

**Ethnic Revitalization, cultural growth and commodification.
Indigenous festivals and events in Troms County in Norway.**

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Abstract:

This paper applies Valene L. Smiths' categories Habitat, Heritage, History and Handicraft to the study of indigenous festivals and events, and looks at how these four categories can help describe the relationship between such events and the Sami society.

Throughout the last forty years the Sami society has undergone a political and cultural revitalization process which has firmly changed the attitude towards the Sami Culture both from the outside, as well as from within the Sami community.

The political movement reached its peak with the controversial development of the Alta-water system in the 80's after which the Sami received sympathy and a greater understanding from the Norwegian society.

In the 1990's however many members of the young Sami generation saw the political struggle as settled and engaged themselves in cultural issues. This marked the beginning of today's famous international indigenous festivals; the Riddu Ridđu, and the later and "more pure" Sami festival, the Márkomeannu, festivals that helped commodify and establish the authenticity of Sami culture.

This paper shows how the Sami festivals have been instrumental in revitalizing the Sami culture in different ways. The festivals display indigenous culture from the past and present while simultaneously functioning as a common meeting ground for indigenous people and people interested in indigenous culture. Interviews with stakeholders in the Sami community show how the festivals have helped change both the greater society's attitudes towards saminess as well as the Sami society's view of themselves.

One important issue with this work is testing whether Valene Smith's model works as a tool to analyze a modern indigenous society, or if it fits better to less developed societies.

Keywords: indigenous tourism, festivals, commodification, authenticity, revitalization

Introduction

During the last forty years the Sami society has been through a revitalization process which has changed the attitude towards the Sami culture from outside as well as inside the Sami society. The revitalization process includes the area of both politics and culture. From the early 1970ies the cultural movement included artists like Nils-Aslak Valkeapää and popular singer/songwriter groups like Tanabreddens Ungdom. The political movement gained power from the Alta controversy around 1980, when the Norwegian authorities wanted to build a hydroelectric power station in the Alta River. The drama in Alta ended in a situation where the station was built, but the Sami population got sympathy and a new kind of understanding from the Norwegian society (Minde 2003 b). The political struggle ended in the establishment of the Sami Parliament in 1987, and a committee started considering the Sami rights to land and water. From the 1990ies the young Sami generation felt that much of the political fight had come to an end, and they wanted to engage in cultural questions. In local Sami communities outside the core Sami areas, as in the area for this study, the coastal Sami communities of Troms County, a revitalization of Sami culture took place. In many of those communities important signs of Sami culture were hidden or forgotten, like costumes, language and food tradition. The long lasting period of acculturation and Norwegianization had ended in a stigma where admitting Sami ancestors in itself was difficult. In the new cultural climate in the 90ies the young generation was learning Sami language at kindergartens and schools, and they showed the way of a new Sami selfishness in the society. In the local Sami organizations old traditions in costumes, food and music were brought to light and ideas for local festivals were born.

“Do something fun, let’s make a festival” was the beginning of today’s famous international indigenous festival, the Riddu Ridđu, and the more recent and more “pure” Sami festival, the Márkomeannu. Festivals, marketplaces and other cultural attractions involve commodification of culture and heritage, and the main question in this article how commodification work together with the revitalization process in the Sami society?

Sami society today

Sápmi is the area inhabited by the Sami in northern Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. There is about 40000 Sami living in Norway, 20000 in Sweden, 6000 in Finland and 2000 in Russia. Sami and no Sami are living side by side, and only in a few municipalities do the Sami constitute a majority. In Norway the Sami population shares very much the same

conditions as the non-Sami, and there are no specific differences in education level, income or health. The Sami got acceptance as indigenous people in the 1970ies, and Norway is the only of the Nordic country which have ratified the ILO Convention 169 about the rights for indigenous people. The Sami Parliament with direct election of the representative was established in Norway in 1987.

