a two-hour drive from Tromsø, a ski and cabin resort was established in the late 2000s (Viken 2014). One of the major issues was how to deal with the reindeer herders and sheep farmers. After long and complicated negotiations, the herders and farmers received a sum of money, and the reindeer herders also got exclusive rights to conduct reindeer-based tourism activities within the resort area. In conversations afterwards, a reindeer herder admitted that his herding had been disturbed, but also that these problems were small compared to the challenges he had in coping with the military forces that have a shooting training area on his grazing land (Nyseth and Viken 2020). During our fieldwork, the threat of expanding modern society was touched upon several times. Many also seem to be worried concerning the expanding tourism. “These areas are the natural habitat of the reindeer, not of tourists”, one of the informants maintained.

Our data include a few incidents of land-use controversies. One case concerned a tourist provider and reindeer herder who bought a farm that earlier had been used for keeping cattle, where they were now offering Sámi experiences on the grounds of the farm. The farm was located within a different reindeer grazing district than that of the tourism provider, thus the reindeer district board complained about this intrusion. This primarily shows the tension within the reindeer herding communities but probably also reflects their concern about the reduction of grazing land. We were also told

about an incident a few years back when a dogsled guide with a small group of tourists encountered some grazing reindeer. The reindeer herder became aware of the situation and drove up to the guide and asked him to turn around. He made it clear that if not, he would call the police. The guide called his company manager who contacted the reindeer herder. These people knew each other. After a conversation, the reindeer herder instructed the guide that if he went around the lake in front, there was a track to follow that would not disturb the reindeer. He did so, and the case was resolved. This illustrates that if the two industries are to take place side by side, there is a need for reciprocal information and communication. There have also been similar tensions within protected areas, as in Rohkunborri National Park. There, the park board decided to ban dog sledding for certain periods of the year. In Finland, the relation between reindeer herding and dog-sledding is even more troublesome (Kugapi et al. 2020). One of the issues there is a growing trend of pop-up companies from the rest of the country coming to Lapland to do business in the high season. Their lack of local knowledge is said to be a problem.

Tourism appropriation of Sámi land is, in general, modest. However, it always adds to the reduction of grazing land and the marginalization of Sámi interests. This is documented in a report from 2018 (Riseth and Johansen 2018). The report does not give a quantitative measure but shows the ways it happens, all more or less reducing the pastures. The reasons are development of infrastructure, such as roads, mines, hydropower plants, windmills, the establishment of second home areas, outdoor recreation and tourism activities. Indirectly, this is also cultural appropriation; when the grazing lands are reduced there will be fewer reindeer, more reindeer herders give up, and the existence and impression of a reindeer herding area is weakened, adding to the vanishing of Sámi culture and society.

Last, but extremely important, is the appropriation of space. This is about how places change character from sites for local activities to sites for tourists and tourism activities. It happens when places are invaded by tourists. The “normal” procedure is that first the tourists come, then the tourism businesses, and gradually the landscape changes, having all the signs and symbols of tourism: tour operators and agencies, hotels, Airbnbs, cruise ships, souvenir shops and tourists. The process can be seen as a conquest of space, as *space grabbing*, and is about appropriating land, culture and atmosphere. It is discussed for towns like Rovaniemi, Reykjavik and Tromsø, where the town centres in the period before Covid-19 attained a greater touristy flavour. In the main street of Tromsø, most of the shops supporting local people’s everyday lives were replaced with souvenir shops all selling Sámi-inspired items, and tour operators offering tours to Sámi camps. The signs of touristification of the town are massive. This is in no way a Sámi takeover, however, as only one of the centres’ souvenir shops and one of the restaurants are run by people profiling themselves as Sámi.

