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A review and future research agenda

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20 years of research on Arctic and Indigenous cultures in Nordic tourism. A review and future research agenda

Carina Ren, Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson, Britt Kramvig, Albina Pashkevich & Emily Höckert

Abstract

Through a critical reading of previous research, this article explores local and indigenous cultures in the context of Nordic Arctic tourism and how its consequences have been researched in Nordic tourism research. We show that experiences with, practices of and controversies over the representation and presence (or absence) of local and indigenous culture in tourism take on very many different meanings and shapes across the Nordic Arctic. This, we argue, calls for situated and sensitive ways of doing research. With a focus on Sámi, Nenets in Russia and Greenlandic Inuit, we discuss the current state of indigenous and Arctic culture in Nordic Tourism before looking closer into how Nordic tourism scholarship has addressed the relations between indigenous culture and tourism in the Arctic. We conclude by proposing three trajectories for tourism research and tourism development, which further supplement and diversify ongoing research.

Introduction

During the summer of 2020, a heated discussion unraveled in the press and on social media in Denmark and Greenland concerning a longstanding, popular ice cream sold under the name of Kæmpe Eskimo (Giant Eskimo). The debate followed in the wake of similar debates in the US on the racially offensive nature of products such as Uncle Ben's and Aunt Jemima and the following renaming of the products (Spells & Croft, 2020). When Nestlé announced the renaming of its Eskimo Pie in June, spokespersons from ice cream producers in Denmark dismissed the idea that people would find the Kæmpe Eskimo ice cream offensive (Ritzau, 2020). This interpretation was very soon to be challenged, as the pace of discussions, articles, comments and statements grew steadily over the summer, drawing in issues of Denmark's colonial past, representation and structural racism.

Overlooking the debate, some dismissed while others confirmed Eskimo as a derogatory term. In social media posts, some also nostalgically lamented a potential loss of their childhood ice cream.

Commentators in Denmark as well as Greenland pointed to the discussions as a direct and timely outcome of the Black Lives Movement or, reversely, as tokenism, detracting attention from more important political, economic and social issues. A small ice cream company arranged a contest to rename its Kæmpe Eksimo, while other, larger companies flatly refused. In both instances, the decisions were lauded as well as condemned on social media. When the Danish National Museum announced on 30 July that it would abstain from using the term Eskimo in its exhibitions, the post received over 5600 likes on Facebook and over 1.300 comments. While many were positive, others were unsympathetic or angry, seeing it as over-sensitive or as direct historical fraudulence. On 3 August, former head of the Greenlandic Home Rule government, Lars-Emil Johansen, announced at the pinnacle of the discussion that he had been and always would remain "a proud Eskimo", creating even more anger, frustration, amusement and confusion in its wake.

While this still ongoing debate shows that affinities to either side of the debate often aligns along the political spectrum, it also displayed that it can cut across it by way of personal experience, generational belonging or ethnic belonging. Although the controversy is closely linked to and in some instances similar to controversies elsewhere, for instance the debate on 'joikakaker' (canned meatballs with a Sami-song name) and the commodification and representation of Sámi in Norway, it shows that its unraveling is always situated, drawing on local past and present experiences and practices.

The introductory story might at first glance seem to lay far from tourism concerns but is instructive in displaying how issues of naming, representation, identity and identification are controversial and sensitive. As much tourism research has proved, this is also highly relevant in tourism, where local and indigenous cultures have often become a crucial and indispensable part of selling places as tourist destinations. In this article, we zoom in on how local and indigenous cultures have become involved in Nordic Arctic tourism and explore its consequences through the lens of tourism research. Similar to the ice cream controversy, we argue that experiences with, practices of and controversies over the representation and presence (or absence) of local and indigenous culture in tourism take on very many different meanings and shapes across the Nordic Arctic.

Before COVID-19 disabled travelling in and through the Nordic Arctic, recent decades have witnessed a tremendous and almost unhindered growth in tourism development in the region. This coincides with a continuing promotion of tourism as a tool for economic diversification and

development in sparsely populated and peripheral regions of the Nordic countries. From Rovaniemi and Tromsø to Reykjavík, visitors flock to experience the Arctic nature and living. Even though much of this traffic typically concentrates around bigger cities with air connection or cruise ports it is most often marketed as 'off the beaten track', exotic and life-changing (see e.g. Lee, 2020; Hall & Saarinen, 2010; Hall, Müller & Saarinen, 2009).