The core area for Sami culture is the inner part of Finnmark County in Norway, and here is also where the most well known symbols for Sami culture come from. National costumes, the local Sami dialect, and a strong connection to the traditional Sami industry reindeer herding, are symbols which are emblematic for the whole Sápmi, also in connection with tourism. In this work focus is at Sami attractions in the coastal areas of Troms County, and there are some differences from the core area of Finnmark. The reindeer herding do not have the same strong position, the national costumes are different and local traditions are often more connected to farming and fishing. Another important difference is that the assimilation and acculturation process is gone much further in the coastal area, and the struggle for revitalization had to start with the very local questions. At the political level these discussions had started in the 1980ies and a local movement for Sami rights was established. From this time it was gradually possible to talk about the Sami culture in past and present in the coastal area. The entrepreneurs behind the Sami festivals and other attractions came into this discussion and tried to find the local authentic culture, possible to show at a festival or in a museum. But to make Sami culture visible was not a process which all agreed on. In Kåfjord, the place where the festival Riddu Riddu is situated, new road signs with Sami language came in use beside the Norwegian signs in the late 1990ies. The Sami signs were consequently destroyed with shotgun the first years! Gradually the Sami language and other cultural expressions is been more accepted, and the festival has made an important contribution in this process.

Another difficult question is the relation to religion. The old Sami shamanistic religion was forbidden in the 18th century, and is today mostly known by written sources. From the middle of the 19th century it has been a strong Christian revival in the Sami societies presented in this work. This movement, called læstadianism, is based on a very pietistic understanding of Christianity, and has strict demands about the moral of its members. Still today it is a living force both in some Norwegian and Sami societies, and those who make festivals and other attractions have to take this into consideration.

Commodification

Commodification is the process where a cultural or natural asset is made accessible to tourists as consumable products, and the cultural assets also gain economic value. In earlier literature commodification has been seen as a one of the great threats to cultural facilities; “If tourism becomes a success, it would become a cultural tragedy” (McKercher and du Cros 2002:115). Today it is more common to appreciate that tourism is actually a partner in cultural heritage management (Boniface 1998). It is underlined that culture nowadays performs a double role; on the one hand supporting society’s collective memory and identification, and on the other hand being a source of wealth and economic development (Richards 2007:304).

Commodification needs to be balanced in relation to other important aspects of cultural assets like education (Douglas, Douglas and Derrett 2001:190) and authenticity (McKercher and du Cros 2002:76). Presentation of assets is the core thing for cultural heritage management, for the tourism sector this is a question of development of products and both imply a kind of interpretation. Tourism tends to focus on user value, such as entertainment, relevance for the visitor and easy to follow, but the educational outcome is important to cultural managers (Weiler and Ham 2001).

Presentation of cultural heritage as an element of tourism products involves dilemmas like education versus entertainment and conservation versus commoditization (McKercher & du Cros 2002), and authenticity versus marketability. For festivals and museums these are vital questions. Museums have a challenge in attracting people on the one hand and in handling educational aspects on the other. Commodification of cultural heritage may on one hand represent a threat to pristine cultural environments, while on the other it may open possibilities for protection of valuable sites and objects, and presentation of cultural assets in a sustainable way (Ryan & Aicken 2005).

Sámi tourism has been the subject of several studies during the last fifteen years (Hall et al 2009, Lyngnes & Viken 1998, Müller & Petterson 2005, Müller & Huuva 2009, Pedersen & Viken 1996, Petterson 2001, Viken 1997 a, 1997 b, 2000, 2002, Viken et al 1998, Viken & Petterson 2007). In the area of indigenous tourism the focus has been on impacts of tourism-based commodification, especially in earlier studies (Butler & Hinch 1996, Smith 1978, 1996). Several critical questions have been raised about the impact of tourism on indigenous peoples (Johnson 2006), but the impacts of tourism to indigenous societies are more or less comparable to impacts of the modern and post-modern world in general (Smith 2003). Like other cultures, indigenous cultures are dynamic and changing, and authenticity is not to be

understood as a preservation of “true Sáminess” or “real Maoridom”, (Richards & Ryan 2004) as an unchanging cultural condition.

The development of indigenous/Sámi tourism products is a part of an ongoing discourse on ethnic identity and the meaning of “Sáminess”. For indigenous festivals as Riddu Ridđu and Márkomeannu, Sámi cultural activities and performances are on one level statements in a discourse about Sámi identity and on another level products to be marketed to a diverse audience (Richards 2001). This also applies to other Sámi/indigenous tourism enterprises. The commercialization of Sámi tourism in the Nordic countries has, especially in Finland, transgressed the line of acceptance in regard to the use of Sámi culture (Ruotsala 1995, Saarinen 1999) and the need of a definition of quality standards by means of certification of tourism products has been brought forward.

