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Digital Sámi Culture Narratives in Tourism

Balancing Commercialization, Revitalization, and Sustainability?

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Cover Photo: Sámi reindeer herder from Kautokeino, Finnmark, 2021.

Photo by: Northern Norway Tourist Board, Marie Louise Somby.

Foreword

This master project marks the end of a six yearlong academic journey, and many people have influenced, challenged, and guided me along the way. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this project. This work is built on a long-standing acquaintance with Sámi tourism companies, and even though this is an online study, there are many who deserve a big thank you as they indirectly contributed to making this thesis a reality. I want to thank all Sámi companies in the Johtit network, who welcomed me as a project leader and shared their knowledge and thoughts.

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Abstract

Previous research has criticized companies and marketing organizations for portraying Sámi culture with a narrative of the pre-modern and the exotic. This qualitative study delves into representations of Sámi culture within the digital realm, examining visual and verbal content on Sámi tourism entrepreneur's websites. This study's focus is to investigate Sámi tourism entrepreneurs' own representations. Employing a content and narrative approach, seven Sámi tourism websites have been studied. Based on analyses of photos, videos, and written text on these websites', this master's thesis discusses digital narratives of Sámi culture that intricately blend elements of culture revitalization, modernization, and a pristine and vast natural landscape in combination with efforts to meet tourists' requests and interests.

This master's thesis contributes by shedding light on digital Sámi culture representations in a sustainability perspective, emphasizing cultural, environmental, and economic issues. The study underscores the potential of digital storytelling as a powerful tool for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs, allowing them to shape their own narratives based upon values of sustainability. However, to achieve sustainable representations a broader and more diverse representation of Sámi culture is essential as this could lead to new business opportunities, strengthening local communities and culture, preservation of nature, while at the same time influencing the creation of responsible tourists.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

I want to provide you, the reader, with some important background concerning Sámi culture and history in relation to tourism. The background is important for understanding potential challenges and possibilities that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs are facing.

The Sámi are the Indigenous people that primarily inhabits the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia (Nergård, 2006, p. 20). Sámi people have lived in close contact with nature for decades and earned their living by fishing, hunting, and/or reindeer herding (Benjaminsen et al., 2016; Dunfjeld, 1979; Jensen, 2019). Presentations of Sámi people often show them connected to a nomadic lifestyle, where people move according to seasons to exploit different nature resources and are especially linked to reindeer herding (Dunfjeld, 1979, p. 7). However, this is a description that does not cover entirely all of Sámi culture. Sámi people and culture are as varied and diverse, as any other cultures. There are different languages, traditions, gákti¹, and lifestyles. Some are nomadic reindeer herders, while others are Sea-Sámi, where the main income come from small-scale fishing or other work (Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019). In addition, there is a large amount of Sámi people that live and work in all types of professions all over Norway.

The Sámi people have experienced decades of colonization, assimilation, and discrimination, and Norwegian policies of “Norwegianization” have for centuries affected the Sámi population (Kramvig & Verran, 2019, p. 168). Sámi people were subjected to a process of forced assimilation, during which their language, culture, and way of life were suppressed in the name of national unity and modernization. According to Kramvig and Flemmen (2019, p. 72) the movement for Sámi rights was on the international agenda from 1970s and 1980s.

During the last 30-40 years, the Sámi people have worked to reclaim their cultural heritage and assert their rights as an Indigenous group. They have fought for the recognition of their language, culture, and traditions.

¹ Gákti is the northern-Sámi word for a piece of traditional clothing worn by the Sámi in northern areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. <https://samiskeveivisere.no/kofte/>

1.2 Introduction to the research topic

Tourism has experienced a significant expansion during the last 50 years, and has become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world (Croce, 2018, p. 218). Tourism has come to play an important part of the business development in the Arctic region, where nature has been the main attraction for a long time (Karlsdóttir, 2013). However, modern tourists coming to Northern Norway are not only interested in nature, encounters with the Indigenous Sámi people are also an important part of the journey (Mathisen, 2010).

Sámi tourism is defined by the Sámi parliament (Sametinget, 2023) as tourism where Sámi cultural elements constitute the main component of the activity. Sámi tourism is not a recent phenomenon; on the contrary, Sámi culture has long held and continues to hold great importance for the tourism industry in Norway (UIT, 2022). As early as the 1900s, Sámi culture was part of an international advertising industry. Western advertising pioneers “used” Sámi people as exotic props for several different products, including cruise voyages to Norway (Jensen, 2019).

Today, there has been a paradigm shift concerning marketing in tourism; there has been a move away from selling a product towards creating value based on customer needs (Bettencourt et al., 2014). Simultaneously, the world has become digitalized and now tourists use websites, Facebook, TripAdvisor, Instagram and travel blogs for inspiration and information about new travel destinations (Banyai & Glover, 2012).

The flow of information has thus changed, from when the tourism industry controlled the flow of information, with brochures and leaflets, to an online participation system where everything is open and easy accessible for public (Hayles, 2016; MacLaren et al., 2017). The digital media’s extensive reach allows narratives to reach a global audience, and this plays an important role in tourism. Digital narratives in tourism contribute collectively to an overall meta-narrative and this creates both possibilities and challenges, as Bruner (2005) says. Meta-narratives are not solely about conveying meaning but also about wielding power.

Previous research has indicated that tourists visiting the Arctic area expect to experience a remote and untouched nature in combination with old and pre-modern Sámi culture, where people live under more primitive conditions than the tourist (Karlsdóttir, 2013; Mathisen, 2010, p. 53). These expectations of encountering an ancient Sámi culture and exotic nature are shaped by a larger narrative framework, a meta-narrative, that plays a significant role in

shaping destinations and impacting tourists' behavior (Bruner, 2005). Narratives possess the capacity not only to depict reality, but also to actively contribute to the development of tourism, as discussed by several scholars (Asdal, 2015; Picard & Zuev, 2013).

The “power of voice” that meta-narratives consist of, is especially important to be aware of in relation to Indigenous tourism, because the voices of Indigenous companies are minimally represented in tourism, in particular in social media (Mkono, 2016, p. 1315). This means that Indigenous communities' own voices are underrepresented in digital narratives. The absence of Indigenous perspectives in social media is seen as a missed opportunity to correct cultural misunderstandings, clarify differences and speak for themselves (Mkono, 2016). In addition, the role of digital media as a platform for cultural negotiation remains a glaring gap in existing research (Mkono, 2016), hence there is a need for investigations of digital representations in Indigenous tourism.

In light of the above, I have been motivated to conduct research connected to how Sámi culture is presented in a tourism context, especially through digital narratives. Tourism is a socio-economic activity with the potential to influence in both positive and negative ways, and this also relates to what impacts and consequences digital narratives may have on Indigenous culture (Wright, 2017). Tourism researchers should therefore not only investigate the attractions in the tourism systems, but also address questions that allow for a focus on the underlying structures of the narratives that influence tourism attractions (Picard & Zuev, 2013). This means that the power and impact of digital narratives should also be studied from a sustainability perspective especially concerning environmental, economic, cultural and social aspects (Karlsdóttir, 2013).

This master thesis novelty is related to the analysis of Sámi tourism companies' own digital stories. Through my analysis I will offer an understanding of how Sámi tourism entrepreneurs represent their culture in a modern and digital context, with images and words. I focus my research for this master thesis on digital narratives, and more specifically narratives on Sámi tourism websites.

The aim for this project, is to study online representations of Sámi culture, through a content and narrative analysis of Sámi tourism websites and discuss the potential implications of these representations. I will contribute with knowledge on how these Sámi tourism entrepreneurs

present their tourism businesses and products and which implications these representations may have in terms of sustainable development.

1.3 Research question

As an overarching question for my project, I ask which representations of Sámi culture are created on Sámi tourism entrepreneurs' websites?

As part of this I have several sub-questions:

- Which narratives are presented via visual and verbal elements?
- Which type of tourist is created through these narratives?
- What are the implications for sustainability of these representations of Sámi culture?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I commence with a review of relevant literature which speaks of understandings of the concept of tourist gaze and the search for otherness within tourism, as the academic field of understanding tourism as a phenomenon has developed during the last decades (Bruner, 2005; MacCannell, 1999 ; Park, 2014; Urry & Larsen, 2011b). I elaborate on the motivations tourists may have in relation to experiencing Indigenous tourism. I discuss the theoretical perspectives of the search for otherness and authenticity (Bernardi, 2019; Park, 2014). I also present theory of narratives and elaborate on how digital narratives are part of a larger meta-narrative, as the overall understanding of a culture or a destination and I discuss how narratives of Sámi tourism websites may influence the representations of a culture. Especially, if a supplier selectively is focusing on certain aspects, simplifying or exoticizing the culture or commodifying it (Bernardi, 2019; Bruner, 2005). Representations can impact how a culture is perceived, portrayed, and consumed by tourists, and could also have implications for the cultural development in terms of sustainable development.

In Chapter 3, I address methodological aspects of this project including my personal interest in Sámi tourism and digital narratives. Further, I elaborate on the methodological approach for the assignment and the choice of method is described, including selection of data sources and criteria. I also explain how I have collected and analyzed data and describe the choices I have made during the research process. As part of this I also reflect on my own perceptions and discuss my position as a non-Sámi researcher.

Chapter 4 entails a discussion and analysis of findings in relation to the theoretical review. In this chapter, I also offer some reflections on the heuristic value of my findings. Finally, in Chapter 5, I summarize findings and discussion in a concluding remark and provide suggestions for further collaboration and development of Sami tourism marketing and possibilities for further research.

2 Literature and theoretical framework

In this project I have been interested in studying representations of Sámi culture that are created through visuals and verbal elements on Sámi tourism entrepreneurs' websites. In this chapter I present theory and previous research that I find relevant in relation to the main research question and sub-questions.

I first explore the tourist gaze, the search for otherness and authenticity. I find it relevant, because this is an important part of the overall context and background for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs to operate in. Next, I elaborate on literature and relevant research concerning the nature of narratives, and the power of digital narratives. Finally, I elaborate on theory concerning Indigenous and Sámi culture representations and investigate the potential implications these representations may have in relation to a sustainable tourism development.

2.1 The touristic gaze and the “search for otherness”

There seems to be a general opinion among key researchers in the field of tourism studies that tourism is fundamentally based upon the need for experiencing and “gazing” on something different from ordinary life (Urry & Larsen, 2011a). Urry and Larsen (2011a) describe the tourist gaze as related to the way we look at landscapes, environment or cultures with interest and curiosity. The way tourist's “gaze” or engage with a destination is influenced by various factors: their own cultural background, expectations, and desires, but also the way a destination is presented and marketed to them (Urry & Larsen, 2011b). Bruner (2005) critiques the idea of the tourist gaze as a one-way process in which tourists consume, and locals are consumed, and highlights the agency of local people in shaping the tourist experiences and the dynamic interactions between tourists and locals.

Another scholar, Park (2014, p. 38) argues that tourists are not merely passive consumers of destination images, but “active participants” who negotiate and construct their own meanings and experiences of and at a destination. In other words, the tourist gaze is more than a passive act of observing. It is an active and social process of looking, interpreting and constructing meaning being influenced by the context you are in and the people you meet. The theory of the tourist gaze is relevant for the purpose of this study because it makes me conscious of what I “see” goes beyond passive observation. It also highlights how a tourist, or a reader of these websites, actively interpret and construct meaning based on personal and cultural backgrounds, interactions, and expectations.

In addition to the tourist gaze, the concept of authenticity is closely related to tourism as a phenomenon, because authenticity is often viewed as a key factor in the satisfaction of tourist experiences. According to MacCannell (1999), authenticity is the main motivation and reason for tourists to travel to places.

Authenticity has long been debated among scholars especially when it comes to heritage tourism (Bernardi, 2019; Park, 2014). Heritage tourism is today an important part of the tourism industry worldwide, and takes as its starting point “intangible and tangible remnants of the past that are used to produce something new in the present” (Park, 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, Park (2014, p. 1) argues that: “heritage is not a fixed or static outcome of the past, particularly when it is presented and represented in the context of tourism”. This means that, culture, and heritage is not a product, but a raw material/resource that must be processed and made available to an audience to become a tourism experience. In other words, heritage is not static but constantly changing, something reconstructed and reinterpreted in the attempt to meet the tourists needs and must be understood as a concept open for interpretations.

According to contemporary researchers we are not able to label cultures as authentic or inauthentic (Bruner, 2005; Wang, 1999). The concept of authenticity is related to a subjective feeling according to Wang (1999, p. 351), and defines an authentic experience as; “one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a real world and with their real selves”. Further, Wang argues that even if an object is regarded as inauthentic it still may feel authentic due to a subjective point of view.

Another researcher within tourism, Bernardi (2019) argues that authenticity is neither objective nor subjective, but performative, which means that authenticity of a place is related to the interaction between people, and between people and objects. Park (2014) further emphasizes that especially within heritage tourism, tourist are not only passive but active participants and co-creators of heritage experiences.

Several scholars have contributed to a critical perspective on authenticity in tourism that emphasizes the challenges. The authentic experience pursuit can sometimes lead to a romanticized or commodified version of culture that does not accurately reflect local realities (Bruner, 2005; MacCannell, 1999; Wang, 1999). The pursuit of authenticity in tourism can then potentially have negative consequences. Especially Indigenous cultures and communities are often exoticized and stereotyped in the pursuit of authenticity, which can reduce them to a

set of cultural symbols or attractions (Bernardi, 2019). This means that the touristic quest for authenticity can be exploitative, or even damaging, to local communities and cultures. It can reinforce harmful stereotypes and perpetuate misunderstandings, which can negatively impact the way tourists view and interact with indigenous tourism companies.

Even if scholars may disagree about the meaning and concept of authenticity, tourists are attracted to destinations that are perceived as authentic, as these places are often seen as offering more valuable and meaningful experiences (Bernardi, 2019; Cohen, 1988; Cohen & Cohen, 2012). This means that tourists often seek out experiences that offer a sense of genuineness, and uniqueness and in this case, authenticity is an important aspect in marketing because it can be used to differentiate a destination, or a company, from others and to create a distinctive brand identity. In the context of this master study on Sámi culture representations, understanding the complexity of authenticity is important, as it influences how tourists engage with and value the narratives that are presented to them.

2.2 Evolving motivations for experiencing Sámi culture

While heritage tourism is defined as present day use of the past (Park, 2014), Indigenous tourism has no universally accepted definition. According to Mkono (2016, p. 1317), Indigenous tourism is a complex and multidimensional concept that cannot be defined. However, according to Hinch and Butler (1996, p. 9); “the term Indigenous people is used to describe races of people who are endemic or native to a destination region as opposed to “ethnic” communities who may inhabit an area they have migrated to”. Indigenous tourism is further described by Hinch and Butler (1996), as related to activities in which Indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction.

Sámi tourism is part of a worldwide Indigenous tourism industry. Recent surveys carried out by Northern Norway Tourist Board (2022) show that Sámi culture is particularly interesting among tourists visiting Northern Norway. Sámi culture in a tourism context is not a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, Sámi culture has long held, and continues to hold, great importance for the tourism industry in Norway. Already early in the 20th century, Sámi culture had become a part of the international advertising industry, where Western advertising pioneers used Sámi people as exotic props in advertisements for several different products (Jensen, 2019). According to Jensen (2019), Sámi individuals were depicted wearing traditional clothing, such as colorful gákti, showcasing a picturesque image of a remote and

fascinating culture and nature. This means that Sámi people have been “utilized” to sell various products and tourism experiences for centuries.

As the advertising industry became more globalized, Sámi culture found its place in international tourism marketing campaigns, brochures, and postcards (Olsen, 2004; VisitNorway, 2023). The breathtaking landscapes of the Sámi region, with snow-covered plains and vast wilderness, were showcased alongside images of Sámi reindeer herders, sleds, and lávvu². The appeal of the Sámi people’s traditional way of life, their connection with nature, and their reindeer herding practices became prominent selling points. This has also been particularly evident in advertisements promoting tourism to Norway, and is still relevant in marketing today (Olsen & Pashkevich, 2023; VisitNorway, 2023). This means that from the early 1900s to the present day, Sámi culture has been extensively marketed and portrayed as exotic and represented through otherness, romanticism and authenticity forming a crucial part of tourism strategies to attract visitors.

The interest in Indigenous culture has also been of importance to tourism scholars. In the past few decades, several scholars have participated in discussions of Indigenous and Sámi tourism-related issues (Bernardi, 2019; Bruner, 2005; Mathisen, 2010; Mkono, 2016). Mathisen (2010, p. 56) points out that “tourists have a desire to visit old and pre-modern cultures, where people live under more “primitive” conditions in close contact with nature and its forces”. Mathisen (2010) emphasizes that the search for Sámi culture experience can be seen as a search for otherness, something different from everyday life, where Western tourists see themselves as part of a modern and “civilized” world and “other” cultures are regarded as exotic and pre-modern.

