

Tourism in Sámi homeland area, Sápmi, has increased rapidly over the past years. As its development accelerates, the various impacts of its expansion are visible at Sámi sacred sites called sieidi. The best-known sacred sites have become popular nature-travel destinations. As visits to sacred sites increases, the essence of their sacredness is under threat because of vandalism and erosion. Sacred sites are not only places of cultural and historical significance, but they hold a great importance regarding the cultural heritage of the Sámi and sacred generational connections with ancestors, and the identities within Sámi communities. For this reason, the identification and thus, protection of sacred sites is a topical and important issue.

The subject matter of the research within this particular context is concerned with the impacts of tourism at Sámi sacred sites and in what ways culturally sensitive tourism can help prevent the impurifying effects of this service sector upon these revered places, which are being assimilated into the industry as it develops. The kind of impurifying effects include: physical, social and cultural forms of contamination upon the sieidis. Equally, and because tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in Sápmi, the prevention of possible repatriation of sacred sites and land needs to be taken seriously. The threats of other land-development projects are also a danger. Many areas where sacred sites are located are on current or former Sámi settlement areas. Where losses have occurred, it is important to keep in mind that the repatriation of land is no longer possible, when there is no more land.

As a concrete and topical example of the narrowing of living space and the dangers of land-use to sacred sites is the wind farm project “Davvi” of St1 in the Rástigáisá fell area in north Norwegian, Sápmi. The fell area is one of the last natural fell sites in Europe - and sacred to the Sámi community. The project represents green colonialism, which has deep roots in Sápmi. This subject is very timely, as at this present moment there are numerous mining reservations throughout Sápmi.

In several land-use conflicts the counterparts are the same: Metsähallitus (state enterprise that administers the state-owned land and water areas in Finland), the Sámi community and the global capitalistic force called ‘tourism’. It is vital for the sake of Sámi communities, cultures and languages that a study of the nature of the various conflicts between different forms of green colonialist forces with regard to threats directed towards sacred sites and other culturally important areas are collected. Therefore, by extending our understanding of

the far-reaching effects of land-use conflicts, generational negative effects to Sámi cultural heritage, which include Sámi languages, cultures and traditional livelihoods, further harm can be prevented.

It must also be noted how these land-use conflicts originate and the way companies operate represent a silent - behind the scenes type of industrial power. For example, this type of action happens when traditional reindeer herding grazing associations hear about land reservations for development from various sources rather than directly from the companies behind these operations. Moreover, leaving local Sámi communities outside from the decision making without inclusion and representation in decision-making, repeats mistakes made in the past, that have directly contributed towards creating generational damage to Sámi cultural heritage and related land-based practices and is a purposeful obstacle to any possible repatriation efforts.

This kind of destruction has happened in Sápmi for example in the 1960's, when a Finnish hydropower company Kemijoki Oy built Lokka and Porttipahta reservoirs and flooded six Sámi villages in the Sompio area. The local population of six hundred and fifty persons heard about the decision to build the reservoirs from the newspapers when the decisions to build them had already been made in secret. The flooding of Sompio and the loss of six Sámi villages and traditional land caused generational trauma and loss of notable pieces of Sámi cultural heritage. My own Sámi heritage lies in the flooded land of Sompio, and the generational trauma caused a breakage of cultural heritage in my family. For this reason, this subject is close to me, since our cultural landscapes and thus sacred sieidi sites are submerged under an artificial reservoir.

Within this research, I examine the possibilities of developing culturally sensitive tourism in Sápmi and its prospects for protecting sacred sites. Such protection could also include addressing purposeful constraints and hindrances implemented by industrial and tourism companies which are under-hand practices that are purposefully meant to interfere with the repatriation of sacred sites, land and water and the loss of cultural heritage, traditional livelihoods and languages. As a Sámi person myself, the protection of sacred sites and the shrouded prevention of the repatriation of land and cultural heritage is an important issue for me personally, and I feel a collective concern regarding these issues within the Sámi community.

Therefore, the aims of the research and purpose of my proposed article in relation to this particular subject matter are to provide more information in connection with developing tools which resolve to tackle the inappropriate and shady deals which are orchestrated in order to prevent the repatriation of sacred sites and thus land itself.

Furthermore, the main reason for striving to develop and implement culturally sensitive approaches to tourism advancement as well as the enhancement and subsequent application of research methods which will help to challenge these dysfunctional practices. Conversely, these initiatives will not only be developed and implemented in connection with threats to sacred sites, but approaches as such will challenge and revise how tourism in Lapland has been developed previously.

In addition to harm caused to sacred sites, the travel industry of Lapland has a history of exoticizing Sámi cultures and building harmful and even racist stereotypes within multiple contexts. This kind of damage and misrepresentation happens for example through what is known as a “Lappish ceremony”, which is a cheap form of entertainment within tourism activities, that usually include a fake shaman offering ‘blessings’ to individual or groups of visitors, which includes the usage of fake Sámi regalia (costumes, drums and handicrafts)[1].