### **Cultural appropriation**

Cultural appropriation within tourism occurs in different ways. The most discussed tourist appropriation relates to performative arts such as storytelling and *yoik* (traditional song), folklore, and the production and trading of handicrafts and souvenirs. The project ARCTISEN did not cover performative arts, so the focus here is on souvenirs. The souvenir trade is an important part of tourism. Souvenirs are objects that visitors bring back home as

reminders or markers of a place or culture visited. Souvenirs cover a broad spectrum of objects, there is “... a continuum from mass-produced souvenir products, at one end, to genuine handmade, local products, on the other” (Schilar and Keskitalo 2018a, 91). An encompassing literature discusses the functions and meanings of souvenirs, also in relation to the Sámi culture (Kelly-Holmes and Pitkäinen 2014; Heller, Pitkäinen, and da Silva 2017; Schilar and Keskitalo 2018a, 2018b; Mathisen 2020; Keskitalo et al. 2021). This literature shows that the relations between cultures as such and the objects sold to tourists are complex, including a dilemma addressed by Schilar and Keskitalo (2018b, 30): “on the one hand, local people might want to emphasize their own ethnic difference, often through their traditionality; on the other, it seems their ethnic culture is being colonized, frozen in time or vulgarized”. This is not a new observation, as Olsen (2019, 35) has argued, the “ideas of differences ... is a result of the colonial encounter between European colonizers and those multitudes of populations from the sixteenth century that should be colonized”. According to Olsen (2019, 35–36), the conception of these peoples as uncivilized Barbarians legitimated oppression, but also nourished the idea of the “Noble Savage”. The discussion of cultural appropriation related to souvenirs reflects this divide: Souvenirs from an indigenous culture serve tourism’s urge for difference and maybe a profitable business, but may manifest ideas similar to those about the exotic and different “Noble Savage”. Thus, the Sámi souvenir trade may reflect uneven power relations between the tourism industry and Sámi souvenir providers.

Copying elements from a culture into cheap souvenirs may not harm anybody, one may think, and most of our informants were rather pragmatic concerning this matter. However, several of our informants had examples illustrating violations of some sort of cultural boundary; almost all examples related to handicrafts. Normally, handcrafted items are filled with meanings, emotions and relational elements (Kugapi and Höckert 2019). As souvenirs they tend to be reduced to simple items and symbols, where the decorative function is more important than the local functions and meanings. The cultural appropriation aspect of trading of cultural items as souvenirs is that the interpretation and control of the items are transferred to people who are external to the culture. This happens even before the purchase. At the time we did our research in Tromsø (2019), only one of the many souvenir shops selling “Sámi” souvenirs were run by a person who reckoned themselves as a Sámi. In the public debate that took place at that time, a major focus was on a shop selling a Sámi hat. The role of all the other shops basically faking and appropriating Sáminess was not equally addressed. However, it is the souvenir shops collectively, together with the tour operators, that create the image of Tromsø as a touristic town.

In our conversations with Sámi tourism providers, cultural appropriation was a recurrent theme, in particular related to the *gáhkti* (costume) and the *stjernelua* (“star hat”, or “four winds hat”), but also related to the production and sale of handicrafts and Sámi inspired souvenirs in general.<sup>4</sup> The costume is much used by tourism providers in their encounters with tourists. This use is in itself a sensitive matter, but commonly accepted as long as those wearing the costumes are Sámi. To most people this makes a difference. The president of the Sámi Parliament in the 1990s once made a comment on the subject, claiming that the costume was an extended part of his body and soul, and that he was hurt when someone from the society that had suppressed the Sámi for generations used the costume in their business and profit-making (Viken 2006).

Local people can read much from the way the costume is sewn, its ornaments, and the way it is worn. There are also significant differences between costumes, for instance being different in Kárášjohka and Guovdageainnu. At the hotel in Kárášjohka, for decades owned by national hotel chains, a few costumes had been put on the wall in the restaurant as decoration. This provoked most of the locals; to them a costume represents a living culture. And just as provocatively, one of the displayed costumes was from the neighbouring municipality, Guovdageainnu. Despite this exposure's provocative role, those in charge of the hotel spent about 20 years ignoring the criticism and the aggravation stemming from it. When a new managing director started at the hotel in 2018, they became aware of the discontent and removed the costumes. This is an example of sensitivity towards appropriation, but also of market adaptation – why should the hotel offend its local customers, the new hotel manager said.