However, according to Park (2019), the search for otherness may not be the only motivation for experiencing Sámi culture. Park (2014) explains that the search for cultural experiences is not only connected to tourists’ need to gaze upon other cultures or a search for something different from their everyday life, but also related to the need to find similarities and connections to their own life here and now.

² Lávvu is the Northern-Sámi word for Sámi tent, <https://norskfolkemuseum.no/sameplassen>

Park's (2014) perspective indicates that there has been a development from Urry and Larsen's theory (2011b) of the tourist gaze and search for otherness as the only motivation for tourism, towards a more complex and personal level of motivation for experiencing different cultures. This development may also be seen as related to a change in how tourism is conceptualized more broadly, from being considered manufacturing to being understood within a service-based economy that has influenced both the request and consumption of heritage in contemporary societies (Park, 2014, p. 19).

Experience-based tourism has increased significantly since the turn of the millennium (Pedersen, 2015). In today's tourism market, customers have varying needs and interests concerning tourism experiences. Customers of today take products and good service for granted, want custom made experiences and are willing to pay for this extra value (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Along with this, there has been a paradigm shift concerning marketing, from a goods-dominant logic towards a customer-centric logic (Bettencourt et al., 2014). This means that traditionally, marketing has primarily focused on promoting and selling physical products (goods-dominant logic). However, according to Bettencourt et al. (2014) during the last 50 years, there has been a fundamental shift in perspective, and marketing now places a much greater emphasis on understanding and meeting the needs and preferences of customers (customer-centric logic). In other words, tourism has moved from simply pushing products to actively engaging with and satisfying the desires and demands of individual customers, recognizing that providing value to customers is at the core of successful marketing strategies (Bettencourt et al., 2014).

The experience is the "reason to go", in other words the driving force to travel to a place. An experience can be understood as the sum of a person's subjective experience, which is influenced by thoughts, feelings, motives, and context (Pedersen, 2012). The search for experiences on a more personal level is also described as a search for transformation (Pedersen, 2012). According to Mathisen (2010, pp. 56-57), when tourists are visiting Northern Norway, they do not only cross geographical boundaries, they also want to cross boundaries of time – like a "rite of passage". The "rite of passage" can be understood as a search for transformation that has been compared to Pilgrim tourism, where people travel to participate in experiences that change you, and you reenter the everyday life as a new person with new perspectives.

The search for something out of the ordinary and transformative experiences are not the only motivation for visiting Northern Norway. According to Northern Norway Tourist Board (2023) customers can be divided into several target groups and segments, also referred to as persona, based upon interests, needs, and context for the journey. A persona is a description of a fictional guest (an archetype). It can be a typical guest you are already familiar with or a guest you wish to attract in the future. This guest is described with interests, behavior, and needs, as well as demographic variables. One such persona, according to Northern Norway Tourist Board (2023), is named “Culture enthusiast”. This persona is motivated by learning and experiencing cultural attractions/products at a destination and has a high interest in history, including food, and local people.

Another segment that tourism actors in Northern Norway have a large interest in is the “Nature enthusiast” (Northern Norway Tourist Board, 2023). For this segment it is particularly important to experience untouched nature, and these tourists are generally interested in outdoor activities, health, and sports. Activities can be physically demanding, and they score significantly above average when it comes to wanting to push their own limits and challenge themselves.

These personas are only two of many different segments that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs must relate to. In other words, contemporary tourists are not one homogenic group of people, and this means that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs operate in a changing tourism environment. They do not only sell one product to all, but they are part of a supply chain of value-creating experiences for several different target groups (Bettencourt et al., 2014; Vargo & Lush, 2007).

For my project, the understanding of persona and different motivations for travelling are important aspects. Tourists wish, to a lesser degree, to be spectators of nature and culture, but increasingly demand experiences that provide value on a deeper and more interactive level. This insight helps me contextualize and interpret the representations created through Sámi tourism websites. I can use this knowledge as a framework for analyzing how these websites convey Sámi culture and nature, how narratives cater to the motivations and preferences of different types of tourists and what kind of tourist is created, or called for, through these narratives.

The search and request for authentic culture experiences may be influenced by narratives (Bruner, 2005). Narratives are powerful tools for constructing meanings, identities, and representations in a tourism context and I will further describe theory of narratives and how these narratives could play an important part for both the tourism company and the tourist.

2.3 The nature of narratives

Narratives are often associated with stories that play an important part in the lives of those who tell them. It is a way for people to capture and relate the things they experience in their world (Hollihan & Riley, 1987). Narratives and stories are sometimes used interchangeably, but there are some differences. A story has a beginning and an end. It is defined as a description of a “limited and coherent sequence of events” (Johannesen et al., 2018, p. 97).

Stories often have a message or a point/moral directly or indirectly (Johannesen et al., 2011, pp. 104-105). This means that while story refers to a sequence of events or incidents, narrative encompasses a broader framework of meaning that includes the structure, form, interpretation, and context of stories. Further, stories are specific, self-contained accounts of events, while narratives are larger frameworks that provide meaning and significance to stories and can encompass multiple stories or experiences.

Narratives are powerful means to create tourists attractions (Bendix, 2002) and for constructing meanings, identities, and representations in a tourism context and “an important reason for analyzing narratives is that they have “power over how we think and act” (Johannesen et al., 2018, p. 107). In other words, when we communicate, we present our perspectives. How the reader perceives the narrative can be different from what the writer intended.

2.3.1 Digital narratives

Today we live in a digitalized world, where the Internet plays an important part in our lives, and tourists use Facebook, TripAdvisor, Instagram, websites and travel blogs for inspiration of new travel destinations (MacLaren et al., 2017). Digital narratives are created and published via digital media, such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. These narratives often incorporate multimedia elements, such as graphics, photos, videos, and audio, to enhance the storytelling experience (Hayles, 2016).

Internet has become an increasingly important source of information and inspiration for travelers planning their trips (Sigala, 2009; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Websites consist of online images and texts, which not only describe reality, but also take part in modifying and transforming the reality out there (Asdal, 2015). According to Mkono (2016) the use of digital media has grown rapidly in the last decade and is an important “channel” for narratives and representations of Indigenous culture. However, digital narratives also offer new possibilities for Indigenous representations, and could entail possibilities for Indigenous voices to be heard (Mkono, 2016). This means that a rich number of narratives today are presented online and consist of both verbal and visual content that influences the reader and could also play an important role in shaping how destinations or Indigenous cultures are presented and consumed.

2.3.2 Visual and verbal narratives

Photos and video play an important part in digital narratives. Photos as research data, however, have been viewed with suspicion and considered unreliable in social science research among several researcher “because photographs represent a choice of one out of countless moments in time and space” (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019, p. 204). This being said, there is little evidence to support these beliefs according to Balomenou and Garrod (2019). On the contrary Balomenou and Garrod (2019) emphasize the importance of photography in the tourism industry and its increasing role in the digital age (e.g., internet photo-sharing and the popularity of selfies).

Furthermore, Balomenou and Garrod (2019) argue that photographs have the power to “prove” and “move” in ways that verbal or textual data cannot. Through their visual language, photos possess the extraordinary power to inform, inspire, and leave a lasting impact on those who engage with them. In addition, photos can serve as catalysts for change, shining a light on social injustices, environmental issues, or human triumphs (Ferdous, 2014). This means that photos and videos are especially important as part of the narrative presented online and hence also for researchers interested in narratives. Visual narratives could hold immense influence, shaping viewers’ perceptions of the world and have the potential to raise awareness, empathy, and mobilize individuals and communities.

Following this, it becomes important to analyze how visual elements, particularly photographs, are employed as part of such narratives on Sámi tourism websites to convey representations of Sámi culture. It highlights the importance of visuals in influencing

perceptions, invoking emotions, and creating a meaningful and impactful interaction with potential tourists.

While visuals and videos engage our senses and emotions, the written word “take part in working upon, modifying and transforming reality” (Asdal, 2015, p. 74). This means that documents, such as text, are not passive and neutral descriptions of an external reality it also plays an active role in shaping, altering, and influencing that reality. Text has the power to impact and change the situations or aspects it describe. This perspective highlights the idea that text also hold the potential to affect people’s perceptions and behaviors. Written narratives are understood as a tool for communicating experience, but also for creating meaning of/from experience (Asdal, 2015).

In summary, the relevance of incorporating both visual and verbal elements in my study lies in the potential to offer a more comprehensive analysis of digital representation of Sámi culture, since multiple data sources can help to enrich the analysis and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the narratives.

2.3.3 The power of narratives

A meta-narrative is a grand or overarching narrative that provides a framework for understanding an experience or a story. It is a narrative about narratives, meaning that it refers to the way in which stories are told and assumptions that underlie them. Bruner (2005) introduces the term meta-narratives as the important element in tourism experiences. Bruner (2005) makes a distinction between meta-narratives and the stories told by tourists; “meta-narratives are the largest conceptual frame within which tourism operates, meta-narratives are not only structures of meaning but structures of power” (Bruner, 2005, p. 21).

Furthermore, a meta-narrative has the power to influence the way tourists interpret their journey and how they interact with destinations, and are often managed by some suppliers to create settings that are in line with the meta-narrative with the aim of keeping the narrative alive for a business purpose (Bruner, 2005; Picard & Zuev, 2013). Picard and Zuev (2013) argue that the meta-narrative already exist in the tourist imaginary before going on the journey, leading tourists to specific sites. These scholars argue that embodied and incorporated knowledge lead to specific form of engagement with places (Picard & Zuev, 2013). This is exemplified through the case of tourism in Antarctica, which entails powerful narratives about wildlife, expeditions, and pristine nature.

Further, Picard and Zuev (2013) argue that the success of a tourism destination depends upon their ability to create settings that are in line with the meta-narrative. The narrative of the pristine nature, untouched by humans is “kept alive” by the suppliers of the journey for a business purpose, with less concern for the environmental issues of the modern world (Picard & Zuev, 2013). The meta-narrative has the power to influence not only the creation of a destination but also influence tourists’ consumption of a place. In other words, a meta-narrative can be a powerful tool for shaping both our understanding of and the attraction of a tourism destination. This means that suppliers, of a tourist company or a destination, have the power to influence through narratives, staging experiences to be able to create settings that are in line with the meta-narrative.

Importantly, meta-narrative is not only a powerful tool for shaping our understanding of a destination, but it can also be limiting. A meta-narrative can be used to justify dominant power structures and suppress other voices or cultures, as they tend to exclude or marginalize other perspectives or other narratives (Picard & Zuev, 2013).

Incorporating this perspective into my study encourages me to critically analyse the narratives presented on tourism websites, because of their potential impact on tourists’ perceptions and behaviours, and also on the creation of a destination. It offers a lens through which I can examine how Sámi culture is represented, consumed, and potentially transformed in the context of tourism.

2.4 Representations of Sámi culture

Narratives create representations that can impact how a culture is perceived, portrayed, and consumed by tourists, and could also have implications for the Sámi cultural development (Bruner, 2005; Picard & Zuev, 2013). Research on narratives of Sámi culture, particularly in the context of digital narratives within Sámi tourism, is scarce. However, there are some valuable findings from a digital study of Sámi tourism companies in Swedish Sápmi that are highly relevant for my study. I will also add findings from other studies and literature that provide insightful findings regarding narratives and representations of Sámi culture within the context of tourism. It is of relevance to include previous research on narratives and literature on portrayal of Sámi culture as they contribute to a deeper understanding of what shapes representation of Sámi culture in a current tourism industry context.

2.4.1 Premodern and exotic representations of Sámi culture

The attraction of the northern regions has long been shaped by captivating narratives and a romanticized perception of the close relationship between humans and the wilderness. The narrative of the exotic and out of ordinary have been strategically employed for marketing purposes, aiming to attract tourists and boost economic development in rural areas (Abram & Lund, 2016; Karlsdóttir, 2013; Keskitalo et al., 2021; Mathisen, 2010).

Several researchers have criticized the way in which local Sámi culture and people are portrayed with the purpose to attract tourists (Bernardi, 2019; Mathisen, 2010; Olsen, 2004; Wright, 2017). Research within Sápmi has shown a lack of respect and sensitivity for the cultural representations of Sámi people (Saari et al., 2020). Mathisen (2010, p. 53) has studied presentation and images of Sámi culture in Sápmi Park in Karasjok in Northern Norway, and he concludes that “everything is organized around the idea to sell the experience of an old, vanishing and exotic culture”. This means that Sámi culture has been used for economic purposes, by private companies without ownership in Sámi culture.

Findings from research of Sámi entrepreneurs websites from Swedish part of Sápmi, also points out that traditional cultural representations are used to create a sense of otherness and attract tourists: “people are not primitive anymore but they act as such for economic gain” (Bernardi, 2019, p. 252). In other words, what Bernardi (2019) points out is that Sámi tourism companies also strive to meet customers' expectations, mirroring the way Sámi culture has been represented for centuries, for economic purposes.

Representations of Sámi culture as exotic and pre-modern come with some challenges according to Wright (2017), as it generates expectations among tourists to encounter something “authentic”. If a supplier selectively focuses on certain aspects, simplifying or exoticizing the culture, commodifying it, this could lead to a meta-narrative that does not match reality. This, in turn, presents difficulties for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs in their interactions with visitors, because the exotic and pre-modern image associated with Sámi culture does not align with the perspectives of all Sámi individuals, as they, like the wider population, have embraced modernity and adapted to the evolving world (Wright, 2017).

The point made by Wright (2017) is supported by Bernardi (2019, p. 249), who says that: “representations have often involved colonial images and descriptions that are no longer corresponding to the contemporary situation”. Furthermore, Bernardi (2019) argues that there

is no single authentic Sámi culture, because Sámi culture, just like as all cultures, is constantly changing and being reinvented.

For the purpose of this thesis, the most important issue highlighted in these scholars' discussions is the problematic representation of Sámi culture in tourism contexts. This includes how Sámi culture is strategically constructed for marketing purposes, often leading to portrayals that emphasize exoticism, pre-modernity, and a romanticized connection with nature. Scholars (Bernardi, 2019; Wright, 2017) emphasize the need for accurate and respectful representation that considers the dynamic and evolving nature of Sámi culture. It holds significant relevance for my study because it offers valuable perspectives on the intricacies of representation and power dynamics.

2.4.2 Evolving perspectives of Sámi culture representations

There are also studies that indicate that representations of Sámi culture include more than pre-modern representations. It is argued that even if narratives are based upon otherness and experience of another time, it is also connected to a narrative of Sámi people as representatives of nature and sustainability. This means that Sámi culture has been depicted not only as primitive but also as an idealized expression of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, providing an alternative model to the resource exploitation observed in modern Western civilization (Mathisen, 2010).

Mathisen's work (2010), for example, reflects this perspective. Mathisen (2010, p. 53) says that: "the Sámi stands out as representative of a life lived in close contact with nature, and as carriers of an Indigenous spirituality that reflects a deep concern for the environment and for the powers found in nature". Furthermore, he describes the Sámi people as embodying a lifestyle deeply connected to nature, emphasizing their Indigenous spirituality that values environmental harmony and the forces of nature. Following this perspective, the Sámi are not only seen as representatives of a historical past, but also as a contemporary expression of a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. This stands in contrast to the resource-driven exploitation often associated with modern Western civilization.

In essence, these scholars are suggesting that new representations of Sámi culture acknowledge their role as protectors of nature and proponents of sustainable practices. This more balanced and modern view seeks to transcend outdated portrayals and presents a Sámi culture that is not confined to the past but resonates with contemporary environmental

concerns and values. It enriches my study's depth and enables me to critically assess whether the websites encompass a wider spectrum of representations. It introduces an alternative perspective on how Sámi culture is represented in tourism websites. It suggests that beyond the common narratives of exoticism and pre-modernism, Sámi culture can also be depicted as a representation of sustainability. Because tourism is described as a socio-economic activity with the potential to influence both positively and negatively, it is essential to examine tourism not only from an attraction perspective but also with a focus on narratives that shape the attraction itself (Picard & Zuev, 2013). Especially concerning what impacts and consequences digital narratives may have on the culture and people in question.

I will further elaborate on possible impacts of representations of Sámi Culture in a tourism context, in particular the potential implications these representations may have in terms of sustainable development.

2.5 Sustainable representations in a digital era

In recent years, sustainability has been on the agenda across markets. Tourists are increasingly interested in taking responsibility for the climate, nature, and the local culture when they travel. Awareness has been building up over time and was further reinforced during the pandemic (Nielsen, 2022).

Sustainable tourism is defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host community” (Saarinen, 2014, p. 3). According to the Bruntland report (WCED, 1987)³: “sustainable development aims to minimize the negative and maximise the positive social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism in destinations communities”. Considering this understanding of sustainability, sustainable tourism development can be seen as tourism that aims to make places better to both live in and visit.