As a part of striving to prevent the misuse of heritage, beliefs and practices belonging to Sámi cultures because of how they are firstly, misrepresented, and secondly, because they are harmful practices within tourism, cultural sensitivity should correspondingly, be integrated and applied within all the tourism industries methods and approaches to doing business. Especially when performing tourism activities which reflect or falsify practices that are still a major element within Sámi culture. Therefore, the need for education in connection with getting businesses to understand what cultural sensitivity is, is also a core value in terms of approach regarding this proposed research.

Appropriate research ethics and the consideration of the community are key elements in Sámi and indigenous research, and for this reason I strive to furthermore develop a culturally sensitive method by utilizing existing materials developed by indigenous scholars that have proven effective[2]. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to aim for minimal community burden and maximum community benefit.

The theoretical framework of the research is built within the paradigm of critical theory including what has already been mentioned regarding the need for a culturally sensitive approach. Applied methods are constructed from mixed methods, combining construction of knowledge by means of hermeneutic phenomenology. Existing knowledge of the research topic is previously built on my earlier work published under the title, “The conflict of sacred and contaminant: The impurifying effects of tourism in Sámi sacred sites” (2021). By way of approaches that help with the decolonization within indigenous research, the main objectives of indigenous research practices are to build knowledge from indigenous peoples’ own perspective, considering the needs of the community. For this reason, I feel that my position as a Sámi researcher makes it possible to study this important topic.

When discussing the protection of sacred sites, the topic of repatriation needs to be included in the narrative. Repatriation processes for the return of information about objects is a very topical issue in Sápmi, since The Finnish National Museum finished a repatriation process with Siida Sámi Museum in August 2021. Indigenous artifacts and generational cultural heritage are tied within the cultures, but in the heart of indigenous cultures are the traditional lands and waters, with which indigenous peoples and Sámi people are in symbiosis with. With the construction of state borders and settler colonialism, the rights of indigenous peoples have also been taken away from traditional lands and the pursuit of traditional livelihoods. Thus, future repatriation processes may potentially target land, water and sacred sites. The prevention of such repatriation is very important so that the connection to the land and thus to traditional livelihoods, cultural heritage and languages is not severed like mistakes made in history, as in the case of construction of the Lokka and Porttipahta reservoirs.

The management of sacred and culturally significant sites is also at the heart a matter regarding repatriation. In the summer of 2021, local tourism companies stopped landing on the sacred rock of Ukonkivi (Äjih in the Inari Sámi language) to honour the wishes of the local Sámi community. The voice of the local community had been brought up by Inari Sámi person Inka Musta and archeologist Eeva-Kristiina Harlin in an opinion piece published in Finland’s biggest press media Helsingin Sanomat.

After the publication of the opinion piece local Inarijärvi cruise-companies stopped landing on the rock and in this way ceased contaminating the sacred site physically, socially and

culturally. This case is a very illustrative example of the success of culturally sensitive tourism and the significant reduction in the contaminating effects of tourism, since the local companies reacted in a respectful way and stopped landing on the sacred rock. Due to the decisions of stopping the cruises, Metsähallitus also made the decision to take down the tourism infrastructure on the island to prevent people landing with their own vessels (Alareisto 2021). In the upcoming research I study the case of Ukonkivi and analyse the possibilities of successful culturally sensitive tourism protecting and preventing repatriation of Sámi sacred sites built on this earlier model.

References

Alariesto, Eleonora. 2021. *The Conflict of Sacred and Contaminant: The Impurifying Effects of Tourism in Sámi Sacred Sites*. Finnish Journal of Tourism Research. URL: https://www.academia.edu/53657566/The_conflict_of_sacred_and_contaminant_The_impurifying_effects_of_tourism_in_S%C3%A1mi_sacred_sites

Endnotes

[1] One good source where this is discussed is to be found in the scholarly work of Gunvor Guttorm. 2007. Duodji - Sami Handicrafts - Who Owns the Knowledge and the Works? In: Solbakk, John T. *Traditional Knowledge and Copyright*. Sámi kopijija, Karasjok. Waasa Graphics Oy: 61-94.

[2] From within Sámi research it is suggested to read the work of Gunvor Guttorm. 2011. *Árbediehtu* (Sámi Traditional Knowledge) - As a Concept and in Practice In: Porsanger, Jelena and Guttorm, Gunvor. (eds.) *Working with Traditional Knowledge: Communities, Institutions, Information Systems, Law and Ethics: Writings from the Árbediehtu Pilot Project on Documentation and Protection of Sami Traditional Knowledge*. Sámi Allaskuvla, Kautokeino: 59-76.