In Norway and Sweden, the development of Sámi tourism has been a project for the Sámi themselves with Sámi entrepreneurs (Lyngnes & Viken 1997, Petterson 2004, Müller & Huuva 2009) and there is an ongoing discourse within the Sámi society about ethical and cultural standards for Sámi tourism. The festivals and cultural attractions investigated in this article came out of a process of ethnic revitalization, and have developed to popular events and attractions also for tourists. The interesting question is what part of Sami culture is performed and displayed at these attractions, and what is not? Which dilemmas have the leaders and entrepreneurs meet in the adaption between Sami culture and identity at one hand, and commoditisation at the another hand, in developing festivals and other attractions?

Framework

To make the connection between indigenous societies and development of travel and tourism products Valene L. Smith's (1996) model the four Hs makes it possible “to define the analytic tools to assess tourism potentials in a specific setting” (Smith 1996:282). Her idea is to analyse society and culture, and see which part of culture gives possibilities or difficulties regarding tourism. Smith underlines the interrelation between the four elements, habitat, heritage, history and handicraft as they present culture-bounded visitor experiences. The geographic setting, habitat, is regarded as the most important due to the close connection between indigenous cultures and land. Indigenous people often occupy low density populated areas, which are of particular interest for hiking and ecotourism. The ethnographic traditions, heritage, “that body of knowledge and skills which ensure human survival together with the beliefs and values that give meaning to life and [...] distinguish between right and wrong”

(Smith 1996:290). In the last decades the situation for native minority populations has changed from acculturation to revitalization, and this opens possibilities for tourism. History as the third H is about an understanding of the effects of acculturation, and a situation where ethnic belonging was regarded as a stigma. These questions are still sensitive in the discourse between indigenous people and the majority society. The fourth element in Smith's model is handicraft. This is of special value because it makes income both for the artisan and the merchant. The four Hs are from Smith's side presented as a diagnostic tool for analysing an indigenous society. In this work the four Hs are on the first hand the framework for data collection, and not so important when it comes to the analytic work.

The long interview

“The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory [it] gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves” (McCracken 1988:9) . The ambition here is to get the subjects' own view on the situation for the activity they are working in with their own words, and “access to the cultural categories and assumptions” (McCracken 1988:17). In itself it is not the aim to ask very controversial questions, but after generations with an acculturation process for the Sami society is it not easy to say which questions might be difficult. In the idea of “self as an instrument” I can use my knowledge and personal experience to avoid difficult question and take care of the necessary respect for the informant (McCracken 1988:44).

The relationship between the investigator and the respondent is of special interest and complexity within qualitative research. McCracken ask “Who does the respondent think the investigator is?” and vice versa (McCracken 1988:25). In this work the respondents vary from highly educated academics to self-made entrepreneurs, and the interviews were of a different character according to this. On the one hand the highly educated respondents had well founded ideas about what they were doing, and were able to put in the revitalization process in a very distinct way. They also felt comfortable talking about the idealistic and theoretical sides of their activities. On the other hand those with a more practical attitude towards their work had no problems answering the question, but they did not have the same interest in the relationship between their activities and the relationship with the society and their culture.

The author is a historian working with travel and tourism management, and with special interest in Sami history and society, and this is the background for the research process. With

a background from an earlier Sami society (today norwegianized) I on one hand know about the processes and dilemmas the Sami society are facing, and on the other hand I am accepted as “one of us”. This gives the opportunity to come close to the informants, and it challenges me to show respect towards the people I meet in the interview.

The 4Hs are in this work used as a model in which frames the data are collected. Used as a model it points out which areas are important, and the questions in the interviews are structured from one H to another. Using the model offers a few difficulties, since important areas about economy and business are not covered. Other general questions about society are not a part of this model either. To go beyond this I had to ask some extra questions.

The different enterprises represented were festivals, museums and a handicraft makers and salesman. Their attitudes towards the attractions differed because some took care of their family traditions, and wanted to transmit that. Others were entrepreneurs trying to make a living, and used their skills and traditions in doing so. All had a genuine cultural interest and wanted to do something special for their home village and include it in a broader indigenous people context. The first question in every interview was to ask the subject to describe their enterprise, number of employees, visitors, and so on. From this we went on to the first H, Habitat. This is not a sensitive question, but with the question about the relationship between the nature and Sámi culture, it was an invitation to talk about Sámi culture in general. The next H, Heritage, opens for talking about the Sámi society today, as well as the past, both the tangible culture represented by artifacts and the intangible culture such as religion and traditional healing. At this point in the interview it was possible to go on with the more sensitive questions about the past, including acculturation, Norwegianization and revitalization that is the History of the Sámi society. Those questions are difficult due to the stigmatization the Sámi society has been through some decades ago, and the interviewer has to be careful with such sensitive matters. The last H, Handicraft is very good since it normally is not that sensitive, but even with this question an interesting discussion came up about the shaman drum made for sale at the market.