In this article, we *first* offer a recollection of the experiences derived from studies of social and cultural consequences brought by rapid intervention of tourism into the Nordic Arctic communities and adjacent parts of European Russia. Our focus lies on Sámi, Nenets in Russia and Greenlandic Inuits. Looking at how local and indigenous culture has been conceptualised in tourism research, we show how a definition of indigenous people remains controversial, but also plays out differently in the contexts of countries and destinations across this segment of the Arctic. *Second*, we look further into how Nordic tourism scholarship has addressed these complex relations between (indigenous) culture and tourism in the Arctic and draw an introspection into research's own role in thinking about and enacting indigenous culture in a tourism context. For the purpose of future research, we *lastly* introduce a range of theoretical resources, which can help explore and make sense of the development of Arctic and indigenous tourism. We propose three trails as hopeful and promising trajectories for tourism research and tourism development to account for the ways in which actors balance and navigate in their encounters and daily practices.

Current state of Indigenous and Arctic culture in Nordic Tourism

The Sámi has been of interest to travellers and those organizing tourism already for quite some time (Müller & Viken, 2017). This interest has been characterised by different kinds of motivations to speak *about* and speak *for* the Sámi and their home area, Sápmi. Travel writing, tourism marketing, media and partly even tourism research, have contributed to reproducing an exotic, primitive and objectifying image of the Sámi as the Arctic 'Other' (see Viken & Müller, 2017). Lüthje's (1995) research has unravelled the vicious circle of history of tourism development in Finland, where non-Sámi tourism actors have sought to respond to tourists' stereotypical presumptions of the Sámi, leading to multiple forms of cultural misuse and appropriation (see also Kugapi et al., 2020). Critical tourism scholarship has during the last decades been fuelled by concerns of non-Sámi tourism actors reproducing this imagery of the Sámi and reaping the benefits from it (Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016).

The misuse and essentializing ways of representing the Sámi cultures, have taken different forms in different contexts. A recent transnational study on cultural sensitivity in Arctic tourism underlines the heterogeneity of Sámi cultures, colonial processes, and political contexts in which tourism is developed (Olsen et al., 2019). While Norway has ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Sweden, Finland and Russia have delayed the ratification due to questions related land right issues. Moreover, the rules for receiving a Sámi status, and entering the electoral roll for the different Sámi parliaments have up to date fundamental differences (Ibid, p. 12).

The recognition of the experiences and services provided by indigenous entrepreneurs in tourism as "real Sámi" has been part of the development in Nordic Arctic (Müller & Pettersson, 2001). It has resulted in an effort to protect Sámi handicrafts and culture by Sámi Duodji association granting a specific certification to the providers of traditional form, use of materials and methods to signify *Saminess* of these products (Schilar & Keskitalo, 2018), but also unintentionally contributing to the process of "*othering*" and exotifying the Sámi culture (Keskitalo & Schilar, 2017; Keskitalo et al. 2019). Furthermore, a set of ethical guidelines has been created by the Finnish Sámi Parliament in order to support responsible and respectful use of Sámi cultural elements in tourism. Indeed, what seems common across Sápmi is the way in which the political Sámi bodies (Parliaments/Sámi Council) are trying to take a more active role in tourism development. The past years' growth in tourism and attention given toward local cultures have brought new opportunities for Sámi to initiate or further develop their tourism businesses. Many Sámi entrepreneurs see tourism as a complementary income to their other livelihoods, such as reindeer herding and duodji, handicrafts. At the same time, tourism offers for many an important platform to share knowledge about Sámi cultures and identity (Leu, Eriksson & Müller, 2018; Fonneland, 2017; Kramvig & Førde 2020).

Turning our eyes towards European part of the Russian Arctic, we find approximately 2000 Sámi occupying a territory of Russian Lapland (Kola Peninsula, Murmansk Region) and the indigenous Nenets, a group of nomadic reindeer herders' group of approximately 44,000 persons scattered across the territory of two Russian Arctic regions - Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Komi Republic. In these areas, international tourism remains scarce, but nationally there is a growing demand for indigenous tourism experiences. In the creation of tourism products, the terms of use of indigenous culture follows a general discourse connected to the traditional or exotic as a unique selling point (Ludlow et al., 2016; Keskitalo, 2004; Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017). This image potentially

contributes to a limited understanding and further distancing of the Northern Europe/Arctic territories and communities, reducing indigenous culture to a quest of the most 'traditional' thus less 'developed' and exotic hosts. This in turn affects cultural production as tourism entrepreneurs are able to maximize their income by providing services, which suit this touristic ideal (Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017; Pashkevich, 2017).