³ WCDE is a shortversion of World Commision on Environment and Development, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/wced>

Tourism is argued to be an effective tool for realizing sustainable Indigenous development. Indigenous tourism “provides opportunities to realize unique, often innovative developments or managements approaches that can be very beneficial to Indigenous people” (Carr et al., 2016, p. 1075). However, Carr et al. (2016) also emphasize that to realize sustainable Indigenous development, a holistic perspective is important including governance, collaboration and embedding Indigenous values and worldviews into tourism development. This means that Indigenous tourism development must be built upon sustainable principles, respect, and cooperation. This is though necessary to get positive outcomes with any tourism destination and company.

Furthermore, in relation to Sámi tourism development, representation of culture must be in line with sustainable principles representing Sámi tourism in ways that empower and support the communities, including economic, social, environmental, cultural, and political aspects (Carr et al., 2016). Sustainability holds significant relevance for my study since narratives have the power to influence tourist perception and engagement with a destination. This means that the potential impacts of digital narratives should be studied from a holistic sustainable perspective, because it offers valuable perspectives on how representations impact environmental, cultural, and social aspects (Karlsdóttir, 2013).

2.5.1 Narratives - a tool for revitalization or exploitation

There are contrasting views regarding the impact of tourism on nature, Indigenous people, and their culture. According to Carr et al (2016, p. 1068): “Indigenous tourism is commonly viewed as a means of facilitating socio-economic benefits to Indigenous individuals, communities and host regions”. This means that in general, Indigenous tourism is seen as a means to bring about positive social and economic outcomes. However, tourism companies have been critiqued for being more concerned with economic growth than the environmental, cultural and social sustainability (Wickens et al., 2015). One well-known perspective suggests that tourism functions as a form of neocolonialism, exploiting the local population while others argue that tourism revitalizes and energizes the culture (Bruner, 1991, p. 246). I will further look into both perspectives in relation to representations of Indigenous and Sámi culture.

2.5.1.1 Commodification of culture – a treat and a possibility

Commodification is a process where history and cultural heritage are refined into a commercial and saleable product for an economic purpose and this may have both positive and negative impacts (Park, 2014). This process has been critiqued by several researcher, as Park argues:

In the context of tourism development, heritage often becomes a commercially driven entity that is carefully selected, packaged, and promoted. Heritage tourism is therefore accused of packaging and commodifying the past and turning it into a tourist kitsch. (Park, 2014, p. 16)

Along similar lines, Bruner (2005) argues that tourism has increasingly influenced local cultures and their representation and explores the impacts of commodification on local communities and the implications for cultural identity. Bruner (2005) discusses how commercialization of culture can lead to the loss of traditional practices and the erosion of local cultural values. He highlights the potential consequence of commodification and argues that this process often simplifies and stereotypes cultures, presenting them as static and exotic for the tourist gaze (Bruner, 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, Bruner (2005) emphasizes that representations of culture are constructed and shaped to cater to the expectations and desires of tourists, thus often emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying or omitting others.

Put differently, Park (2014) and Bruner (2005) are both tackling the intricate nature and outcomes of commodification, specifically in terms of how it shapes the presentation and encounter of cultural heritage within the realm of tourism. The predominant concern associated with this phenomenon revolves around actions that oversimplify cultures, rendering them as exotic attractions for tourists, designed to cater to tourist preconceptions, sometimes disregarding vital components. In essence, commodification can compromise traditional practices, impacting cultural identity.

Bernardi (2019) also argues that commodification of Indigenous cultures can result in a reduction of their uniqueness, as they are transformed to meet the demands of tourists. Commodification of Indigenous cultures in the pursuit of authenticity can result in the exploitation of local communities and resources. This can occur when tourism companies prioritize profit over the well-being of the community, leading to environmental degradation, over-tourism, and other negative impacts (Bernardi, 2019).

An obvious pitfall is when commodification and development take place on “other people’s” terms rather than the industry itself, this means the culture and the actors are more depleted than enriched in the long term. This is especially relevant when the culture presented is linked to a group in society that has been subjected to discrimination and assimilation, which applies to the Sámi population (Wright, 2017). These findings and discussions about commodification are relevant to be aware of when discussing how Sámi culture is portrayed and for reflecting on the costs of potentially simplifying or exoticizing culture to cater to tourists’ expectations. Importantly, the discussions on neocolonialism, exploitation, and the potential loss of cultural uniqueness also provide insights into the challenges faced by Indigenous cultures in the tourism industry. Incorporating these perspectives in my theoretical framework allows me to critically examine how Sámi culture is presented on tourism websites.

One way to avoid negative impacts of representations and commercialization is, according to Wright (2017), to focus on the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs’ own values and history. Wright (2017) argues:

By working with the values that Sámi tourism wants to convey, it may be easier to create good and innovative products around these and convey them without being afraid that the staging is not authentic enough. The focus on the values one wants to convey then makes it suddenly about much more than tourism. It is about awareness-raising processes among the actors about their own identity and cultural heritage, and it is about conveying knowledge to future generations. (Wright, 2017, p.33)

This quote from Wright (2017) shows that there is not necessarily anything negative about commercialization, as long as it is based on Sámi entrepreneurs’ own values and ownership. When discussing representations of Sámi tourism, it certainly reminds us to reflect on representations that the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs create themselves.

In other words, Wright (2017) suggests a strategy to counteract the negative impacts of portraying and commercializing Indigenous heritage. This approach entails emphasizing the values and history of Sámi tourism entrepreneurs. Wright’s (2017) argument revolves around aligning with the values Sámi tourism wishes to uphold, enabling the creation of authentic and innovative products while avoiding concerns of inauthenticity.

This approach extends beyond tourism, fostering self-awareness and understanding of identity and cultural heritage among the stakeholders, and transmitting knowledge to future generations. The quote highlights that commercialization, when rooted in the values and ownership of Sámi entrepreneurs, need not be negative. Instead, it can serve as a positive contribution to ensuring that cultural heritage and knowledge is passed on to the next generation.

In addition to research by Wright (2017), more recent research also points out both negative and positive impacts of commodification of Sámi culture. According to Kramvig and Smedseng (2022, p. 27): “both colonization and commercialization have led to Sámi knowledge traditions being lost and to Sámi culture being represented in ways that people do not recognize, and which do not reflect the variety of Sámi societies”. Furthermore, these scholars (2022) emphasize that Sámi culture is dynamic and not static, and that representation of Sámi culture should reflect diversity, living culture, and values rather than perpetuating the notion of Sámi as the exotic other. Today, Sámi people and heritage consist of a diversity of identities and culture expressions, in which the modern Sámi community includes of local communities, families and individuals with different ways of being Sámi and different Sámi languages (Nergård, 2006, p. 21).

Furthermore, Kramvig and Smedseng (2022) argue that the portrayal of Sámi culture as exotic and pre-modern has led to the loss of Sami knowledge traditions and misrepresented the diverse Sámi communities. However, Kramvig and Smedseng (2022, p. 27) also emphasize that storytelling and representations of Sámi culture can include positive impacts, revitalizes and energizes the culture and that; “storytelling has also proven to have far greater significance beyond building experiences to create more value for the tourist”. The study by Kramvig and Smedseng (2022, p. 14) show that Sámi entrepreneurs hold Sámi culture, history, and knowledge as the pivotal and motivating factor behind the establishment of tourism businesses.

Both Kramvig and Smedseng (2022) and Wright (2017) share the same concern about the negative effects of misrepresenting and commercializing culture. However, Wright’s (2017) focus seems to be on aligning commercialization with the values and history of the culture itself to avoid inauthenticity, while Kramvig and Smedseng (2022) stress the importance of accurately representing the dynamic and diverse nature of Sámi culture, challenging stereotypes, and revitalizing the culture through storytelling.

In addition, Wright (2017) highlights that it is necessary to direct the spotlight on who creates representations of Indigenous people. It is necessary to emphasize on where these representations come from, and how they are transformed and redefined in the present situation and according to power relations. This means that in a culturally sustainable tourism development, representations must be made, accepted, and controlled from a local Sámi perspective.

The power of voice in storytelling is also addressed by the Australian researcher Mkono (2016). This scholar argues that the voices of Indigenous tour operators/companies were minimally represented in tourism social media “ this is regarded as a missed opportunity to correct cultural misconceptions and clarify differences, to speak for themselves, creating a stronger, more assertive online voice” (Mkono, 2016, p. 1315). What Mkono (2016) points out is that there is an opportunity for Indigenous people to gain power through interaction and storytelling with tourists through digital media. Despite this opportunity, Mkono (2016) says that their voices are missing in the public discourse, which is described as a problem in terms of sustainability.

Digital narratives made by the Sámi entrepreneurs themselves could create opportunities to address stereotypes; “if the power to define authenticity of a cultural experience is in the hands of the Indigenous peoples themselves and not others” (Bernardi, 2019, pp. 252-253). This means that representations of Sámi culture can have both positive and negative consequences. On one hand, it can provide economic opportunities for local communities and help in the preservation and revitalization of cultural practices. On the other hand, however it can also lead to the distortion or dilution of cultural traditions, loss of authenticity, and the erosion of local cultural values. The insights and perspectives presented by these scholars hold significant relevance for my study. The discussions on commodification, misrepresentation, and the power of storytelling provide valuable insights and allows me to critically assess how the analyzed websites depict Sámi culture and whether they fall into the pitfalls of oversimplification and stereotypes or revitalize and strengthen their culture.

2.5.1.2 Narratives - a key for addressing conflicts and revitalization of culture

According to Kramvig and Verran (2019), narratives have the potential to highlight and shed light on challenges we face. Especially concerning the potential conflicts and impacts Indigenous tourism can have on a tourism destination. For instance internal conflicts regarding the use of Indigenous culture in destination marketing but also land-use conflicts (Olsen, 2016, p. 179). Land-use conflicts are, according to Olsen (2016), a challenge to be

aware of, especially regarding Indigenous tourism. There is a potential for internal conflicts in the Indigenous communities regarding the use of nature areas.

Conflicts regarding use of nature in tourism is something that also Karlsdottir (2013) discusses. She argues that the tourist gaze has been a main factor for shaping views on nature and this has led to conflicts regarding nature preservation. However, Karlsdottir (2013, p.139) emphasize: “tourism can be positive from an environmental point of view if it is based on awareness and managed accordingly”.

In addition conflicts may also arise concerning Indigenous identity (Olsen, 2016). This refers to disagreements, debates, or tensions within the Indigenous community itself regarding how their cultural identity is portrayed and utilized in the context of tourism. Kramvig and Verran (2019) add knowledge to this topic with their perspective that revolves around the transformative potential of storytelling. They argue that narratives have the power to address challenges and conflicts and also reshape perceptions of the colonial past. Narratives can be an important part of the reconciliation process for Sámi entrepreneurs and that: “storytelling can become a tool for reworking the colonial past, and can therefore change our experience of it” (Kramvig & Verran, 2019, p. 168). This means that even if tourism can create challenges and conflicts related to Indigenous tourism. These authors acknowledge the power of narratives to shed light on issues and conflicts and potentially contribute to their resolution.

However, there is a need to expand our way of thinking about stories because “storytelling is not only a product, but an interactive process that involves reciprocity” (Kramvig & Verran, 2019, p. 168). In essence, the statement highlights the idea that storytelling is more than just the act of creating a story, it involves engagement and an exchange between those telling the story and those receiving it. It encourages a broader and more interactive view of storytelling. Recent research by Kramvig and Smedseng (2022) underlines that today Sámi tourism entrepreneurs have started to reclaim their own history “ they are active agents for change”. Furthermore, say Kramvig and Smedseng (2022, p. 27), the Sámi entrepreneurs are familiar and conscious about the power that narratives convey outside of the time and space they are told “because narratives travel”.

In summary, Kramvig and Smedseng (2022), and Kramvig and Verran (2019) argue that Sámi entrepreneurs are actively engaging with their own stories and narratives, and the growing focus among the entrepreneurs of the potential of storytelling for reconciliation and cultural revitalization. In relation to this project, digital narratives could be an important tool for actively engaging with the audience and taking responsibility for the narratives presented online, because it is important that Sámi communities tell their own stories, in their own way, and that stories about the Sámi reflect the diversity of the culture and values. Because stories ‘travel’ and thereby contribute to creating representations or “truths”. It is also crucial that Sámi entrepreneurs acquire knowledge about their own history, and also how to use social media, choosing target markets and understanding potential gains and pitfalls. In a qualitative research project these scholars’ perspectives give me the necessary insight and enables me to explore both the potential positive impacts of revitalization and empowerment through storytelling, as well as the risks associated with misrepresentation, conflicts, and commodification of culture and nature.

3 Methods

Moses and Knutsen (2012, p. 1) argue that “there are different ways of knowing” and this affects the methods we choose to study phenomenon and the social world. Researchers design and choice of method are often a result of underlying beliefs and understandings of the nature of the world, and how it should be studied. This means that there are different lenses through which a researcher may approach a topic depending upon the researcher’s epistemological stance, purpose of the research and methods used.

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the background for my project, explain the methodological approach, selection process and analytical procedures chosen in order to address my research questions. Finally, I will also reflect upon my own position as a non-Indigenous researcher.

3.1 Personal position and interest in Sámi tourism

The path of this master thesis began in 2018, when I started working in Northern Norway Tourist Board with Johtit – a project for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs. The purpose of the Johtit project was mainly to increase competence and develop a broader diversity of Sámi tourism experiences among Sámi entrepreneurs in Sápmi⁴. This was the starting point of both my journey concerning Sámi tourism and, in many ways, the starting point also for this project.

I started out with little knowledge about Sámi culture, mentality, and history. Even if I am born and raised in Northern Norway and lived in Finnmark for many years, I must admit that my knowledge was deficient. During the Johtit project period from 2018 – 2021 I had the pleasure of getting to know Sámi tourism entrepreneurs located from between Røros in the South to Kjøllefjord in the North.

I had several meetings with each of the entrepreneurs, and we also had group gatherings and the entrepreneurs participated in main events arranged by Northern Norway Tourist Board. Through conversations with the entrepreneurs, I got insight into Sámi culture and history, and

⁴ Sápmi refers to areas in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The area of land that the Sami people traditionally inhabit is called Sápmi, Nergård, J.-I. (2006). *Den levende erfaring. En studie i samisk kunnskapstradisjon*. Cappelen Akademiske.

I learned about some of the challenges that the entrepreneurs were facing as well as their goals and hopes for the future.

Storytelling and digital development were important elements in the Johtit project, because several of the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs needed to develop these elements in their businesses. For instance, several of the entrepreneurs did not have business websites, and some of them were not present at any digital platforms at all. Furthermore, for some of those who were present at digital platforms, they had a need to improve their presentations of content. In light of this, it was decided that one objectives of the Johtit project should be to focus on digital development, especially to increase both the visibility and quality of representations of Sámi tourism products and also to increase the range of products offered (NordNorskReiseliv, 2021).

At the same time as I started working with Johtit, I was accepted into the master program in Tourism Studies at UIT. During the first semester I took a course in Heritage Tourism, where I became familiar with Sámi tourism research. Findings from previous research on pictures and brochures revealed that in tourism contexts, Sámi culture was presented as something pre-modern, with people living under “primitive” conditions and in close contact with nature, and where a narrative of the nomadic reindeer herding culture was dominating (Mathisen, 2010; Olsen, 2004). Wright (2017) points out that the representations created through such narratives of the Sámi people are problematic, because they in turn cause expectations among tourists to experience something authentic and exotic. Wright (2017) emphasizes that this can create problems for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs in their encounter with tourists. Many Sámis are uncomfortable with representations created by this exotic and pre-modern image because they, like everyone else, are part of a modern world (Wright, 2017).

In my experience with Johtit, I saw that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs presented their businesses and developed tourism experiences in line with what they believed the market requested, and many times this could be along lines of something exotic or pre-modern. Furthermore, there was a discussion among the participants of Johtit regarding a traditional narrative. Some of the entrepreneurs saw a value in the continuation of a traditional narrative to be continued, because of how traditions still were part of contemporary daily life, and thus would argue that this narrative was not only something from the past, but also part of the present. Others, on the other hand expressed the need for more modern representation of Sámi culture in marketing and storytelling (NordNorskReiseliv, 2021). It became clear to me that

the issue of storytelling and digital representations was quite complex, and I became interested in finding out more, both in terms of relevant research on representations of Sámi culture, and in terms of stories and accounts of Sámi people's own past experience with marketing and representation.

A visit to the local library resulted in several books about Sámi people, history, and culture. Among these books I found Jensen's (2019), 'En samisk verdenshistorie', which emphasizes that Sámi culture has been used for marketing purposes since the beginning of the 20th century. Jensen (2019) claims that Sámi culture has long been part of the international advertising industry, where western advertising pioneers have used Sámi people and other ethnic minorities as exotic elements in advertising for many different products ranging from tobacco to cruise ship journeys to North Cape. For instance, a well-known poster from the early 20th century shows a young Sámi boy with a large Sámi knife in his hand and the midnight sun in the background. This smiley gákti wearing boy is the main focus of an advertisement for a cruise to Norway – to the land of the Midnight Sun (Jensen, 2019, p. 384).