The informants are chosen because they are leaders, entrepreneurs or persons with special knowledge about the festival, museum and Sami society in general.

From local cultural movement to attraction for tourism. A mismatch or tourism on the premises of the indigenous population?

The Sami festivals and attractions which grew in the 1990ies in the coastal area of Troms county did not have commercial or public success as their first priority. They started on a very small scale by entrepreneurs who had cultural and local interests in the first place. “The Riddu Riddu was established in 1991 as a sea-Sami festival, and the goal was to reestablish and revitalize the sea-Sami culture, especially among the youth” as one of the entrepreneurs said. “One of the goals is to have fun; it shall be cool to be a Sami” a representative for the festival Markomeannu said. “Breaking down stereotypes is very important, people [Sami] from our area has little knowledge about typically Sami symbols like reindeers”. This could be said, is the modern attitude to using Sami culture as attraction at festivals and museums. The more traditional view is to take care of the traditional symbols, and also present the more emblematic sign of Sami culture (Olsen 2003). Commodification of Sami culture meet difficulties both in those Sami cultural symbols had a reputation as worthless from the age of acculturation at one hand, and that the young generation had an all encompassing attitude to accept cultural expressions as Sami on the other.

During the assimilation process a lot of the most important symbols of Sami culture were suppressed, regarded as old-fashioned, of poor quality and useless in the modern world. This includes language, costumes, houses (the Sami turf hut called gamme), food, handicraft and songs. The suppression worked like a stigma, and the Sami people did not want to be associated with what was typically Sami (Minde 2003a). Typical of the cultural situation in the costal Sami villages in the beginning of the 90ies was that a few used it, the young ones were open for it, and the rest had little interest in Sami questions.

Struggle for the language is considered the most important topic, and the attractions and festivals are agents in this development. A common attitude to Sami language has been that why should one use a language which very few people understood, when everybody understand Norwegian? This old attitude has changed and since the 80ies Sami language has gradually been used both in kindergartens and schools. The owners of the Sami farm and museum Vilgesvarre see language as the most important part of the revitalization. Typical of the changing situation is that their farm some years ago was only known under its Norwegian name “Blåfjell”, but today Vilgesvarre is the only name even Norwegians know. Use of the Sami language is an important policy also for the festivals. Markomeannu use Sami as their

first language on their web sites, and you need an extra click to get the Norwegian site. All introductions from the stage or written materials are both in Sami and Norwegian, and the Sami language first. These attractions provide arenas where Sami language is useful. Especially the festivals are places where Sami people from all of Sápmi, the Sami land, meet, and knowledge of Sami language gives credibility. For other visitors and tourists this use of language gives a feeling of authenticity, and may be exoticism.

Use of the language and Sami costume are closely connected, “for those who have learned Sami, use of Sami clothing feels normal, and we see more and more people wearing Sami costumes at the festival” says one of the leaders. Like other National costumes, design of the Sami costume varies from one area to another, and a renaissance of the costal Sami designed costumes is very visible at festivals and other attractions.

Authenticity is important both for visitors and for entrepreneurs of cultural attractions. Definitions of authenticity or what is regarded as authentic vary from group to group or from individual to individual (Mehmetoglu & Olsen 2003, Smith and Forest 2006). Farms and museums like Vilgesvarre want to present their farm as they were when the last Sami farmers left them in the 1950ies, with no electricity, no snow scooters or bikes and limited comfort for visitors. This is a kind of “objective authenticity”, based at experiences on historical sites and artefacts (Smith and Forest 2006:135). The festivals represent a kind of “constructed authenticity” with staged events and artificial created cultural attractions (Ibid). The festival Markomeannu wants to have a young approach and present the modern Sami culture and society. The young leaders of the festival want a wide definition of what is Sami, or what is presented as Sami activity. This shows a new kind of selfishness among the young Sami. They say that the culture is strong enough for all kinds of expressions. If some cultural activity goes on in a Sami area, or is done by a Sami person it is good enough. One example is that an old Sami lady was collecting beer boxes, and her collection was a great success at the exhibition at Markomeannu. “Why should not a Sami make a good collection of beer boxes?” asked one of the leaders. On the other hand Markomeannu is quite conservative about what to present, “no Sami kitch products at our festival”. This means that typically “touristic” products like dolls in plastic boxes wearing Sami costumes, or mass produced souvenirs from distant producers are banned. “We have tried to be all encompassing about modern Sami expressions, and we never felt that we had to compromise about what is real Sami.” In a discussion of what gives an experience of “personal authenticity” seen from the audience, this may be confusing (Smith and Forest 2006:135). Avoiding some of the most well known

cultural symbols, at the same time as the definition of Sami culture is opened in other directions, will require a cultural authority from the festival (Fees 1996), or the cultural integrity of the festival might be undermined.