Indigenous cultural revival of the European part of Russian Arctic during the past decades has been much debated. In theory, there is support for indigenous recognition and multiculturalism, but in practice the continuity of state powers are sustained in these remote territories (Vladimirova, 2017). Thus, the instigation of formal mechanisms for the active participation of both Sámi and Nenets in tourism activities in order to secure control over tourism products have failed to be realised (Heldt-Cassel & Pashkevich, 2018; Keskitalo et al., 2019). Typically, indigenous cultural expression is articulated through popular representations such as ethnic festivals or events based on folklore traditions, including sports, theatre plays or dance performances, which facilitate the official framing of indigenous culture by central authorities (Vladimirova, 2017). Often, this carefully controlled version of indigenous culture is kept alive in order to reconcile the potential conflicts arising from the increased Arctic nature-resource exploitation of the traditional reindeer herding pastures (Vladimirova, 2017, Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017). Similar to other tourism forms celebrating Arctic indigenous 'otherness', in this case non-indigenous tourism entrepreneurs negotiate the terms of access and rules of engagement of their indigenous hosts, thus leaving community benefits unregulated and uncontrolled, which further weakens the positioning of representatives of indigenous Russian Sámi and Nenets culture (Heldt-Cassel & Pashkevich, 2018).

In Greenland, we find yet another situation for indigeneity in tourism. While Greenland remains a part of the Danish Kingdom, it has had Self-rule since 2009. Increasingly and similar to the development elsewhere in the Nordic Arctic and in Sápmi, tourism has been introduced as a central pillar to build a strong economy. In addition, it is by many perceived as an economic tool to secure the wish of many Greenlanders, namely full independence from Denmark. In contrast to areas in Scandinavia and Russia populated by indigenous groups, the Inuit population in Greenland is in majority (app. 47.000 out of a total population of 56.000). While colonial issues still linger in Greenlandic society today, the indigenous Inuit identity has, as recently observed by Kuokkanen (2017), been downplayed as a part of Greenlands' quest for economic and national independence.

Together with a strong focus on nature-based tourism and a low number of tourists, this has meant that the use and selling of indigenous cultural artefacts in tourism remain less contested than in Sámi areas. Debates or controversies on cultural appropriation and misuse in tourism are generally lacking (Ren et al., 2020). Unlike many areas of Nordic Arctic, tourism numbers remain modest with under 100.000 international tourist arrivals a year. However, this number is slowly growing in tandem with increased accessibility for tourists to visit.

For many years, the national DMO of Visit Greenland has been a central player in (re)defining the representation in branding campaigns and tourism marketing of Greenlanders and Greenlandic everyday life. In campaigns, nature, culture and modern everyday life in the Arctic is blended into a hybrid, playful and often humoristic imagery. Question is how to moderate the negative impacts of increasing tourism and raise the possibilities for creating benefits and involvement for the local population.

For all the areas described above do we see how tourism is entangled in multiple ways with Arctic and indigenous identity and culture. In some places and under certain conditions, the marketing and development of tourism is part of creating and exacerbating essentialization while it in other instances supports and strengthens local and indigenous heritage and traditions. Interestingly, this mirrors two juxtaposed debates in tourism research, which highlight the empowering as well as deteriorating effects that tourism can have on local culture. In the following, we take a closer look at how this bifurcation is retrieved in a Nordic tourism research context.

Researching Indigenous and Arctic culture in Nordic Tourism

The first editorial to the Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism describes the scope, background and the "Nordic Context" of the newly established journal (Mykletun & Haukeland, 2001). There within, indigenous culture is featured. One of the articles in the first issue is on Sámi tourism (Müller & Pettersson, 2001) and raises "important issues regarding transformation of the culture of indigenous people to encompass modern tourism business" (Mykletun & Haukeland, 2001, p. 3). The Nordic context as defined by the editors undeniably limits the scope of discussion of indigenous tourism in the journal. Most notably, Greenland is not included as part of the "Nordic Context" and while the Baltic states are counted in, North West Russia is not mentioned. In practice, the initial definition of the scope of the journal may not have been very strict (see e.g. Ireland, 2003). However, searching the journal for "indigenous culture" reflects a strong

Scandinavian focus, with studies on indigenous tourism primarily being about Sámi tourism (most notably in the special issue in 2006).