As Jensen's (2019) work show, narratives of Sámi culture have been used for marketing and a part of the tourism industry in Norway for centuries. In that sense, the Johtit entrepreneurs focus on marketing of Sámi culture is not unique. But importantly, previous research of Sámi culture has emphasized the "Othering" of Sámi culture, where Sámi culture is contrasted with a modern world, and also how the voice behind the narratives about Sámi culture originates from external actors/companies and not from the Sámi actors themselves (Jensen, 2019; Mathisen, 2010; Olsen, 2004; Wright, 2017). With this new insight I started reflecting on my own understanding of how I perceive what I see and read about Sámi culture, and how I understand Sámi tourism representations.

This master's project is not only developed in light of a personal interest in Sámi tourism but also because it is a complex and interesting phenomenon. Sámi reindeer herders operate at the intersection of culture, identity and business (Benjaminsen et al., 2016). Operating in this intersection can involve both challenges and opportunities for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs, especially, concerning how to communicate their culture, history, and way of life for a marketing purpose. I became interested in investigating contemporary Sámi culture representations, curious if these representations could still be criticized as pre-historic and exotic as previous research had pointed out. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of Sámi tourism representations and see how Sámi tourism entrepreneurs present themselves visually

and verbally in a modern and digital tourism context. I decided to focus my research for this master's thesis on digital narratives, and more specifically on Sámi tourism websites.

In the next section of this chapter, I will present how I have collected and analyzed data to address my overarching question of which representations of Sámi culture are created through visuals and verbal elements on Sámi tourism entrepreneurs' websites.

3.2 Research design

The research design of any research project is based on the researchers perspective and the purpose of the investigation, and the research design can be described as a “systematic approach to collecting, analyzing and interpreting data” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 243). In other words, the research design is the strategic plan that defines the course of action, guiding me as a researcher through the process of inquiry.

From formulating research questions to selecting methodologies, the research design provides structure to the investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is the framework that ensures coherence and reliability, while also accounting for the intricacies of real-world research. This chapter delves into the essential components of my research design, specifically the choices that have shaped my research journey.

As I am interested in developing in-depth knowledge about narratives presented online of contemporary Sámi tourism entrepreneurs, I have designed a qualitative study. According to Hannan and Knox (2010), both qualitative and quantitative research methods can be used in tourism research, however, to fully understand the complexities of tourism they argue that it is necessary for researchers to go behind quantitative numbers and statistics and use a qualitative research approach. Qualitative researchers' purpose is to interpret and understand the meaning of different phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and qualitative research is a preferred method for tourism studies when the purpose of the study is a need for a deeper understanding (Hannam & Knox, 2010). In my project the research question focuses on exploring representations of Sámi culture on Sámi tourism entrepreneurs' websites. Given the nature of my research question, a qualitative research approach is well-suited to uncover and analyze these representations.

3.2.1 A content and narrative approach

In today's digital age, content comes in diverse forms, each carrying its own unique power to convey messages, evoke emotions, and shape our understanding of the world. One example is a photo, that can be understood differently depending upon the context in which it is presented, as well as the personal experiences and views of the person seeing the picture (Johannesen et al., 2018). As a qualitative researcher analyzing multimedia content on websites, I will focus on methods that allow me to deeply understand the underlying meanings, emotions, and contexts within visuals and verbal elements. More specifically when I analyze photos, text, and videos on websites, this requires a combination of various approaches to gain insights and understanding.

In this study I have chosen to investigate the main research question through a content and narrative analysis. Since this research is related to a study of both verbal and visuals at websites, a content analysis approach is suitable because it is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text to the content of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). This approach is not only used for collecting data but it is also used for analyzing and categorizing the content's themes and textual or visual elements and is also utilized to discover gaps in tourism promotion (Banyai & Glover, 2012; Krippendorff, 2004). It helps the researcher identify patterns and recurring themes present in the multimedia content. This may for instance imply an analysis of frequently used words or phrases, picture motives, and symbols.

While content analysis can be associated with quantitative research methods, content analysis can also take a qualitative approach, where the main goal is to observe and interpret the text and images according to the researcher's own definitions (Banyai & Glover, 2012). This approach will demand a reflexive recognition of the researcher's own empiric knowledge and cultural context (Radel, 2018).

In addition to a content analysis, I find a narrative analysis relevant for this research project. A narrative analysis is a research method that focuses on the interpretation and understanding of narratives (Riessman, 2008). It involves examining how individuals construct and convey meaning through storytelling, whether in written or visual form. Narrative analysis is often used to explore the stories people tell and the underlying themes, emotions, and structures within those stories (Riessman, 2008). Further, a narrative analysis involves deconstructing

the stories into episodes, quotations or themes, coding the themes and interpreting the relationships between the codes (Banyai & Glover, 2012, p. 270).

However, also narrative analysis come with some challenges as the “issue of voice”, that refers to a situation where the researcher faces difficulty in expressing its own perspective while conducting a study meant to convey the experiences of the participants and represent their viewpoints (Banyai & Glover, 2012).

For this project, a combination of both content analysis and narrative approach is relevant. Especially for research on digital media, a mix of method is required since each approach bring unique insights and perspectives to the research process. By using these together, I can create a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the data that I analyze (Banyai & Glover, 2012).

3.2.2 Research sources and selection criteria

The number of research sources and also the appropriate amount of data needed for a research project vary depending on the research question, design and complexity of the research topic (Patton, 2014). In the process of selecting websites for my study, I have taken a methodical approach in line with Bernardi (2019; 2022) who has conducted research on Sámi entrepreneurs’ websites in Sweden. In line with research conducted by Bernardi (2019; 2022) the primary selection criteria for my research project was Sámi ownership. Specifically, it was essential that the researched sites were owned and operated by Sámi entrepreneurs in Norway, since this was a context, I was familiar with through my previous work in tourism.

I initiated the process of obtaining a comprehensive overview of all Sámi-owned entrepreneurs in Norway. As of today, there is no comprehensive database within the Norwegian statistical system that provides an overview of Sámi tourism businesses. In Statistics Norway⁵ database there is for instance a distinct industry code (NACE) designated for agricultural enterprises with supplementary activities in tourism. The NACE code gives a possibility to get an overview of businesses at the municipal level. However, there is no equivalent overview for Sámi tourism enterprises or reindeer herding with supplementary

⁵ Statistisk sentralbyrå <https://www.ssb.no/>

activities in tourism. Due to the absence of easily accessible databases locating potential businesses was a challenge.

Following this, I found it necessary to reexamine my prior knowledge with the Johtit project. As part of the Johtit project there was initially made a list of approximately 30 Sámi owned businesses in Sápmi. But still this list may not represent the complete number of Sámi owned entrepreneurs in tourism, as a considerable number of Sámi-owned tourism enterprises are not registered as limited companies (AS) and are therefore not easily accessible through statistical databases. Instead, most of these businesses operate as sole proprietorships (ENK) under private family names as part of a Siida⁶, which presents a challenge in the process of identifying potential companies.

Even if prior familiarity with Johtit companies was not originally a selection criterion, I ultimately chose to utilize my personal knowledge and the insight I had gained during my time as the leader for the Johtit project. The Johtit project started with 21 Sámi-owned participants from different regions of the Norwegian Sápmi (NordNorskReiseliv, 2021). I made this the foundation for a further selection process.

Furthermore, another selection criteria was based on the actual availability of tourism business websites. Some of the above described 21 Sámi-owned tourism companies, did not have websites at all, making these Sámi entrepreneurs inaccessible for analysis. Additionally, certain websites, although available, did not contain substantial textual or visual content. For instance, some websites contained minimal information, typically limited to a picture and contact details. Consequently, these websites did not offer sufficient material to be included in the study, as they lacked the necessary narrative and visual components required to explore the representations of Sámi culture within the context of tourism comprehensively.

⁶ Sámi reindeer grazing district. Within each district, groups of reindeer owners have the animals in one or more common herds and collaborate on practical operations. This is called a siida. KMD. (2020-2021). *St. 37, Samisk språk, kultur og samfunnsliv*. Retrieved from <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/b5868533e2ad4346a452930f62d601d2/no/pdfs/stm202020210037000dddpdfs.pdf>.

Another aspect for the selection of websites was linked to geographical location. I tried to ensure that I had businesses from different regions in Sápmi. This criterion aimed to capture variations in cultural nuances and approaches across various Sámi communities.

There are variations within Sámi culture (Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019) and there may also be differences from one company to another depending upon where they are located in Sápmi. Including businesses from various geographical locations within Sápmi was a way to address diversity and complexity of Sámi culture. Based on the selection criteria motioned I included seven Sámi tourism entrepreneurs' websites in my study.

All selected websites represent reindeer herding, and this can offer valuable insights. Even within the common theme of reindeer herding, there are likely to be variations based on geographical and cultural differences. For instance, the practices and traditions of reindeer herding may differ between the Finnmark plain and the coastal areas of the southern part of Northern Norway. By recognizing the nuances within the common thread of reindeer herding, the study gains an opportunity to explore how cultural representations intersect with regional variations. This can lead to an exploration of how different areas present and interpret their relationship with reindeer herding, tourism, and Sámi culture.

The number of seven websites, is nearly identical to the study of Bernardi (2019; 2022) in which she examined eight websites. Focusing on seven websites allowed for a comprehensive examination of each site's content while ensuring that the research remained manageable within the available timeframe.

In table 1, the seven selected tourism companies' websites are listed, including details of the date I visited the website, the available content on the website, and the geographical location within Norwegian Sápmi where the specific business is based.

Table 1. Sámi tourism company websites included in the study

Websites	Date for visit	Pictures	Video	Text	Geographical location
Website 1	02.12.2022	x	x	x	Northern part of Sápmi
Website 2	02.12.2022	x		x	Central part of Sápmi
Website 3	05.12.2022	x		x	Central part of Sápmi
Website 4	05.12.2022	x	x	x	Central part of Sápmi
Website 5	11.12.2022	x		x	Central part of Sápmi
Website 6	12.12.2022	x	x	x	Southern part of Sápmi
Website 7	13.12.2022	x		x	Southern part of Sápmi

3.2.3 Anonymity and handling materials from public discourse

Internet provides a wealth of data, which can be easily collected, since it is open for public access and the “web has created new opportunities for conducting online research” (Sugiura et al., 2017, p. 184). In the case of Indigenous research, academic scholars have in many years shown a great deal of interest in research of Sámi culture, and it is emphasized that research must be done in a respectful and ethical manner (Virtanen et al., 2021). However, policy concerning research of Indigenous websites or digital sources open for public is still unclear. There seems to be a lack of development in literature in how digital research should be conducted especially when researching minorities and vulnerable people (Skille, 2022; Thomson et al., 2021).

Even if digital data is easy accessible and often available as part of public discourse, data obtained from the Internet can also present some particular ethical challenges (Skille, 2022; Sugiura et al., 2017). This means that even if I do not need a permission to study websites, since they are official and publicly available, researchers need to understand the impacts research activities may have on the “observed” culture or “person of study” especially related to the absence of full consent by respondents (Duim et al., 2018). However, even if websites are open for public reading, I have therefor anonymized the company names and information about images and words are referenced and paraphrased to prevent individual businesses and entrepreneurs to be recognized. This approach ensures the responsible conduct of research in the digital era.

3.2.4 Data collection procedures

Following the selection of company websites, the next step in the process was data collection. A website is a collection of webpages that are interconnected and grouped together under a single domain or web address. A website can consist of one or more webpages. A webpage is a single page on a website and consist of one or several tabs. Each tab can display a different webpage. As I saw that it was not feasible to examine all tabs at all seven websites in their entirety within the time constraints of this project, I chose to narrow down my data collection to specific tabs.

I chose those tabs that were common across seven websites and also those that were directly relevant to my research focus. An overview of all tabs found at the seven websites is listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Range of webpage tabs found on the seven selected websites

Website tabs	Tabs included in my study
Our culture	X
Language	
Home	X
About Us	X
Contact	
Gallery	X
Activities	X
Overnight stay	
Partners	
Shop	
Covid 19	
Map	
Terms	
Sami Food	
Guided Tours	X
Terms	
Souvenirs	

Also, the selection of tabs to be studied aligns with the approaches of other scholars, notably Bernardi (2019; 2022), who examined similar aspects such as front pages (Home), selected activity pages, and ‘About Us’ sections. Tabs like ‘partners’, ‘shop’, ‘terms’, ‘covid 19’ and others were thus not included in this study because they fell outside the scope of my research.

The initial section of the website that I considered crucial to investigate was the ‘Home’ tab. This tab serves as the front page, essentially being the very first visitors encounter upon entering the website. As it represents the initial point of contact between the website and its users, the ‘Home’ tab holds particular significance in shaping visitors’ first impressions. It functions as the online counterpart to a welcoming entry point, setting the tone for the entire browsing experience. Consequently, studying this tab is essential, as it provides a foundational understanding of the websites overall narrative and representations.

Moreover, the ‘About Us’ section is another area of interest in this analysis. Both ‘Home’ and ‘About Us’ are two among several tabs or categories available on the website, each offering a blend of written content and visual elements.

The 'About Us' tab holds particular significance as it serves as an introduction to the people behind the website, the storyteller, offering valuable insights into their personal stories, interests, and values. In essence, it provides a human touch to the website, giving visitors a glimpse into the individuals driving the organizations.

Furthermore, another section of interest is the 'Our Culture' tab. Similar to the 'About Us' section, 'Our Culture' encompasses a mix of written content and visual elements. This section invites readers to delve into a more profound exploration of the cultural facets and values that the storyteller seeks to communicate. It serves as a narrative platform that gives the reader a possibility to learn more about the cultural life of the Sámi people. In essence, 'Our Culture' offers an opportunity for readers to connect with the cultural and traditional elements.

The final tabs in my selection are 'Guided Tours/Activity' section, as well as the 'Gallery.' These tabs were chosen to gain insight into how the website actively engages its audience and promotes a range of activities.

The 'Guided Tours/Activity' section also provides information on the experiences and services offered, giving visitors an overview of what they can expect during a visit and these tabs are also relevant to be able to analyze the potential tourists these websites are attracting. Some websites also have dedicated tabs or pages for photos. These tabs are often called 'Gallery' and can display a series of images related to a specific topic or activities. The 'Gallery' serves as a visual showcase, offering a collection of images that can visually convey the experiences and destinations associated with the offerings. These photos are important to study to get an overview of which representations that are created.

Together, the information available at these tabs play an important role in shaping the user experience and influencing potential visitors to explore and participate in the activities offered. By studying these tabs, I aim to understand which representations are created and further use this information to discuss the potential implications these representations may have.

Another choice I had to make as part of my data collection process, was concerning language. The websites I analyzed were available in two languages, Norwegian and English. In light of the objectives of my study, I made a choice to concentrate my analysis on the content presented in the English language. This decision was based on the evaluation of English as a widely recognized and commonly used language in the context of global communication and

tourism. Given that tourism often involves travelers from various linguistic backgrounds, focusing on the English language content was seen as a pragmatic approach to explore how these websites engage with the reader.

By concentrating on the English-language tabs, my aim was to examine how Sámi culture is represented and communicated to a potentially broader international audience. English content on these websites is often tailored to appeal to tourists and travelers, making it particularly relevant for understanding how Sámi culture is portrayed within the context of tourism.

3.2.5 Rational for the selected website elements

For the purpose of this project, I decided to examine the selected tabs by analyzing their visual and verbal content. I chose to organize my examination by analyzing three types of content: Photos, video, and text.

Photos are the visual elements that are presented at all websites in various degree. Many of the websites studied have a large picture at the top of the main page, known as the header image or banner. This is the first thing you as a reader see when you enter the website. Through pictures, researchers can explore how nature or cultural elements are used to create narratives (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019; Ferdous, 2014). This means that photos in the study of Sámi cultural representation provide a visual window into the depth and complexity of the culture. They can consist of cultural traditions, identity, and stories, offering a glimpse into environments, and symbolism.

Further, photos are also inserted within the main content of a website, for instance at the tab of 'Activities'. These images can provide visual aids to complement the text descriptions, illustrate concepts, or showcase products. These photos are often smaller than the heading and placed next to the text or product descriptions.

In addition, some websites have pictures as backgrounds that include images that cover the entire webpage. These images can set the mood, tone, or theme of the website.

In addition to photos, video is another interesting visual element to study. Videos consist of several photos put together with music, or a non-verbal communication (Rose, 2022), that are elements that text and still pictures not encompass. In my study, there are three websites that include a video. These videos are visible when you enter the webpage as the first thing you

see and some of these include sound with music and joik⁷. In a qualitative study exploring representations of Sámi culture, I find videos a valuable data source. Videos are an audiovisual medium through which viewers can directly experience aspects of culture (Rose, 2022). Analyzing such visual elements offer a more immersive understanding of cultural practices, traditions, and environments than pictures may do.