The Sámi hat has turned out to be a commercial success (Niskala and Ridanpää 2016). One of the most sold in Tromsø is made with added decorations. A trained Sámi eye will think of it as fake. Many Sámi feel that its sale to and wearing by tourists is offensive. In addition to being filled with meaning and local knowledge, handicrafts often reflect relations, emotions, and other things that are not for sale, as beautifully described by Kugapi and Höckert (2019). Among our informants, there was an owner of a Sámi souvenir shop that sells this hat. The owner had felt the dilemma and had what Schilar and Keskitalo (2018a, 92) refer to as “ongoing dialogue with oneself”. They had chosen to sell it, as it is a profitable item. They know the producer, located in northern Finland. The producer has been in the hat production business for decades and knows Sámi culture. But still, this is another example of the market trumping authenticity, as often is the way cultural appropriation appears. One may also ask whether it is appropriation when the buyer back home employs a Sámi item – a knife, a star hat, a *guksi* (wooden cup), or a pair of *skaller* (reindeer-fur shoes) – as home decoration? Currently (2021) there are many examples of museums bringing back cultural items that had been appropriated during a colonial period, but this relates to colonialism as a system and state affair. To blame a tourist buying a handcrafted souvenir is something else. The souvenir trade is per definition business related to cultural differences.

Besides the costume and the hat, the touristic use of the *govadas* – the Sámi shaman drum – is disputed. When a theme park was established outside the hotel in Kárášjohka in the 1990s, the drum was chosen as a model for signposts. Sceptical voices appeared locally; some maintained that the drum has a status similar to the cross in a Christian context (Viken 2006). Even today, this is a contested use: “The *runebom* (drum) is not a signpost”, one of our informants said. The drum strongly relates to mythology and religious traditions (see Friis 1871; Mathisen 2020), and there is an ongoing debate about the ownership of cultural and spiritual knowledge (Mathisen 2020, 10; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). We met this issue in one of the interviews. The informant used the shaman drum and drumming as part of the narrative about Sámi culture. They did not think of themselves as a shaman. The interviewee was aware of the sensitive aspects of such performances. They wondered whether the fact of being a Sámi legitimates such use of elements from a former belief system. It may be regarded as a form of cultural self-appropriation (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernández-Ramírez 2010) – taking something from the past in one's own culture, bringing it into a new arena and making money thereof. This is normally accepted. Still, as Mathisen (2020, 12) has observed “... the symbolic

figures of the Sámi *noaidi*'s drum have left the drum skin and started appearing on nearly all kinds of other souvenir products". This has a flavour of exploitation.

The split between authentic and inauthentic or fake frequently came up in the conversations with Sámi tourism providers. Authenticity covers a huge academic discourse, which only briefly can be referred to here. It is particularly relevant concerning handicrafts, where it is about materials used, form and fashion, the production methods, whether it is a handcrafted or manufactured item, the narrative contexts of the objects, and the origin of the producer (see Smith and Robinson 2005). These characteristics can be viewed as dimensions or continuums on which a product has a score somewhere between low and high, more or less. Schilar and Keskitalo (2018a, 93) have described how the souvenir and experience producers use narratives to increase authenticity. One of their examples is a non-Sámi silversmith in Norway that emphasizes Sámi narratives as a way of acquiring local acceptance. Thus, narratives may increase the legitimacy and authenticity, but do not seem to eliminate the element of appropriation in cases where the narrator is external to the culture. Keskitalo et al. (2021) write about a drum maker in Finland who had been accused of cultural appropriation, but over time had acquired local acceptance for her drums and other crafts. We also met this during our fieldwork. We were told of a hand crafter that weaves shell ties used on garments, a field with strong traditions, who is not accepted as a member of a Sámi handicraft organization – they are not a Sámi. But their handicraft is popular among the Sámi. Importantly, these handcrafters do not exploit but support the culture. As mentioned earlier, appropriation can also be positive. However, the fact that those referred to are not Sámi is not changeable. Neither is it important; their products are seen as authentic.