The discussion above shows that indigenousness as steeped in colonialism and mechanisms of othering, in which indigenous culture is associated with the traditional or even the primitive. Similarly, indigenous people are associated with traditional subsistence practices and close links to nature as opposed to modern capitalist (tourism) economies (Keskitalo, 2017). Academia has both contributed to as well as interrupted this narrative. The concept of indigenous is best thought of as a flexible construct that is being molded and negotiated by a plethora of actors in different places and at different levels. It is commonly used to refer to people that "represent culturally or ethnically distinguishable groups" (Viken and Müller, 2017, p. 3) and as such it retains a presence and value for tourism businesses that aim at providing new or alternative experiences from what tourists are used to from their everyday home environment (Viken & Müller, 2006).

The image of a clearly defined culturally bounded group is in most instances not accurate, not the least in the Nordic countries, where the Sámi population is integrated into the welfare state and leads a modern lifestyle, let alone groups like the Nenets and Inuit as discussed above. Things become more complicated when it is difficult to perceive any major difference between the indigenous groups of people and those that they are supposed to be different from. While some Sámi work in tourism in order to support an often-composite household economy, others perceive working in tourism as a lifestyle choice (Müller & Viken, 2017, Tuulentie, 2006) in which 'being Sámi' is not necessarily work related.

Research on indigenous tourism in the Nordic context has underlined the need to move from focus on defining what it is towards describing what it does (Viken & Müller, 2017; Olsen, 2006; Viken, 2006; Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016). As such, academic discussion has moved towards more focus on indigeneity of all cultural groups and the way in which cultural traits are entangled in various ways with tourism dynamics. This includes an exploration of where and how indigeneity comes to matter in the development of Arctic tourism (and vice versa), such as in processes of commodification of culture and in the exotification and construction of identities and images of people and places (Zhang & Müller, 2018).

In tourism research, indigenous peoples are increasingly described as active agents of change rather than passive victims of (evil) forces of the market (see e.g. Viken and Müller, 2017, Fonneland,

2017, see also Shepherd, 2002). For instance in a Sámi context and as argued by Zhang & Müller (2018), some narratives "portray the Sámi people as 'exotic others' in the global and domestic tourism industry, others show that tourism can also be an opportunity to challenge such a view" (p. 163). This underlines that tourism dynamics in the Arctic are rife with controversies, begging the question of how tourism research (also) within this field contributes to the ontological politics of destination development (Jóhannesson et al. 2015). In a time where researchers are asked to create knowledge useful for and with Arctic and indigenous communities, it is important to address the responsibility that this task entails. How might our research and theoretical concerns affect communities, business and governmental programs? How can we move research into a space of co-creation that takes indigenous ways of knowing seriously; and that rethinks the role of research and researchers as co-creators (Ren, Jóhannesson & van der Duim, 2018)? This is what we explore in the following section, in which we draw attention to some possible trajectories leading the way of inquiry to more responsible Arctic tourism.

The future of Indigenous and Arctic culture in Nordic Tourism: Three trails forward

Ongoing research on Arctic and indigenous tourism has drawn focus on identity politics and representations of the Arctic (Viken, 2006). It has brought forth that tourism is an activity that may simultaneously be contested and welcomed by indigenous people and has also shown that tourism may contribute to essentializing as well as strengthening Arctic indigenous cultures. In some instances, tourism can even work to reconcile past injustices (Kramvig & Førde, 2020). For future research, we argue it is important to further diversify and supplement accounts of how tourism and indigenous culture in the Arctic entangle in multiple ways. We suggest the following three trails forward for future research.