The next element of this study is verbal text. The analyzed text on the websites includes meta descriptions, headings, navigation menus, page titles, image text, product or product details and other descriptions. These textual descriptions serve to inform and guide user interactions on the website. Asdal (2015, p. 88) argues that texts do not stand in a random relation to reality but are already part of reality, and textual work helps different actors renegotiate and modify that reality. This highlights the influential role of written information in shaping people's perspectives and behaviors, ultimately leading to adjustments or changes in how they perceive and engage with their surroundings or the reality they experience. This means that texts can serve as powerful tools for communication and transformation of ideas and, consequently influence the way we interact with both the destination and the company.

Overall, the chosen elements within the data collection are selected because they hold the potential to offer nuanced insights into the narrative and representations of Sámi culture.

3.3 Analytical framework and procedures

In this section, I will describe the specific steps I have taken when collecting and analyzing data. As part of this I find it relevant to build upon previous research within the field of Sámi tourism, and especially a study of Sámi tourism websites in Sweden (Bernardi, 2019; 2022). In Bernardi's research (2019; 2022) the following themes have been described:

- Connection to nature/harmony with nature/peacefulness
- Connection to reindeer
- Connection to the past
- The use of friendly language

⁷ Joik is the traditional Sámi music form. The person who performs a joik is joiking something or someone. Traditionally, it is the one who is being joiked who owns the joik. <https://result.uit.no/reaidu/vare-tema/musikk/joik/>

- Authenticity as a noun or adjective
- The Sámi costume
- Joining the Sámi
- Modernity and useful information for tourists

In my project, I have used the themes presented by Bernardi (2019; 2022) as an analytical guideline when examining the visuals and verbal content on the Sámi entrepreneurs' websites. That is, these themes provided a structured framework which I used as a starting point when analyzing the diverse aspects of Sámi culture and its portrayal on the Sámi tourism websites.

In light of, this I decided to refine themes for my data analysis process to create a set of three main themes that are adapted from the previous research of Bernardi, but in addition I looked for other themes, or indications that the adapted themes from Bernardi needed to be adjusted.

For my study, there were then three themes that guided my analysis:

Theme 1 Connection to culture. This theme is based on several themes from Bernardi's study: 'Connection to the past', 'The use of friendly language', 'Authenticity as a noun or adjective', 'The Sámi costume' and 'Joining the Sámi'. This consolidated theme enables me to investigate how various elements, including historical references, authenticity, and traditional clothing is presented. In addition, I will look at the storytellers and how these collectively contribute to the representation of Sámi culture within the context of tourism. It provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the multifaceted aspects of cultural connection portrayed on these websites.

Theme 2 Connection to reindeer is similar to Bernardi's theme on 'Connection to Reindeer'.

Theme 3 Connection to nature shares similarities with Bernardi's 'Connection to nature/harmony with nature/peacefulness'. While Bernardi combines multiple elements, I have chosen to focus specifically on the core concept of a connection to nature. However, as part of this theme I have also included Bernardi's 'Modernity and useful information for tourists'. In addition, I will look at how the storytellers presents narratives of nature and how these collectively contribute to the representation of nature within the context of tourism. This theme is also relevant, since I am interested in which representations are created and which type of tourist is created based upon the representations of nature, and the implications these representations have.

Importantly, even if Bernardi's research (2019; 2022) was a starting point for my analysis, I did not analyze my data with the purpose of just finding similarities or discrepancies compared to this previous research. According to Sand (2023) a researcher must look for knowledge gaps in relation to previous research and dare to ask question of how these findings builds upon previous research and does it add knowledge. Scholars encourages researchers or observers to delve deeper into their subject matter, looking beyond the surface to explore new dimensions (Patton, 2014). This means that by considering whether there might be "something else there or different," researchers can gain valuable insights that may challenge existing assumptions or lead to new discoveries.

In my project, I was looking for this "something else" in that I was seeking to shed light on additional elements or variations that may be relevant to understanding representations of Sámi culture and the impacts that this entail. For instance, I paid attention to if there were any aspects that may not have been explored via Bernardi's analysis or if there were elements that needed to be reconsidered in the context of my research.

In addition to the three themes 'Connection to culture', 'Connection to reindeer', and 'Connection to nature', I was interested in the implications these representations may have in relation to sustainability. Sustainability was not a distinct theme present in Bernardi's (2019; 2022) study. However, according to Benjaminsen et al. (2016), Sámi culture inherently embodies sustainability due to its deep-rooted connection with nature and animals over generations. Sámi culture sustainability is about what the industry does every day and the way they have lived in harmony with nature for generations (Benjaminsen et al., 2016). Other studies of Sámi culture highlight those representations of culture and nature in relation to Sámi tourism, provides an alternative model to a Western sustainability perspective (Mathisen, 2010).

In other words, this means that in Western views of sustainability, there may be a separation between culture and nature. However, in the Sámi perspective, sustainability is seen as intertwined with culture and nature, where the preservation of cultural practices and the harmonious coexistence with the environment are integral components. This alternative model challenges the conventional Western understanding of sustainability, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural and historical connections to nature in sustainable practices.

Overall, sustainability as an integrated part of Sámi culture has guided my approach to also examining the data material with a sustainable perspective. Consequently, in my investigation of photos, videos, and text, I aimed to uncover underlying messages and knowledge related to sustainability as part of both nature, culture, reindeer, and creation of tourists.

3.3.1 Website analysis process

Through the analysis process, my aim was to uncover narratives and understand which representations of Sámi culture is presented by examining verbal and visual elements and develop a comprehensive understanding of the potential implications these representations may have. To be able to interpret the findings in the context of my research question I asked which insights can be drawn from the verbal and visuals aspects on the websites.

To ensure a structured analysis, I developed a framework. I made an excel sheet for each website, and further I made separate sections regarding visuals (photos, symbols, video) and verbal (text). Then I made sections for the themes; ‘connection to culture’, ‘connection to reindeer’ and ‘connection to nature’ and in addition I included a section for narratives, tourist (personas) and sustainability.

Next, I systematically gathered data from the selected websites. One webpage at the time, at specific dates, over a period of approximately a month. I commenced with Website 1 and followed the same procedure for the remaining six websites once I completed the analysis of the initial one.

I initiated my research by conducting a thorough visual analysis. Studying a website involves a careful and systematic examination of the content to extract meaningful insights and data (Banyai & Glover, 2012). I started with photos in relation to themes at the selected tabs. The visual analysis was undertaken to extract insights into how websites communicated narratives and themes through visual representations. I studied photos with the overall question “what do the photos represent?” related to one theme at the time. First, I began with the Theme 1 ‘Connection with culture’. Within this theme, my examination focused on visual representations that portrayed elements of Sámi culture. This included studying photographs, symbols and images depicting cultural practices, traditional clothing, and other cultural artifacts. I focused on how these visuals represented Sámi culture, whether they highlighted cultural traditions, a pre-modern expression, or representations of modern daily life.

Additionally, I assessed the portrayal of cultural elements in terms of commodification and authenticity.

Following this systematic approach to analyzing visual elements on the websites, I proceeded to delve into the second theme, ‘connection to reindeer’, looking for visuals that feature reindeer. This involves an exploration of how reindeer were depicted in various contexts, whether in traditional reindeer herding practices, cultural symbolism, or as a part of the natural landscape or part of daily life. I considered the role of reindeer in the narratives presented on the websites and how they contributed to the overall representation of Sámi culture. I also looked at representations of reindeer in combination with the audience, to find out which narratives are presented to the tourists and how these representations could influence the behavior of the tourists in an encounter with these animals.

Moving on to the third theme, ‘connection to nature’ and looked at how nature was portrayed, which season was in focus, how the weather was, and I also examined the use of color, atmosphere/mood and its potential symbolism or emotional impact.

I further studied other objects and elements as part of nature in the photos, for instance animals and people. I noted, what people or animals were doing and what people were wearing, as well as what scenes and representations were created regarding local culture and communities. Further, I looked for the overall narrative of nature in the photos, such as romanticized or documentary-styled or whether they are staged, modernized, or manipulated in any way.

In line with a narrative analysis approach, I also explored the overall narrative or story that the photos convey. I asked: “what are the underlying meaning and emotions that these visuals portray?” By analyzing the narrative within the photos, I aimed to understand how these visuals contributed to the overall message, the websites conveyed.

I also focused on the narrative aspect of the visuals and their connection to sustainability. By exploring the narrative aspect of the visuals in the context of sustainability, I aimed to uncover how these visuals contributed to the broader sustainability discourse within the representation of Sámi culture on the websites. This involved identifying visual elements that reinforce sustainable values and practices, as well as examining whether sustainability was interwoven into the overarching narrative conveyed by the visuals. I also considered the potential influence these visuals might have on tourists. Additionally, identifying the specific

persona (segment) these visuals resonate with helps in understanding the intended audience and tailoring the content to their preferences and expectations.

After studying photos, I conducted a focused analysis of the videos on the websites (only three websites included videos), following the same structured approach as used for the examination of photographs, but included an examination of the story and plot of the video, the presence of music, how individuals, nature and animals were presented in addition to an examination of verbal information/text. Only one of the videos included verbal text.

Following the analysis of photos and video, I shifted my focus to analyzing the verbal content on the website. This encompassed examining the headlines, main text, stories, and descriptions present. I analyzed the text according to my three themes, as well as narratives, creation of tourist and sustainability. According to Krippendorff (2004) the result of a content analysis can provide valuable insight to both cultural and social context in which these texts were produced. I studied text and narratives at the selected tabs; 'Home', 'About Us', 'Our Culture' and 'Activities offered'. I conducted a detailed analysis of textual content on the selected webpage tabs, aligning my study with the four overarching themes: 'connection to culture', 'connection to reindeer' and 'connection to nature'.

According to the 'connection to culture' theme, my primary objective was to uncover the main topics and recurring cultural aspects that were presented in the text. I carefully identified specific focus areas regarding to Sámi culture. I also had an overall narrative approach to this theme as like the theme of nature. I tried to understand the underlying meaning and messages that the text has concerning culture and cultural practices. For instance, I asked what purpose and mission the text had and which implications it potentially could have concerning sustainable cultural development.

In the 'connection to reindeer' theme, I studied text related to the significance of reindeer in Sámi culture. I looked for references to historical and traditional reindeer herding practices, cultural symbolism, and the role of reindeer within the Sámi community. By examining how reindeer were portrayed in the textual narrative, I gained insights into their cultural importance and how they contributed to the overall representation of Sámi culture.

Within the 'connection to nature' theme, I focused on textual content that addressed nature and the natural environment. I sought to identify how nature was described and presented. I

studied the textual content for recurring words or phrases and descriptions of products and activities promoted. As part of this I also studied the ‘tone of voice’ (e.g., formal, informal, personal, or impersonal) and also the style of writing (e.g., persuasive, informative).

Transitioning to the narrative analysis I examined the use of language, including terminology, metaphors, and any language-specific features to be able to draw out underlying meanings, values and motives and consider how the text contributes to the overall narrative of nature, whether it was portrayed as pristine or impacted by human activities.

Further, my analysis extended to exploring sustainability within the narratives. I also studied phrases and words that could be part of a sustainable perspective. I looked at how the websites addressed sustainable practices, environmental and cultural consciousness, and responsible tourism within the written content. Furthermore, I was also interested to gain rich, in-depth insights into representations “behind the text” the underlying meaning of the verbal content. I asked the question “which type of tourist is created?” In this regard I tried to approach this with the use of reflexivity as a key and recognize that the interpretation of text can be influenced by my cultural and societal norms, and that this may influence the understanding of what I read (Radel, 2018).

In summary, my visual and textual analysis encompassed a comprehensive exploration of the three themes in addition to the overall narrative, and which tourist is addressed and created including sustainability aspects. With a purpose of providing a nuanced understanding of how Sámi culture is represented and communicated through textual and visual content.

3.4 Limitations, ethical considerations, and reflexivity

All research projects have limitations, this is also the case for my project. One of the possible limitations in this project is related to involvement of the entrepreneurs. The research was conducted within the objective of studying publicly accessible online content. This means that the research did not delve into these authors’ motivations or intentions behind the text or images included on their websites. While it was not my intention to examine the authors intentions and objectives, it is important to remember that without direct communication with the owners of the websites, my study does not give insight into their perspectives, intentions, values, and motivations behind the representations of Sámi culture.

Also, this project does not gather data on how different readers/tourists understand, interpret and act upon the online narratives presented to them. Readers understand the story through his or her eyes depending upon different aspects and context as perspective, previous knowledge, gender, cultural belonging and nationality, and other factors (Johannesen et al., 2018). This means that the purpose and intentions behind a visual and verbal content may not necessarily align with how every reader interprets every visual and verbal aspects of a webpage. When coding content, and when pointing to patterns in the data, even though being based in themes provided in previous research (i.e. Bernardi) and/or shared understandings of what can be considered “romantic” etc., it could be that certain individuals have other associations come to mind than those I have determined. There are some pitfalls to be aware of in terms of analysis: “phrases could be taken out of context and misinterpreted” (Banyai & Glover, 2012, p. 269). This could lead to misinterpretations and false understanding of a tourism destination (Banyai & Glover, 2012).

Another important aspect of a project like mine, although not a limitation as such, is the relationship between me as a non-Indigenous researcher and the topic at hand. There are both opportunities and challenges for a non-Indigenous researcher to study Indigenous issues (Skille, 2022, p. 831). Scholars (Thomson et al., 2021, p. 676) argue that there are methodological considerations researchers must undertake, especially addressing the role of the researcher and the ethical considerations.

The role of the researcher includes reflection upon my own position as an outsider doing research on Sámi culture. Being a Norwegian and a Master student I am an outsider. However, I am born and raised in Northern Norway within Sápmi, and I am probably a mix of Norwegian, Sámi, Finnish, Swedish and Russian, and southern European, as many from the coast of Northern Norway are. I have lived side by side with Sámi people all my life, and I have several Sámi friends. But still my background, traditions, language and “way of life” is very different from for instance a Sámi reindeer-herder, and I must take in considerations that this may influence the way I “see” and understand findings which can also affect the analysis of my findings. My position as a non-Indigenous researcher is something that I have given a lot of thought during the process of this Master project, and I have asked myself if it is “right” of me to conduct research on a culture that I do not belong to.

According to Carr et al. (2016, p. 1067), research should be conducted by Indigenous researchers or in collaboration with them, with the aim of avoiding Indigenous communities

from being seen solely as the “Other”. It is recommended by several scholars to work closely with members of the Sámi community to ensure that the research is made in a respectful and accurate manner (Skille, 2022; Virtanen et al., 2021). It is important that a culturally sensitive approach is encouraged when encountering an Indigenous culture (Olsen et al., 2019). I must confront my own preconceived attitudes, values and views and know how this may affect the result of my findings (Radel, 2018). I will make sure that my research include ethical considerations (Thomson et al., 2021). According to NESH (2021, p. 29) researchers have a social responsibility when studying vulnerable groups. Conducting research on these groups requires strict adherence to ethical norms, including respect, protection, and justice. Researchers must avoid terms that promote unfair generalizations or stigmatization.

Nevertheless, doing research without involvement of the Sámi entrepreneurs is seen as a challenge in relation to guidelines of these scholars, and I must admit that this made me stop and think and reconsider the process of this project. As part of this I started searching for more knowledge and found another perspective of Indigenous research by Sand (2023, p. 12) who argues that the “fear of doing research on other culture than the one you belong to is related to an insider-outsider dichotomy, and this may overshadow other crucial aspects of research”.

Sand (2023) argues further that focusing too much on the researcher’s position, particularly whether they are ‘allowed’ to conduct research on Indigenous issues, can hinder development of research and knowledge. Sand (2023) further emphasizes that it is important to look at how the research is carried out, such as the choice of methods and how we interpret our findings and that is what determine the validity, relevance, and quality of the research results.

After some time of reflection, and discussions with my supervisor, I decided to continue my work with this Master project, because I believe that development of knowledge within Sámi tourism is a responsibility all students or researchers may have, and not a responsibility of only Sámi students or researchers. However, still it is important to do this research with respect and in a responsible manner. According to Sand (2023, p. 13) all researchers should “do their homework” when writing about Indigenous issues. This means to acknowledge your lack of knowledge, and being able to listen and learn, being honest, and explain how you have carried out your research. In a cultural sensitivity perspective, the researcher must reflect one’s own attitudes and not place oneself at the center of evaluating other societies or

cultures. To comprehend and acquire knowledge about individuals from a multicultural perspective, it is essential to show consideration for others' viewpoints and backgrounds.

Even if I have been working in tourism and with Sámi tourism entrepreneurs for some years, I am still an outsider to the Sámi community, and I am aware of my embodied knowledge or lack of knowledge that may influence the way I see and understand the findings (Valtonen et al., 2017). Overall, even if I questioned the purpose of this project and myself as a non-Indigenous researcher, the decision to go further with this research project was based upon a genuine interest and a sense of responsibility to use my pre-experience from Johtit and knowledge from working with marketing and tourism development for many years. I decided to continue and delve into the area of representations of Sámi culture and enlighten this topic.