The old things are nowadays used in new ways, and it is a process which can be difficult if the past also includes difficult memories. "... distance in time and space is needed to appreciate phenomena and to trigger either nostalgia or the search for authenticity ..." (Schouten 2007:35). The old turf huts, *gamme*, are at Vilgesvarre rebuilt and are in use as accommodation for visitors. These are important symbols for Sami housing, but they also represent poverty and a time when the Sami people struggled for survival under pressure from the majority population. Those who left to move into modern houses never want the old times back, and the entrepreneurs at Vilgesvarre got some critical questions when they started the rebuilding project. The Sami tent, *lavvu*, used by the rein deer herders has got quite another position; it is used as modern equipment at excursions and camping. It is also inevitable equipment at marketplaces, Sami attractions and festivals.

The festival *Riddu Riddu* is today regarded as an international indigenous festival and has delegates and participants from aboriginals and fourth world people from all over the world. The international contacts for the Sami were established on political levels in the 1970ies, and have developed into cultural cooperation in recent decades. This means that Sami cultural entrepreneurs in remote places in Norway may stay in contact with other cultural leaders all around the world. The Sami society has as such showed the way for the Norwegians in the same kind of places, in this understanding it is possible to say that the Sami culture during the last four decades has changed from being an old remnant into being an innovative force in society. The new attractions and festivals are a sign of that (Tuulentie 2006).

The tangible culture is easy to show to visitors. Food, handicraft and artwork are the backbone of festivals and attractions. Also intangible culture such as language and musical expressions like the old Sami song, *joik*, has its place from stages and at attractions around. But there is still something left, some traditions, some Sami specialties which are not shown in public. There is very little talk about religion and supernatural forces, white and black magical power which the Sami culture in older times was connected to. At *Riddu Riddu* shaman songs, drums and rituals might be demonstrated, but then from peoples from other parts of the world. Some parts of those supernatural forces still exist, and are in use such as healing, and some are said to be in contact with the ancestors. "This is not for the festival, it is private, and we

don't talk about it in public" as one of the subjects says. The only place where it is possible to come closer to this spiritual part of Sami culture is at Vilgesvarre. When night comes, and people are alone with the darkness, then they have a session with storytelling. They tell new and old stories, about ancestors, about holy places where inexplicable things happens. There are still some mysteries left.

As the leaders and entrepreneurs have expressed, there has been more focus on the visitors and tourists during recent years. Riddu Riddu has grown out of the frames of the local society, and is an important event on the national level. "Connection with travel and tourism is enrichment for the festival, as far as the program is fully under our own control, but in collaboration with others there will be a mutual influence." Commodification of Sami culture by using the well known symbols as costumes, housing, language, handicraft and food will may be strengthen these both as products and symbols (Müller & Petterson 2005:208).

Revitalization, commodification and authenticity

Revitalization in this connection has two sides. The first is to make the old cultural symbols acceptable in the modern society, without the stigma from the acculturation period. The second part is to renew the old cultural expressions to fit in the modern society, and be acceptable to young generations. In the commodification process the cultural expressions get an economic value, and in a society where money talks this get a wider importance for the indigenous society. If local culture has a value which the visitors are willing to spend money at, than it get higher status at the home society. In a situation where the old fashion turf hut, the traditional costumes, food, music and handicraft get a commercial value, also other cultural expression like language and literature gain importance for the local society and visitors. The process of commodification helps to show some cultural expression, and also open a discussion about the definition of local indigenous culture. In this process elements from popular culture whether it is food, music or clothes will be merged into the local cultural expression and a risk for banalizing will occur. The Sami festival can be in danger to be like whatever cultural festival. Tourists own definition of what is the authentic elements can be used as a program, and then an "emergent authenticity" occur (Burnett 2001). These processes can also be of revitalization, when a Sami cultural expression is modernized and adapted to other modern expressions, it can be a necessary renewing which adapt Sami culture to the modern world, and help the young entrepreneurs to reach their goal, make it popular to be a Sami.

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