The essence of cultural appropriation is when somebody from outside is exploiting the culture. Presenting and exposing the culture, and even making money thereof, by members of a cultural group, is not seen as cultural appropriation. Culture as a resource for business is widely accepted. However, there are many examples where there is doubt or divided opinions. This discussion has a parallel in a recent dispute between Erich H. Matthes (2019) and James O. Young (2021). Matthes (2019) uses a white rap artist as an example of arts appropriation, given that rap has its origin in black music. Young (2021) rejects this position. To him, it is not the rapper that is to be accused, but the system behind them. Young (2021, 309) claims: "The people who are responsible for the oppression are those who perpetuate the oppressive system". But he admits that one can "argue that participation in a structure of oppression contributes to the oppression of minority groups". A parallel would be to say that it is not the non-Sámi souvenir sellers or buyers who are the problem, but the system behind them – the tourism industry in general. Against this one may say that the individual tourism providers should also be sensitive to the issue of exploitation and patronizing behaviour (Viken, Höckert, and Greenwood 2021). Only a few of our informants touched upon these issues. In a research project conducted in the early 2000s, the tourism industry, basically an externally owned hotel in Kárášjohka, was blamed for exploiting the local culture (Viken 2006). Exploitation reflects unbalanced power relations, and is a major aspect of cultural appropriation, as it is currently debated (Matthes 2019; Young 2021). These lessons should be part of the academic and industrial discourses concerning the production and trade of souvenirs, and in promoting tourism as a sensitive matter.

## Ambivalence and hidden antagonism

A major outcome of this research on Sámi tourism is that there are many forms and areas of appropriation – of land, of culture and of space in general. These elements are exploited and controlled by the majority society and the state, often in the name of development or modernization. Often there are relevant arguments both for and against a particular use of cultural assets, and often scholars end up by stating the complexity of the matter. It is difficult to make up one's mind and choose a side. In social theory, this has been labelled ambivalence, a situation where one, either as an individual or as a collective, is pulled in opposing or differing directions. Ambivalence has been a topic in social science since Robert Merton wrote on it in the 1960s. Later, Zygmunt Bauman (1990), in particular, suggested ambivalence as a central characteristic of our times, what he called postmodernity. For instance, Bauman was occupied by the ambiguity of "objects" not only having one but often several meanings. This makes the ambivalence more complicated. What we have observed is that with Sámi cultural expressions there is both ambiguity and ambivalence that relate to the complexity of Sámi culture and society and to the fact that the society is dynamic.

Ashforth et al. (2014) discussed how organizations tackle situations of ambivalence: with avoidance, not discussing the issue or ignoring it; through compromises where the parties or interests approach each other with give and take from each other and making common decisions; as dominance, where one position overrides the other; and as holism, a situation where one accepts the opposing interests of the other and develops pragmatic solutions within this frame. Concerning the touristic appropriation of the Sámi culture, there are obviously aspects that are not discussed or are avoided. For a long time, the topic of appropriation was not addressed within the tourism industry or among scholars, nor has the appropriation of land – the land-grabbing – or of space. There is also an ambivalence that is tackled by a combination of avoidance and dominance, for instance how Sámi tourism in Norway should be developed and managed on a destination level. It is not widely discussed (Viken 2016) and is rather silently solved by subsuming Sámi tourism into the destination marketing organization of northern Norway, as a topic and through projects. The commercial appropriation of Sámi culture is discussed, but it seems to be due to a rather holistic solution, in which appropriation is accepted as an unavoidable aspect of the industrial process, and as a matter of discussion concerning moral standards and guidelines. Furthermore, awareness of the many and different views creates an ambivalence that prevents action. This is also the situation in academic analyses of the situation; they tend to circle around differences or complexities, and modernization processes. There is also a risk that this situation, together with ambivalence, creates some sort of moral blindness (Bauman and Donskis 2013) – we no longer respond morally to things we genuinely dislike.