Another aspect of reflection is the result of the data selection process unexpectedly revealed that all the selected websites belonged to reindeer herders. This outcome might raise questions about the unintentional bias or influence that the selection process could have had. It is important to acknowledge that the intention was not to exclusively focus on reindeer herders, as this was not a primary selection criterion. Rather, the intention was to encompass a diverse range of representations related to Sámi culture and its portrayal within the context of tourism.

That all selected websites represent reindeer herding, can still offer valuable insights. Even within the common theme of reindeer herding, there are likely to be variations based on geographical and cultural differences. For instance, the practices and traditions of reindeer herding may differ between the Finnmark plain and the coastal areas of the southern part of Northern Norway. By recognizing the nuances within the common thread of reindeer herding, the study gains an opportunity to explore how cultural representations intersect with regional variations. This can lead to an exploration of how different areas present and interpret their relationship with reindeer herding, tourism, and Sámi culture.

In essence, the unexpected result prompts a valuable perspective shift. Rather than a deviation from the research aim, it becomes a possibility to explore the diversity of reindeer herding practices and cultural interpretations across different regions. This serves as a reminder of the richness that can emerge from the unexpected outcomes of research processes, offering a chance to uncover and understand variations that might not have been initially anticipated (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002).

4 Findings and discussion

The primary objective of this chapter is to delve deeper into the findings and discuss representations of Sámi culture, including which implications these representations may have. I will discuss my findings in light of the three themes that were my analytical pillars: ‘connection to culture’, ‘connection to reindeer’ and ‘connection to nature’. As part of the discussion of findings associated with these three themes, I will also highlight which type of tourist is created through representations of Sámi culture. Finally, I will bring together findings from all three themes and discuss the implications of this way of representing Sámi culture in terms of sustainability.

4.1 Connection to culture

The first analytical theme I worked with was ‘connection to culture’, which enable me to investigate how various elements, including historical references, authenticity, and traditional clothing were presented in the Sámi entrepreneurs’ websites.

The Sámi entrepreneurs in my study are all engaged in both reindeer herding and tourism. This is a complex business combination, because Sámi tourism entrepreneurs operate at the intersection of culture, identity, and industry (Benjaminsen et al., 2016). Given the important role of reindeer herding in Sámi culture, albeit symbolically for many Sámi people, this means that business activities are deeply entwined with Sámi cultural heritage and identity. They are not just running businesses; they are shaping and being shaped by their cultural practices. When culture and Indigenous practices are turned into a tourism experience for an economic purpose, it involves a balance between cultural revitalization and commercialization that comes with both challenges and opportunities (Bruner, 2005). I will further provide a more detailed examination of the findings from this study concerning the processes of cultural commodification and revitalization.

4.1.1 Balancing authenticity and evolving tourist preferences

Tourism is argued to be based upon the need for experiencing and seeing something different from everyday life - a search for “otherness” (Urry & Larsen, 2011b). The search for “otherness” is also related to authenticity. Even if scholars may disagree about the meaning and concept of authenticity, it is argued that tourists are attracted to destinations that are perceived as authentic, as these places are often seen as offering “otherness”, a difference from everyday life that adds the experience value and meaning (Bernardi, 2019; Cohen, 1988;

Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Tourists travelling to Northern Norway are interested in experiencing authentic Sámi culture. This is a situation where the attractiveness of such experiences has been related to the desire of visiting a pre-modern and exotic culture (Mathisen, 2010).

To meet the expectations of authenticity, Bernardi's (2019) research has shown that Sámi tourism companies use traditional cultural elements to attract tourists. In my study, I also find that some of the websites meet the request of "otherness" and authenticity to attract tourists. One example is a photo on Website 2, featuring a couple, holding a reindeer by a rope. They are dressed in traditional gákti, standing in the middle of a wide-open natural area, where all that can be seen is an endless white plain. In another picture, presented on Website 2, the hindquarters of a reindeer are visible, and there is a wooden sled attached. There is a person sitting in the sled dressed in gákti. Both images contain powerful Sámi symbolism of the gákti and the reindeer, but they can also be said to depict an exotic and pre-modern life as there are no signs of contemporary modern life such as snowmobiles or other technological elements like mobile phones, that are used in modern reindeer herding. In addition, there are no descriptions or photos of tourist engaging in activities nor daily life in local villages. This implies a focus on the pre-modern and exotic aspects of life, with less emphasis on other elements of contemporary society.

In addition to such visuals where traces of modern life are absent, there are also verbal findings that underscore the pre-modern and exotic culture narrative. One example can be seen on Website 3, where guests are invited to "Join a Sámi reindeer herder's everyday life in the mountains". This type of text explicitly indicates that these representations are from Sámi people's contemporary lives. In combination with photos of Sámi people with traditional clothes holding a reindeer or sitting in a reindeer sled it can be said to speak "right to the heart" of individuals who are attracted to cultural tourism experiences, to use a phrase from Northern Norway Tourist Board (2019b).

The examples from findings on Websites 2 and 3 suggest that the Sámi entrepreneurs present themselves to attract tourist who are eager to experience an authentic and traditional Sámi culture, a culture different from Western life. This means that the practice of incorporating traditional Sámi cultural elements to attract tourists, as observed in both Bernardi's (2019) research and my own study, emerges as a significant and enduring strategy within Sámi tourism companies. This strategy not only aligns with tourists' expectations of encountering

“otherness” but also holds a historical resonance. Visually, the images from Website 2 and Website 3, resemble how Sámi individuals have been portrayed in marketing from the early 1900s to attract visitor to the north.

The implications of representing Sámi culture with “otherness” can be complex. On one hand, it can attract tourists who seek unique and culturally immersive experiences, as the portrayal of “otherness” often fascinates travelers looking for something distinct from their daily lives (NorthernNorwayTouristBoard, 2023). On the other hand, even if meeting the touristic request for authenticity is a way to attract tourists, it can also come with some challenges. A key challenge is that such representations can be exploitative or even damaging to local communities and cultures. Commodification of culture carries the risk of oversimplifying and potentially distorting the authentic representation of the culture, presenting them as static and exotic for the tourist gaze (Bruner, 2005, p. 5). This means that the emphasis on the exotic and pre-modern aspects can create an incomplete understanding of contemporary Sámi life. It can reinforce the idea that Sámi culture is frozen in time, undermining the fact that Sámi culture has evolved and developed as part of modern society, even while simultaneously preserving its traditions in many ways. Furthermore, such representations raise concerns about cultural sustainability, as it can perpetuate misunderstandings, and create stereotypes and misconceptions about Sámi culture. This can negatively impact the way tourists view and interact with Indigenous tourism companies because representations of culture that are constructed and shaped to cater to the “authentic” expectations and desires of tourists, often emphasize certain aspects while downplaying or omitting others (Bruner, 2005).

The fact that tourism actors’ presentations downplay certain elements while foregrounding other elements to attract guests is, of course, not uncommon in tourism. For instance, it is not uncommon for tourism companies in Northern Norway to emphasize on certain traditional aspects for marketing purposes. An example can be the marketing of fishing culture in Lofoten, which has been promoted in line with a historical appeal, using visuals emphasizing traditional practices and with headlines such as: Nusfjord - an authentic fishing village (NordNorskReiseliv, 2019a). The example of Nusfjord emphasizes that representations like these, are missing modern or contemporary facets of the culture. It tends to focus on historical or traditional elements, potentially overlooking how these traditions might have evolved or adapted within the context of modern society. Yet, even if the absence of visual and verbal depictions of modern life is not exclusive to Sámi culture, it still brings about some challenges as it does not accurately represent the diversity and facets of contemporary Sámi

culture, as highlighted by Kramvig and Smedseng (2022). Sámi culture is part of modern life, people live in houses in villages, families and individuals have different ways of being Sámi and different Sámi languages (Nergård, 2006). This means that there might be a gap between how some of the Sámi tourism companies choose to portray Sámi culture –emphasizing the pre-modern and exotic aspects to attract tourists – and the real-life experiences and identities of Sámi individuals.

Furthermore, limited, and imbalanced representations of Sámi culture can also create specific expectations and behaviors among tourists. This can potentially impact tourists overall travel experiences and the way in which they engage with the Sámi community and its culture. It is crucial for tourism companies to strike a balance that respects the diversity and contemporary aspects of Sámi culture while still catering to the interests of tourists seeking authentic experiences. This kind of balance will always be important for tourism. However, for Sámi entrepreneurs, this is especially vital, given the historical context of Norwegianization, cultural assimilation and the ongoing challenges Sámi people face in preserving their unique identity and heritage. Therefore, it is essential for Sámi tourism businesses to be at the forefront of promoting a nuanced and authentic representation of their culture to protect and revitalize their rich traditions while sharing them with the world.

While my findings indeed reveal that several Sámi entrepreneurs' websites place visual and verbal emphasis on the historical and exotic aspects of Sámi culture, there are also additional findings suggesting a different dimension in certain websites. Particularly, it appears that some entrepreneurs are striving to modernize their offerings, striking a balance between the traditional elements of Sámi culture, and meeting the contemporary interests and needs of today's tourists. For instance, on Website 5 and 6 findings indicate a different approach than the pre-modern and exotic representations found on Website 2 and 3. In different ways, both website 5 and website 6 present the traditional Sámi element of a *lávvu* in contexts of a more modern and contemporary situation. On Website 5, there is a small picture of a *lávvu*, the surrounding area is in focus with snowmobiles parked outside the *lávvu*. On Website 6, there is a video in the front page where a large *lávvu* is seen and inside of the *lávvu* there is comfortable seating made of benches instead of the traditional reindeer skin on the floor. There are tourists sitting on these benches looking at what appears to be the Sámi host, who stands in the middle of the *lávvu* addressing the audience. On these websites the *lávvu* is presented as an adjusted product to contemporary and modern life.

These examples suggest that the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs have adapted to changing market demands, consumer preferences and values (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). By providing benches instead of reindeer skin on the floor, these representations are catering to the preferences of tourists who may not be accustomed to or comfortable with the traditional lávvu seating. The traditional narrative of the lávvu, as a shelter and place to live when reindeer herding, is enlarged with a narrative of a shelter for tourists to enjoy a warm and comfortable meeting with Sámi culture.

However, when examining the traditional and modern narratives from the Sámi perspective, representations may not be separated into something that is solely confined to the past or as part of modern Sámi life. Previous research underlines that Sámi people have been seen as “the ultimate other” and this is a contrasting element that implicitly highlights the values of the Western culture (Mathisen, 2010; Olsen, 2004). In other words, Sámi people have historically been viewed as the ultimate “other” or as distinctly different from Western culture, emphasizing the contrasting values and perceptions between the two. If the pre-modern narrative of “otherness” is viewed through an alternative lens, particularly that of the Sámi themselves, the traditional representations could also be seen as part of modern life today and not something that only belongs to the past.

Even if the lávvu represents a centuries-old cultural tradition and carries a symbolic significance in representing the Sámi nomadic lifestyle and a close relationship with nature, it is also something that belongs to the present and is used by Sámi people today (Peskelo, 2018; Potinkara, 2012). This means that when narratives, particularly of the lávvu, are presented to tourists, it can lead to a multifaceted understanding as a symbol of culture and pre-modern life but also as part of modern life of today. It creates representations that transcend time and serves as a bridge between Sámi history, culture, and the present, potentially enriching tourists' understanding of Sámi culture.

Overall, the coexistence of both traditional and modern representations indicate that the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs in general are both meeting the request for “otherness”, and at the same time, adapting to changing market demands. The representations of traditional narratives along with “modern” adjustments suggest a balancing act that these entrepreneurs must contend with meeting tourists' demand for authenticity and ensuring that cultural heritage is respected, accurately represented with a diversity of the Sámi culture, and not commodified to the point of marginalization or misrepresentation. There is a concern among scholars that in a

pursuit of profits, some Sámi tourism companies may prioritize adjusting traditional customs for a short-term financial gain, without adequately considering the long-term consequences (Bernardi, 2019; Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022). However, there is not necessarily anything negative about adjustments of traditional element for a commercial purpose, as long as it is based on Sámi entrepreneurs' own values and ownership (Wright, 2017). Balancing economic goals with cultural awareness and sustainability is crucial for ensuring that these adjustments contribute positively to the preservation of Sámi culture, and provide long-term benefits for the local community. It underscores the importance of sustainable practices that align with both cultural and economic considerations. I will further discuss representations of Sámi culture in relation to values, ownership, and cultural revitalization.

4.1.2 Narratives a tool for cultural empowerment and revitalization

The economic interest has been argued to be the main motivation for Sámi entrepreneurs for developing tourism experiences (Bernardi, 2019), but storytelling and representations of Indigenous culture is said to hold an important contribution, ensuring that culture is passed on to future generations (Wright, 2017). Specifically storytelling can be a tool for reworking colonial past and could play an important role for revitalization of Sámi culture and identity (Kramvig & Verran, 2019).

In my study I also find that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs use history and traditions, visually and verbally, in ways that can be seen as preserving and revitalizing culture according to Sámi cultural values. One example of such culture revitalization is the depiction of traditional Sámi clothing known as gákti. In both videos and photos and across all the websites, the gákti is shown. For instance, on Website 1 at tab "About us" five of in total seven pictures are of Sámi people in gákti and beaska⁸ - outfits that signify Sámi culture. At the top of the page there is a large picture of a colorful woolen blanket with Sámi design and in the background a man on skis with a blue gákti and a pair of brown reindeer skin pants. There are also old pictures, of their family. Even if these pictures are in black and white, I can see that the gákti is similar to the pictures taken in recent time.

⁸ Beaska is a winter garment made of reindeer skin, <https://www.sprakradet.no>

Gákti is a traditional clothing, that in earlier times, was an everyday garment. After World War II, fewer and fewer Sámi people wore it due to the process of Norwegianization, where the Norwegian government sought to suppress all aspects of Sámi culture (Kramvig & Verran, 2019). The systematic attempt to colonize the Sámi population had a profound effect on their cultural traditions, language, and way of life, and it posed a threat to the survival and preservation of Sámi identity (Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019; Kramvig & Verran, 2019). As a result of these policies, many Sámi individuals experienced a loss of connection to their cultural heritage. This process had a strong influence and people completely stopped speaking their mother language and wearing gákti (Kramvig & Verran, 2019; Samiskeveivisere, 2023). Today tourism entrepreneurs are reclaiming their own history and are agents of change (Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022). By featuring narratives of gákti, the Sámi tourism companies of this study convey a message that their cultural traditions have persisted over time and are still very much alive. Despite the historical challenges and pressures to assimilate, these representations highlight that Sámi culture is not only something that belongs to the past.

In addition to highlighting cultural elements as gákti, the use of Sámi language can also be said to contribute to a process of revitalization of culture. For instance, on Website 1 Sámi words are interwoven throughout the text. An example of this is the display of the phrase: “Luondu min eallin - Nature is our culture”. These words craft a poetic and solemn atmosphere that resonate with the theme of preserving culture and nature. However, it also highlights the close relation between nature and culture, which is seen as an important value for Sámi people. Website 1 stands out as an exception among the studied websites, by using Sámi words in all headlines and text. The amount of Sámi words underscores the importance of safeguarding and promoting Sámi linguistic and cultural identity.

Another example of narratives on a Sámi entrepreneur website that can be said to contribute to a process of revitalization of culture is the representation of árran – fireplace in the lávvu. For instance, on Website 1 there is a video showing the fireplace inside the heart of a lávvu. There are stones that form a circle around the fireplace, darkened as a sign of the many fires that have burned within. The light from the fire creates a warm atmosphere, and around the fireplace reindeer skins are placed on the floor creating a welcoming feeling. The fireplace holds strong cultural and ceremonial significance in Sámi traditions, and is associated with family gatherings, community, warmth, and the preservation of cultural practices (Bludd, 2023).

Furthermore, preservation and revitalization of cultural practices is not the only motivation for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs. Sámi knowledge preservation is also an important factor behind the establishment of tourism businesses (Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022, p. 14). In the case of my study, I find that preservation of knowledge lies at the very core of the studied websites. For instance, in Website 1 verbal findings emphasize the importance of knowledge; “when I sew and hear the sound of the thread, it creates a unique kind of melody, and I always remember the strong women who have taught me the craft, the stories, and our traditions. This is knowledge that has been developed over generations”. This phrase underscores the intergenerational aspect of Sámi culture and the deep connection between practical skills, knowledge, and storytelling, reflecting the cultural richness and continuity within the Sámi community. By representing and embracing intergenerational practices, Sámi culture not only preserves its heritage but also creates positive implications for cultural sustainability, community strength, and the transmission of valuable knowledge to future generations.

Sharing Sámi cultural traditions and knowledge with tourists also seem to be a motivation for the creation of tourism experiences. I find in my study that some of the Sámi entrepreneurs have offerings where tourists can engage in and learn about traditional Sámi practices like making duodji or participate in preparing a Sámi meal. For instance, on Website 4 there is a description of Sámi food with the phrase: “We like to share our broad knowledge about the local resources, and to show the short and simple value chain from the water to the dinner platter”. The text continues and invites the guest to participate in fetching dinner: “You can be part of the daily trips when we go to pull up the fishing nets”. These examples of texts underline the connection Sámi people have between nature, food, and their willingness to share their knowledge of harvesting from nature.