The first trail for future research is to continue developing *new approaches and conceptual tools that recognize that we live in a world of difference and multiple tensions* (Haraway, 2017; Tsing, Swanson, Gan & Bubandt, 2017; de la Cadena & Blaiser, 2018). Imagining post-Anthropogenic landscapes and cohabitation in these requires new ways of thinking beyond a priori and binary distinction of modern/traditional, culture/nature and to open up our analysis to practical ways of learning (Gan, Tsing, Swanson & Bubandt, 2018). This aligns with a growing interest among tourists to explore stories of contemporary lives in the Arctic and indigenous communities and to engage with discussions on current challenges in the region (Kramvig & Førde, 2020: 13).

While the conceptualizations and practices of cohabitation and reconciliation are ongoing within most Arctic nations, the forms that these struggles take vary. Tourism research can not only research contrasts and similarities across Arctic experiences and practices, but also facilitate encounters that can move beyond identity politics by showing how indigeneity and Arctic culture and nature are entangled and enacted as multiple. This entails a reframing of culture that recognises the possibility of radical ontological difference that sustains a multiepistemic literacy, a "term [that] indicates learning and dialogue between epistemic worlds. Dialogue between a diversity of epistemic worlds works to enact a 'pluriversal world' a strategy for moving away from the universalizing and colonizing notion of the universe" (Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019, p. 65).

Such tools can help to open new spaces for alternative epistemologies and ontologies and new spaces for action where the doors are left open for the unexpected (Höckert & Grimwood, 2019), for instance in relation to indigenous knowledge and sustainability in times of ecological crisis. In this situation, we find it crucial to make space for Arctic and indigenous knowledge in sustainability discourse and to trace the repercussions of tourism as a geosocial force (Huijbens & Gren, 2016). This requires, as argued by Virtanen et al. (2020), a recognition of traditional, place-based knowledge of how to manage land-related, water-related, fire-related, and wind-related practices and resources (Virtanen et al 2020, p. 78). However, it is also important to critically engage with notions of tradition and "inherent resilience of indigenous people" (Reid, 2019, p. 13) in order not to further consolidate a particular "scripting of the Arctic and the life-worlds of indigenous people inhabiting it" (Reid, 2019)

A second trajectory trail, in our view, is to continue to *engage with questions on tourism and indigenous land governance as a matter of co-existence*. All over the Arctic, the tourism industry is a part of the human reshaping of the landscape. Facilitating tourism means building roads, railways, airports, hotels and resorts and bringing people and tourism activities into areas already filled with tensions and multiple interests, often posed around the (im)possibility to migrate through the land with/or following animals and sea-mammals. Disputes and conflicts regarding land management and land claims are one of the most important questions for many indigenous political bodies and communities. In this regard, stakes of tourism development are being played out in interplay with other industries and sectors. The halt of international travel due to COVID-19 may lessen the emphasis on tourism but as the Nordic Arctic regains it's attractiveness as a destination, the need to deal with diverse modes of co-existence lingers. It is important to engage with knowledge as

multiple and create space for otherness in respectful and sensitive ways. Challenging a 'one model fit all needs' entails however a need (and necessity) to rethink and do tourism following political ecologies rather than large-scale logics of extractive industries (Ren, Bjørst & Dredge, 2015). While it does not align with a growth paradigm, it strengthens alternative visions and futures.

Lastly, we call for *re-considering and expanding the notions of tourism and culture* by engaging with creativity, design and cultural innovations important in many Arctic and indigenous communities. Tourism and travelling is a world making practice (Wright, 2017), but so is hosting the travellers. This should inspire us to rethink and broaden the idea of what the object for a tourist-research study could be. Haraway (2016) encourages us to participate in the making of experimental (hi)stories and practices. Especially storytelling in many indigenous researches has already been perceived as significant and timely (see e.g., Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Guttorm, Kantonen & Kramvig, 2019). Storytelling is important for most Arctic and indigenous tourist providers; even though more careful attention is needed to understand what stories can - and cannot - be told and how.

Knowledge and the telling of stories are entangled, as knowledge is embedded in the epistemology and ontology of storytelling. Storytelling through art and design can offer these possibilities. We see an opportunity for tourism researchers - along with other tourism actors - to engage with stories that are told through Arctic and indigenous art, design, film, handicraft, as well as in the museums, galleries, festivals, workshops and institutions that are already engaged with these practices. Enhanced academic engagement could inspire and affect how communities and entrepreneurs continue to construct mutually meaningful communication between visitors and inhabitants and thus, enact new paths for local and indigenous tourism in the Nordic Arctic.

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