With reference to controversies related to the use of the Sámi costume and the star hat, Kramvig and Flemmen (2019a, 2019b) point to the challenges related to bringing the past into the present. The history is part of people's identities, and the pains of the past are still alive a generation after the policies and attitudes of the majority people have changed. This appears in different ways, and those involved are more or less aware of it. Kramvig and Flemmen (2019a) discussed an incident where a Swedish clothing designer (with distant Sámi roots) made a Christmas collection inspired by the *gáhkti* (garment), with

middle-class Swedish women as the target group. The designer was criticized by Sámi costume experts, as she mixed ideas and models, breaking traditional rules for costumes. How she did so is also shown in the article (Kramvig and Flemmen 2019a). According to the authors, such use of Sámi cultural expressions breaks “the cautious process of maintaining respectful relations” (Kramvig and Flemmen 2019a, 78). Thus, this raises the question of whether the costumes can be a model for new creations and designs?

Many felt that boundaries were crossed when a huge Norwegian grocery retailer, assisted by an event agency during a national company gathering in Tromsø in 2013, dressed their employees in fake Sámi costumes. The event was debated in the media. Many were obviously insulted, others claimed it should be tolerated, and some even saw it as an act of cultural bonding. The incident was also discussed by Kramvig and Flemmen (2019b). They saw the costume as a boundary object between now and the past and as an object entangled in a network of history, traditions, respect and affect. Therefore, the tension that the different uses raise cannot be ignored; there are no compromises, they argued.

One could be tempted to say that in such questions, the culture of origin should have the last word. However, this is not the way culture works – a culture is not a regime deciding, controlling and punishing. Or is it? The modernity project was very much about rationality and a belief in legal rules, which also could and should give moral guidance. However, as many scholars, among them Taylor (1991) and Bauman (1990), have pointed out, this is a vanishing system. With the prevalent moral blindness, Bauman claimed the way forward is not to be found in collectives and their regimes, but in the individual as a moral subject. However, Bauman also found this difficult, as the situations demanding moral actions are also ambiguous and ambivalent. In this discussion, Bauman leans on Levinas (1969), who argued that the individual has a moral responsibility for the Other. In this philosophy, the “I” is not an individualist but one that constantly cares for the Other. In line with this philosophy, the moral dilemmas of appropriation should be solved by caring for the Other. If tourism appropriation hurts somebody or perverts culture, a modified pattern of action is needed. This is also the essence of sensitive tourism as it has recently been defined (Viken, Höckert, and Grimwood 2021). However, with different others, who should we care for? Abram (2016, 75) posed the dilemma between preservation and modernization in this way: “If Swedish designers consider artistic innovation to include the adoption of patterns of designs found in the world around them, Sámi designs are just another instance of creative inspiration, but this fits poorly with the political currencies of emblems of Sámi belonging and kinship”. It is not easy to see a compromise or where the boundaries go in a society that wants to be dynamic, creative and culturally sensitive at the same time. The “holistic” solution – living with the ambivalence – seems to be the only way forward, seeking compromises as much as possible within a reflexive frame and counteracting moral blindness.

## Conclusion

In this article, both land-related and cultural appropriation have been addressed. The major point concerning land appropriation, be it for tourism or other industrial or infrastructural purposes, is that it results in declining pasturelands for reindeer herding. Examples of cultural appropriation within the tourism field also flourish, but most of