When culture and tradition are integrated into Sámi tourism experiences, it constructs a narrative that is not only informative but also interactive. Tourists that engage with Sámi culture, become active participants in the narrative, rather than passive observers. This could enhance the tourist experience and lead to greater satisfaction and a stronger connection to the culture, making the visit more meaningful and valuable.

While my findings indeed reveal that Sámi entrepreneurs’ websites place visual and verbal emphasis on cultural and knowledge preservation, there is also another important aspect that I find interesting. This is how storytelling can be used as a tool to create reconciliation and repair conflicts. Reconciliation refers to the process of restoring or repairing a relationship,

typically one that has been strained or broken due to conflicts. Storytelling has a potential as a means to break down barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and promote reconciliation (Kramvig & Førde, 2020). In my study I also find that Sámi entrepreneurs present narratives that have the potential to break down barriers and repair relationships. For instance, Website 1 presents a narrative of the traditions of duodji⁹, in combinations with new design methods and product made of wool: “designs on the woolen blankets from us are inspired by traditional Sámi patterns that safeguard Sámi aesthetics and represent an important part of our cultural heritage”. This is an example of a narrative that can be seen as an important tool for changing the way Indigenous people perceive and interact with their past, and challenge colonial narratives by giving agency and visibility to Indigenous communities as modern designers. This means that narratives, whether through visuals or verbal storytelling, can serve as powerful tools not only for attracting tourists or revitalizing cultural traditions and knowledge, but also for fostering new understandings of Sámi culture and potentially re-working previous relationships.

Furthermore, the story behind the design on the wool blanket, serves as an illustration, which can lead to a more comprehensive portrayal of Sámi culture, potentially fostering intercultural understanding. This is an example of narratives that can attract tourists that appreciate the evolving nature of Sámi culture, and further lead to an increased respect of Sámi storytellers. This means that when the traditional culture narrative is wrapped in contemporary design, it can engage and educate both tourists and local people in the communities. Storytelling has a transformative potential, in challenging stereotypes and fostering respect and appreciation (Kramvig & Verran, 2019). The presence of interactive Sámi cultural experiences can shape the identity of the destination. It can position the region as a place for cultural exchange and learning, attracting conscious and responsible tourists. In a sustainable perspective, a more comprehensive portrayal of Sámi culture could lay the groundwork for a harmonious coexistence between cultural heritage, tourism, and the preservation of the region’s unique identity.

⁹ Duodji is handcraft made of Sámi people. <https://nordligefolk.no/sjosamene/klaer-handverk-og-duodji/>

In summary, narratives that are presented on the selected websites are example of Sámi entrepreneurs that are increasingly taking responsibility for reclaiming their own history. According to findings in this study, narratives serve as a foundation for transmitting Sámi people's values and is part of a cultural revitalization process, which indicates that these websites are not merely platforms for tourism. Instead, they are deeply rooted in a profound commitment to increase understanding of Sámi traditions and history, which further may contribute to the overall strengthening of Sámi culture (Kramvig & Førde, 2020; Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022; Kramvig & Verran, 2019).

The studied websites serve as digital archives of Sámi culture, safeguarding its unique identity and traditions for present and future generations. The significance lies in the fact that the narratives presented on the websites I have studied, irrespective of whether the audience regards them as pre-modern or not, signify a shift and an empowerment for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs in terms of shaping their own cultural representations. Passing down cultural practices, knowledge, and values to future generations, and also to potential tourists creates new perceptions of Sámi culture, which may lead to increased respect, rework historical stereotypes, but also creating a stronger cultural pride among Sámi people.

4.2 Connection to reindeer

In this section I will discuss my findings according to the theme 'connection to reindeer', which is derived from previous research by Bernardi (2019; 2022).

4.2.1 Reindeer as a cultural symbol versus as a domestic animal

The second analytical theme that I worked with is 'connected to reindeer'. Reindeer herding holds a special place in Sámi culture, representing more than just an economic activity. It is a tradition deeply intertwined with identity and way of life. Reindeer herding stands as a testament to Sámi cultural heritage and a symbol of Sámi peoples connection to the land (Benjaminsen et al., 2016; Dunfjeld, 1979).

In my study, I also find that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs emphasize their connections to reindeer as an important part of their Sámi cultural heritage. Visual and verbal narratives of reindeer are presented in all seven websites. For instance, on Website 7 there are several photos of reindeer on the "Homepage" as the first thing you see when entering the website. On the very top of the page, a large image grabs the viewer's attention. The image depicts reindeer grazing peacefully in a lush summer field, while a man and a woman, dressed in

traditional gákti, stand amongst the reindeer, engaging with them in a relaxed manner. The scene indicates an everyday normality between the Sámi people and reindeer, portraying their daily lives. This image underlines the close relationship that Sámi people have with reindeer.

Another example of narrative on Website 7 that can be said to emphasize the close cultural bond between Sámi people and reindeer is the phrase; “As a guest, you are invited to meet our reindeer, the amazing Arctic animal that is intricately tied to the Sámi livelihood and culture. Our storytelling will unveil additional insights”. Mentioning storytelling suggests that, in addition to the direct encounter with reindeer, there will be narratives shared that will provide you as a guest with deeper insights into the Sámi culture, history, and the significance of reindeer in their lives. It emphasizes the idea of cultural exchange and an immersive experience for guests.

Furthermore, an example of a narrative that also can be said to present a deep bond between the Sámi people and reindeer is found on Website 1, the description of reindeer is also central in text which reads: “the reindeer is our life”. This description focuses on the vital role of reindeer in Sámi culture and life and portrays reindeer as an integral part of their identity and existence.

The Sámi tourism entrepreneurs in my study are not only showcasing their ties to reindeer as a crucial aspect of their Sámi cultural heritage but also as a symbolic representation of Sámi culture. For instance, in a video on Website 2, the focal point of the scene is a grand procession of reindeer assembled in a long and slender formation, which looks like a train, moving at a slow pace. In the beginning of the video, there is a text “Reindeer herd migration to the coast” that explains what viewers see, and the camera lens mostly follows a large reindeer herd from a bird’s eye view, overlooking the reindeer herd as they move along towards the coast in a calm winter weather with the sun “hanging” low behind the hill. There are two persons following the herd on a snowmobile, one in the front and one in the back. The landscape serves as a picturesque backdrop, with white snow covering the ground. The vast and pristine beauty of nature in combination with the large number of reindeer represent the harmonious coexistence between the Sámi people and their herd. The reindeer are the main character in this video, and migrating to the coast represents the mobility and cultural heritage of the Sámi people, showing how they historically have been a nomadic people that has relied on and lived in harmony with these animals.

This video captures the traditional practice of reindeer herding, which is a fundamental part of Sámi culture and identity (Benjaminsen et al., 2016). However, the narrative of the video also symbolically reflects the core values and traditions of Sámi culture, emphasizing their profound connection with the land.

Another example of a text that represent awareness of cultural heritage and as a symbolic representation of Sámi culture is a text about reindeer herding from Website 2:

We are now three generations collaborating on reindeer herding. As reindeer herders, we have a responsibility to manage nature, culture, and history for future generations, just as our ancestors did before us.

The narrative of a reindeer migration featured in the video on Website 2 is likely to attract tourists who are interested in authentic and educational experiences. Visitors who identify as “Culture enthusiasts” (NorthernNorwayTouristBoard, 2023) interested in learning about reindeer in their natural environment, are particularly attracted to this narrative. The narrative provides a unique opportunity for tourists to witness a traditional Sámi cultural practice and the historical significance of the reindeer in the Sámi way of life. These representations help promote cultural awareness and intercultural understanding while offering tourists a unique experience. It can contribute positively, in relation to cultural sustainability, due to the preservation of Sámi culture and the responsible development of Sámi tourism. Visitors who encounter the narratives highlighting the cultural significance of reindeer may have a better understanding of the role reindeer play in Sámi culture and contribute to the preservation and promotion of Sámi cultural heritage. Further, the exemplified phrase also involves a sustainable message which the Sámi entrepreneur communicates to tourists. The entrepreneur expresses a commitment to managing and preserving not only the reindeer herding tradition but also the natural environment, and cultural heritage. This reflects a dedication to environmental sustainability and the transmission of cultural and ecological knowledge from one generation to the next.

Even if the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs in my study showcase their ties to reindeer as a crucial aspect and symbol of cultural heritage there are also additional findings suggesting a different representation in certain websites. In my study, all seven websites present reindeer herding. This is not a surprising result, as all the websites belong to reindeer herders. However, it is worth noting that there are also some variations in how entrepreneurs present reindeer that

differs from previous examples. For instance, on Website 6, there are several pictures depicting close interactions between tourists and reindeer, where both the host and guest are seen feeding reindeers with their hands. Further, on Website 7 there is a photo of a young boy with his face turned towards a reindeer. Standing face to face with the reindeer, the boy has reindeer lichen, in his mouth, while the reindeer, in turn, grazes on the same reindeer lichen. The image captures the intimate connection between a boy and the reindeer and creates a narrative of reindeers as tame and not afraid of people.

In addition to such visuals where reindeer is presented as domestic and tame animals, there are also verbal findings that underscore the narrative. One example is on Website 6, where reindeer are presented and described with text as “charming, curious, and furry creators”. Both the visual and verbal examples create representations of reindeer as a charming and domestic creator rather than a wild animal. However, even if an active and close experience with reindeer could be attractive to tourist there are some implications to be aware of. If interactions between reindeers and tourist become too frequent and are solely for the purpose of tourism, it can harm cultural practices and also environmental concerns because it can cause changes in the behavior of animals (Geffroy et al., 2015). This occurs when cultural practices, such as feeding reindeer, are solely or excessively performed for the economic benefit of tourism.

In summary, ‘connection to reindeer’ is a prominent theme in Sámi tourism representations. The selected websites feature images and narratives emphasizing the cultural significance of the reindeer. However, close interactions with reindeer for tourism purposes raise concerns about environmental sustainability and cultural respect. There is a risk that narratives of reindeer as tame and domestic animals create tourists that treat cultural experiences as mere entertainment, which could be disrespectful to the Sámi culture and interfere the wild and natural life of reindeer. Balancing tourism with sustainability should take in consideration the needs of both tourists, the industry, local community, and the reindeer. Narratives that emphasize the domestic and friendly nature of the reindeer, should be carefully managed since it is important that tourism products align with sustainable practices and Sámi values and traditions (Wright, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to consider and address potential negative impacts and ensure that cultural activities with reindeers are conducted in a responsible and sustainable manner.

4.3 Connection to nature

In addition to culture and reindeer, I have also been interested in examining which representations of nature that are created through narratives on the selected websites. In this section I will further discuss findings according to the theme ‘connection to nature’, which is derived from previous research by Bernardi (2019; 2022).

4.3.1 Varied representations of nature in relation to Sámi culture

The third analytical theme that I have emphasized on is ‘connection to nature’. Previous research has shown that Sámi entrepreneurs in Sweden presents narratives of untouched and peaceful nature, in combination with culture (Bernardi, 2019). In my study, I also find that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs in Norway create narratives of culture in combination with a romantic and untouched nature. For instance, throughout all websites, visual findings depict stunning landscapes and harmonious coexistence with nature. Specifically, winter landscape emerges as a dominant visual component. For instance, on Websites 7, the first thing I see when entering the website is a video with a breathtaking winter landscape, where nature is draped in pristine white snow. The snow-covered plains and trees, extend as far as the eye can see. The weight of the snow has transformed the trees into natural sculptures, bending gracefully under the wintry load. In the background, the white steep mountains create a dramatic backdrop, adding a sense of grandeur and scale to the scene. Furthermore, in the foreground tourists are sitting in traditional Sámi sledges, pulled by reindeer, which glides gracefully through the winter wonderland. The video captures the essence of the narrative of the Arctic area. It represent a connection between Sámi people and nature, and this is a narrative that is in line with the narrative of the Arctic area that is built upon a romantic narrative, of the last wilderness as something to be “gazed” at before it is gone (Karlsdóttir, 2013).

The narrative of nature as something to “gaze” at is also evident in the verbal findings of my research project. For instance, on Website 2, the reader is invited to “gaze” at nature with the phrase “welcome to our universe”. This is an example of a verbal representation of nature as a place worth seeing and it convey a sense of uniqueness that highlights the value nature has for tourists.

Representations of a romantic nature, especially winter landscapes, could result in a certain type of tourists and even impact how a destination is being consumed by tourists (Karlsdóttir, 2013). The combination of visuals and verbal presentations of pristine nature holds potential to draw in tourists who seek a closer connection with the untouched natural environment (Karlsdóttir, 2013). This may create a tourist that want to look at spectacular nature as part of their bucket list. According to Northern Norway Tourist Board (NordNorskReiseliv, 2022; 2023), this is a segment referred to as ‘Attraction Hunters’¹⁰. This segment primarily seeks to encounter natural phenomena and breathtaking landscapes during their visit to Northern Norway. However, the “plot” of the remote and wild Arctic nature in combination with Sámi culture practices, is not only a possibility to attract tourists it could also raise sustainable concerns and challenge. The challenge lies in developing a tourism destination primarily designed for passive observation, which may hinder the realization of economic advantages for the local community.

Another challenge lies in the development of tourism year round, which is a goal due to the National Tourism strategy (NasjonalReiselivsstrategi, 2021). The implications of exclusively using winter photos in marketing material can, on the one hand, attract tourists seeking a winter wonderland experience, such as those interested in activities like Northern Lights. Winter landscapes can create a sense of enchantment and adventure, drawing in visitors looking for unique winter-weather experiences. However, on the other hand, focusing solely on winter landscapes may also limit the potential of tourism. Tourists who are looking for different seasonal activities are not attracted to the winter narratives. Additionally, it might reinforce the stereotype that Sápmi is only a winter destination, overlooking the unique appeal of other seasons in the region. Therefore, using a variety of seasonal photos in marketing can offer a more comprehensive view of the destination and cater to a wider range of tourists with different preferences and interests. This approach aims to stimulate year-round tourism, promoting sustained visitation throughout different seasons, enriching the overall tourist experience and increase business opportunities.

¹⁰ <https://ilag.nordnorge.com/wiki/4594/>

However, beneath the surface of a romantic and captivating narrative of wilderness and Sámi culture, my study also reveals nuanced findings that delve deeper into the multifaceted relationship between the Sámi people and nature. For instance, on Website 1, verbal findings present the connection of Sámi culture and its deep-rooted ties to nature, with the phrase “nature is our culture”. This narrative seamlessly intertwines the remote, untamed beauty of natural landscapes with Sámi cultural practices and traditions, underscoring the inherent interdependence of nature and Sámi culture.

In addition, on Website 1, there is a video where I see a reindeer herd grazing peacefully against the backdrop of the plain. It is shot in slow motion, showing a large reindeer herd on the mountain plateau during winter. Further, the images move slowly, and there is a man and a woman, they are both dressed in traditional Sámi winter garment - beaska. The man has a scarf made with Sámi colors (red, blue, yellow, and green) like the colors of the Sámi flag. The couple observes the reindeer, standing with their back at the camera overlooking the reindeer herd. The weather is quiet and calm. Then the video continues into a lávvu. There is no one present and the only thing I see is the fire and reindeer meat hanging from the roof. The video continues outside and suddenly the weather has changed into a snowstorm, and I see a close-up picture of the reindeer herder. He stands quiet and strong looking directly into the camera and it looks like he does not notice the stormy weather. This video creates a narrative that combines the beauty of the natural environment, the richness of Sámi culture, and the tranquility of life in harmony with nature. Even if the natural winter narrative is still present, the video also represents a sense of dramatic reality of everyday life in Sápmi.

An important aspect of this video is the representations of a dramatic nature as opposed to the calm and dreamlike nature presented in photos and videos on the other websites.

Representations of nature with contrasts and hard weather conditions is an important message to “educate” tourists of what to expect when visiting the Arctic region. This could create a tourist that is more prepared to adapt to different outdoor conditions, and the realities of the Arctic weather. While ‘Attraction Hunters’ are pleased with “gazing” at spectacular nature, the ‘Nature enthusiast’¹¹ want a to immerse themselves in nature (NordNorskReiseliv, 2022).

¹¹ <https://ilag.nordnorge.com/wiki/4524/>

This segment is characterized by individuals eager to actively engage in outdoor activities, health, and sports.

The ‘Nature enthusiast’ prefer activities that are physically demanding, and score well above average in the desire to test their own limits and challenge themselves (NordNorskReiseliv, 2022). One example on Website 3, that speaks to the segment ‘Nature enthusiast’, prioritizes showcasing nature in combination with an invitation to actively participate with the phrase “Join us hunting for Northern Lights”. This phrase is an invitation to participate on a northern light safari, where the northern lights cannot be guaranteed, hence the term “hunting” is used. This is an example of how a Sámi entrepreneur tries to align with the contemporary preferences and values of tourists (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). By showcasing the combination of remote and natural beauty of the Sami region with terms like “hunting” and “safari”, entrepreneurs are enticing travelers to visit and actively experience nature, and not only passively “gaze” at nature.