them are not really offensive; it is to make money by selling cheap, poor-quality products to tourists. However, offending cases are easy to find, particularly concerning the *gáhkti* and the hat, of which more or less vulgar copies have flourished. However, a major conclusion concerns the touristic appropriation of space. Tourism tends to conquer and take over places. Tromsø is a good example, with souvenir shops filled with Sámi cultural elements, but also with cheap and more or less vulgar elements. Only one of the shops is run by a person who reckons themselves as a Sámi. Thus, the appropriators are, in fact, national commerce and the international tourism industry. A second major conclusion is that there is a hidden or silent structural appropriation taking place, also within the realm of tourism. Tourism adds to othering processes (Viken and Müller 2017). This happens through social practices, talk and text in which Sámi people are treated as different and exotic. It often reflects attitudes that may exist subconsciously and beyond politics, being some sort of moral blindness concerning the legacies from colonial times. However, as mentioned, not all appropriation is necessarily negative. Additionally, not all appropriation is done by outsiders. There are also processes of “self-appropriation” occurring, where Sámi people exploit their own culture and heritage for the sake of making money.

Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernández-Ramírez (2010) conducted a study on appropriation among indigenous groups in Ecuador and made positive conclusions about it. They took commodification processes as a departure. To be saleable and a commodity, cultural expressions “... not previously considered “saleable” must be objectivized: everyday life, archaeological ruins or the environment”, Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernández-Ramírez (2010, 212) claimed. To them, objectification is a necessary step towards tourism. If these processes are led by outsiders, it is appropriation in the sense discussed above. “However, objectification carried out by the community itself also illuminates a process of appropriation”, Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernández-Ramírez (2010, 213) maintained. The authors studied two communities that were part of a “*turismo comunitario*” programme supported by the Ecuadorian government, criticized by some as market intervention. The self-appropriation observed through showing land, daily life and heritage, did not have the same pattern as selling goods in a market, as they said, “selling does not involve parting with the sold product ...” (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernández-Ramírez 2010, 223). According to this logic, tourism based on self-appropriation may be seen as some sort of circular economy, as the product can repeatedly be sold. The authors also underlined that touristification, involving commodification and appropriation, empowered the communities studied through increasing awareness of their cultural peculiarities and by creating cultural pride. This has also been observed in Sámi contexts, in which tourism is a tool for revitalization, revaluation of culture and creation of pride (see Viken 2006).

Thus, what is our responsibility as researchers? Very often, social scientists end up answering the research question by stating that it is a complicated matter, that different stakeholders have different views or that complexity overshadows the field. If we think in terms of power, suppression and empowering, can we then ignore taking a standpoint? Do we not, as social scientists, have a responsibility towards those being suppressed? It is broadly admitted that the Sámi have been suppressed but also that they are currently recognized and respected as an indigenous group. However, as this and other studies have shown, there are still structures and processes through which the Sámi culture and livelihood are threatened, also within the field of tourism, partly through

land-grabbing and cultural appropriation, and through the colonization of space. In this context, the tourist gaze is neither neutral nor innocent. As Wassler and Kirillova (2019, 124) provocatively claimed: “Rather than providing factual insight, the gaze alienates, stereotypes, objectifies, and ultimately de-humanizes the gazer and the gazed in a power-struggle of interpretation”. Thus, being aware of previous struggles, and struggles about the present and the future, should be part of the tourism agenda, as well as establishing terms and worldviews in which people are equally valued. This is the essence of sensitive tourism as suggested within the ARCTISEN project (Viken, Höckert, and Grimwood 2021).

## Notes

1. There are also processes related to former colonization going on, such as repatriation of Sámi cultural heritage. A current case in 2021 is about a *runebom* (drum) from 1691 that was confiscated in a witchcraft proceeding by Danish authorities and stored in the Danish national museum. The Norwegian government has demanded its return to Sápmi (Aftenposten 2021). In January 2022, it was decided to return the drum to Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat/The Sámi Museum in Karasjohka.
2. The core Sámi areas are not defined here but mostly refer to inland areas and areas where reindeer herding was and is an important industry. Coastal Sámi areas were not reckoned as part of the core.
3. As Minde (2003) and many others see it, the changing event opening the public’s eyes was the building of a dam on the Alta River in the Sámi core area and near important reindeer pastures, an area with a vulnerable environment and culture.
4. There is no law or other regulations for the production and sale of traditional costumes in Norway. However, there are strong norms related to kinship and place concerning who can wear a particular costume.

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