Another example that also differ from the passive “gaze at nature” narrative and invites tourists to delve deeper into the multifaceted relationship between the Sámi people and nature, is found on Websites 4 and 5. For instance, on Website 5, there is a product description; “Snowmobile safari – drive your own snowmobile” and on Website 4; “Hunting and fishing trips”, are both examples of offerings that invite tourist to engage actively in Sámi cultural activities in nature. In addition to the verbal narratives, the visual findings also underscore the active and engaged narratives of these offerings with the use of photos of people hunting, fishing, and driving snowmobiles. The narrative of these photos highlights the rugged and adventurous spirit of life in Sápmi. The snowmobiles represent a modern transportation possibility, which enables people to discover the area and at the same time be active. According to these examples, nature is presented as a “playground” for personal interest and hobbies. The emphasis on seeking an “adventurous” nature may drive a growing interest among tourist to experience the depths of the area and also harvest nature resources that further carries the risk of conflicts and exploiting both cultural and natural environments (Bruner, 2005; Karlsdóttir, 2013; Wickens et al., 2015).

This means that while the promotion of nature-based tourism appeals to the adventurous spirit of visitors, it also raises sustainable concerns about potential ecological disruptions and conflicts. Nature-based tourism can have harmful effects on both nature resources and wildlife when tourism disrupts the natural behaviors of wildlife. It can lead to negative

environmental consequences for the animals, their populations, and the overall ecological balance of the area (Geffroy et al., 2015). This means that an increase in ‘Nature enthusiast’ visitors could not only disturb and strain delicate ecosystems and wildlife, but increased tourism could also lead to potential conflicts between siida members (a group of reindeer herders) and other siidas’ as pointed out by Bernardi (2019). There may be different opinions within the Sámi community about the extent and nature of involvement in tourism, potentially leading to internal conflicts and debates. Furthermore, it can also include disturbances in feeding, migration, and other critical activities that are essential for the well-being of reindeer and the ecosystem. Striking a balance between tourism and environmental sustainability becomes important to ensure the preservation of delicate ecosystems and the well-being of both wildlife and the local community.

Overall, while the remote and fairytale winter nature theme holds significant relevance across all websites, there are also alternative depictions of nature in combination with Sámi culture that creates other perceptions of how to relate to an Arctic environment. These diverse representations not only enrich the narrative but also offer visitors a broader and more nuanced perspective on the multifaceted relationship between the Sámi people and their natural surroundings. However, there are some sustainable concerns to be aware of in relation to nature-based tourism. I will further discuss implications for sustainability in the representations of Sámi culture.

4.4 Sustainable representations and implications

In recent years, sustainability has been put on the agenda across markets and age groups. Tourists are increasingly interested in taking responsibility for climate, nature, and culture when they travel (VisitNorway, 2022). Tourists are concerned with whether their visit should have significant negative consequences for either the environment or the community they are visiting.

Digital narratives are an important source of information and inspiration for tourists planning their trips. Narratives can shape a destination and influence how tourists experience Sámi culture (Asdal, 2015; Sigala, 2009; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), potentially leading to both positive and negative impacts on tourism (Karlsdóttir, 2013; Saarinen, 2014).

Sustainability in the realm of digital narrative representations is a concept that has received little attention in previous Sámi tourism research. While several studies have explored the various dimensions of Indigenous culture representations, a critical aspect that remains underemphasized is sustainable representations in relation to digital storytelling and marketing of Sámi culture. My study contributes new insights to the field by focusing on economic, environmental, and cultural aspects that previous research has not examined in a similar manner.

4.4.1 Strengthening cultural and social sustainability?

Sustainable tourism is a concept that considers both the present and future economic, social, and environmental impacts (Saarinen, 2014). Striking a balance between the demands of tourists, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities is crucial for achieving sustainable representations.

When it comes to cultural sustainability, findings from the themes ‘connection to culture’ and ‘connection to reindeer’ reveal that the Sámi entrepreneurs use digital storytelling as a means to strengthen and revitalize Sámi culture, values, knowledge and traditions. For instance, the websites studied portray the use of gákti that represent specific geographical origins of individuals. According to photos found on the websites, there are visible differences from a gákti from the inner part of Finnmark and a gákti from the southern part of Nordland. This is not surprising as the featured companies represent various geographical areas across Sápmi¹². Even so, it is an example of diversity of Sámi culture. It suggests that Sámi people are not a homogenous group, but a diverse one with distinct cultural expressions depending on their specific geographic and cultural backgrounds. The example of gákti underscores the richness and diversity of Sámi culture, a concept supported by scholarly research in the field (Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019). The diverse representation of gákti, reflecting regional variations in Sámi culture, contributes positively to the cultural richness and long-term vitality of the Sámi community, aligning with the principles of cultural sustainability in tourism.

¹² There are six different Sámi language areas in Norway. <https://sametinget.no/sprak/fakta-om-samiske-sprak/>

Even if the diverse forms of gákti signify cultural revitalization and diversity, my study uncovers areas for enhancing cultural representations. Sámi culture consist of a diversity of people with different languages and traditions, and different ways of earning a living (Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022; Nergård, 2006). Findings from my study reveal that representations of host communities and other social aspects seem to get less attention. For instance, findings reveal a lack of depictions of local villages or the lives of other people in the region. When emphasizing on the social aspects of sustainability, the studied websites create narratives that constructs a perception of Sápmi as an isolated realm without other people, communities, or civilizations. This reinforces the idea that the destination is primarily about unspoiled nature, Sámi people and reindeer herding, neglecting the rich cultural diversity of both Sámi culture and other communities in the region. A narrow Sámi cultural narrative may pose challenges and potentially lead to conflicts, as opinions within the Sámi community diverge regarding the role of tourism. While some recognize the benefits of commercialization, others perceive it as a threat (Pettersen & Viken, 2007). If tourism companies present a specific image of Sámi culture for marketing purposes, not all Sámi people will identify themselves with this image because not all Sámi are reindeer herders (Pettersen & Viken, 2007).

Furthermore, the narrative of Sápmi as an isolated area for reindeer herding, can create a gap between marketing narratives and the lived realities of Sámi individuals who may see themselves as part of modern society rather than fitting into the pre-modern or exotic stereotypes often presented in tourism materials. The implications for sustainability are potentially negative, as misrepresentations may hinder authentic cultural exchange, foster misunderstandings, and impact the overall well-being of local communities.

Even if there is a potential for enlarging representations of the cultural diversity of Sámi culture, communities, and other people of the region. The absence of depictions of local villages or the lives of other people and communities could be related to a cultural disconnection which refers to a clash or conflict that arises from disparities in values, beliefs, practices, or ideologies between two or more cultures (Fitzpatrick & Berman, 2016). The absence of wider community representations may be connected to the colonization of Sámi people and their land (Kramvig & Verran, 2019). This means that Sámi values and practices are different from other practices of people in the region, and this may be one of the reasons why narratives “exclude” other cultural or society elements.

Overall, the implications for sustainability are nuanced; while a focus on cultural revitalization is positive, the exclusion of broader community representations may hinder genuine cultural exchange and understanding. Sámi tourism entrepreneurs should be aware of their responsibility to participate in a broader cultural presentation (Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022). It is crucial to address this aspect for more inclusive and sustainable tourism representations and create tourism experiences that benefit both society and the tourism entrepreneur. An increased focus on social sustainability representations could help to reduce social inequalities and conflicts, which is a goal according to United Nations Sustainable Development¹³.

4.4.2 Enhancing sustainable nature narratives

When it comes to environmental sustainability, Indigenous tourism is seen as having the potential to broaden the concept of sustainability beyond Western viewpoints, offering distinctive perspectives on their interactions with nature (Kramvig & Førde, 2020). This means that Sámi tourism can expand and enrich the traditional Western understanding of sustainability offering unique insights and viewpoints on how Indigenous communities interact with and sustainably manage their natural environment. In my study, findings derived from the theme ‘connection to nature’ indicate that the unique interaction and management of nature resources are not equally represented in narratives on the studied websites. There are still a majority of the Sámi entrepreneurs who present nature as something to “gaze” at, for instance emphasizing on photos of nature and its role as a picturesque backdrop for tourism. Also, through verbal findings nature is presented as something to “gaze” at; “welcome to our universe” is an example of a phrase that underline nature as something extraordinary and something to admire.

Emphasizing on the “tourist gaze” in narratives has created both opportunities and challenges for tourism destinations. It has played a significant role in shaping perceptions of natural environments and increased tourism to the Arctic area (Karlsdóttir, 2013). However, the “gaze” has sometimes led to conflicts concerning nature preservation. Because how tourists perceive and interact with nature can influence how nature is treated and consumed. When tourists view nature as a resource for consumption or entertainment, it can create tensions

¹³ <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social>

between conservation efforts, other interest of the community and the economic interests of the tourism industry (Karlsdóttir, 2013).

Even if the “tourists gaze” can lead to negative consequences and conflicts of nature conservation, there is also a possibility for tourism to have a positive impact on nature when it is rooted in sustainable awareness and conscientiously managed (Karlsdóttir, 2013). In my study, I also find that some of the Sámi entrepreneurs promote environmental sustainability, especially through verbal findings. One example on Website 3 is the phrase; “Nature in nature’s own way” and another example from Website 1 is; “Nature is our culture”. Both examples highlight the profound connection between the Sámi people and their natural surroundings. Through these narratives Sámi tourism entrepreneurs communicate that they do not impose their will on nature but coexist and live in balance with it. These examples of representations highlight Sámi people’s role as environmental caretakers to achieve a sustainable tourism industry (Kramvig & Verran, 2019; Mathisen, 2010).

Another example that emphasizes the sustainable awareness and responsible representations of nature, is found on Website 4, with the phrase; “we leave the same kind of track as previous generations left behind”. This sentence emphasizes the close relationship between the Sámi people and the natural environment and is a sustainable message that encourages tourists to participate in taking care of nature. The sentence is part of a product description of a skiing trip. This means that the Sámi entrepreneur is not only talking about environmentally responsible practices but is also implementing sustainable practices in their offerings. This example is positive, in a sustainable nature perspective, as it highlights a sustainable message and encourages tourists to participate in caring for nature. It represents a sense of responsibility and aligns with environmentally conscious practices, showing that the entrepreneur has a commitment to create a sustainable tourism industry.

In summary, sustainable digital nature narratives can help tourists gain a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of the environment in Sámi culture. Further, this can foster respect for the land and its importance to the Indigenous community, encouraging more responsible interactions. In the context of my study, this means that when Sámi tourism entrepreneurs represent their embedded sustainable values and environmentally mindset, it can lead to responsible choices among tourists, and the impact on nature can be minimized.

4.4.3 Economic growth – an opportunity or a treat?

In addition to social and nature sustainability Sámi tourism representations should also consider economic impacts. Economic stability is one of several motivations for Sámi entrepreneurs starting a tourism business according to a study by Leu (2019). Findings from my study also indicate that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs, like any other sector, seem to strive for growth and financial success. An example of economic motivated representations in my study is for instance, on Website 6, with a product description saying; “meet and feed reindeer” and on Website 5 “Join us at a snowmobile safari”. These products headlines are examples of Sámi entrepreneurs that are actively promoting their products with an inviting text.

The examples of products that cater to the needs and interests of tourists have the potential to increase tourism to a destination. The increase in tourism can further lead to an increased income, employment, new business possibilities and local development, which are an important part of being sustainable. However, the tourism industry, including Sámi entrepreneurs, have faced criticism for prioritizing economic growth over environmental, cultural, and social sustainability (Bernardi, 2019; Wickens et al., 2015). This means that the concern among scholars has been related to economic benefits of tourism that must not come at the cost of long-term environmental damage, loss of cultural identity, or social disruptions.

To achieve a positive tourism development there should be a sustainable balance between economic, cultural, and environmental issues. It is important that the business development should be managed by the Sámi entrepreneurs themselves and in their own pace (Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022). This means that in Sámi tourism, it is vital for innovation and the business development to be controlled by the Sámi entrepreneurs at a pace that aligns with their own values and goals. This strategy emphasizes Indigenous control and considers their unique approach and time frame for development.

Even if economic motivations and opportunities has been seen as a sustainable treat, it could also be seen as a positive contribution to preserve cultural heritage and strengthen Sámi communities. In my study, a product like “feeding reindeer” is probably developed to attract customers, because tourists visiting Norway are interested in close encounters with reindeer and Sámi people (NordNorskReiseliv, 2022). To cater to the needs of the tourist is not something negative, as long as it contributes positively to the environment, preserve cultural heritage, and benefit local communities. One important factor in this regard is that economic

stability is necessary to allow Indigenous communities to do their own marketing, tell their own stories, engage with a global audience, and gain more control over their tourism initiatives (Carr et al., 2016; Kramvig & Verran, 2019). This means that digital storytelling and narratives holds a potential to empower the Sámi tourism businesses both economically, socially, and culturally. The economic stability derived from tourism can have a positive impact for the entrepreneurs, but also for the local community. When Sámi tourism-driven economic activities are managed and directed by the local entrepreneurs, it can result in a more inclusive and community-oriented approach, ensuring that the benefits of the economic growth are distributed within the local area. This, in turn, can contribute to the sustainable development and overall well-being of the entire community.

Overall, economic stability and growth is an important foundation for Indigenous communities to be “in control” of their marketing with a global audience. Through digital narratives Sámi entrepreneurs can revitalize their culture, influencing a more sustainable tourism development, and at the same time strengthen economic aspects for themselves and the community they belong to.

5 Conclusion, DMO cooperation, and future research

Throughout this study, my primary objective has been to conduct a comprehensive analysis, delving deep into the diverse narratives and representations presented by Sámi tourism entrepreneurs on their websites. This study has been a journey into the digital landscapes of the Sámi tourism industry, exploring not only the visual and verbal content but also the underlying meaning, potential impacts, creation of tourists, and highlighting implications for sustainability.

In this study I have unveiled Sámi culture representations, derived from the themes ‘connection to culture’, ‘connection to reindeer’, and ‘connection to nature’. Representations concerning ‘connection to culture’ unveil narratives that create a more nuanced picture than previous research has emphasized. A central aspect according to findings from this study highlights both modernity and sustainability as well as the exotic and pre-modern narrative of the nomadic people.

My findings signifies that the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs have different marketing strategies, where some are still meeting the request for “otherness” while others are adapting to changing market demands. Overall, representations of traditional and pre-modern culture in combination with “modern” narratives indicate a balancing act of cultural commodification and revitalization that these entrepreneurs must contend with. Even if representations of Sámi culture indicate different strategies to attract tourists, narratives underscore the importance of passing down cultural practices and values to future generations, as well as to visitors. The narratives presented online are more than a means for economic gain; they also express hope, resilience, and the continuity of Sámi customs, and preservation of culture and tradition. In addition, the narratives shed light on the Sámi people’s ongoing efforts to regain what was lost during the Norwegianization process, emphasizing the need to strengthen their unique cultural identity. The implications and potential challenges lie in meeting tourists’ demand for authenticity and ensuring that cultural heritage is respected, accurately represented with a diversity of Sámi culture, and not commodified to the point of marginalization or misrepresentation.

Narratives, derived from the theme ‘connection to reindeer’, indicate that reindeer is an important aspect of Sámi tourism representations. All the selected websites feature both visual and verbal narratives emphasizing the cultural significance of reindeer. Reindeer herding

plays a central role in Sámi culture, reflecting a profound connection to identity and tradition. Since all selected websites are reindeer herders this is not a surprising finding. However, even if representation highlight the close relationship between Sámi people and reindeer, there are also representations of reindeer focusing on meeting the requests of tourists. Representations of reindeer vary, from a wild animal living in nature to a tame and domestic animal for tourists to engage with and feed. These representations of reindeer raise concerns regarding domestication and over-commercialization. Striking a balance between tourism and cultural preservation while addressing environmental and cultural impacts is essential for sustainable Sámi tourism.

Representations of nature, derived from the theme ‘connection to nature’, indicate that while the remote and fairytale winter nature theme holds significant relevance across all websites, there are also alternative depictions of nature in combination with Sámi culture that creates other perceptions of how to relate to an Arctic environment. In addition to the narrative of untouched, romanticized nature combined with Sámi culture, there are representations of nature as a source of dramatic contrasts, educating tourists about nature’s unpredictability.

In addition to the analysis based on the three themes ‘connection to culture’, ‘connection to reindeer’ and ‘connection to nature’ I have also studied representations in terms of sustainability and which tourist is attracted. This study has unveiled that the Sámi entrepreneurs are targeting several segments, ‘Attraction seekers’, ‘Culture - and Nature enthusiasts’, with offerings like “meet a reindeer”, “northern lights safari”, “snowmobile safaris” and “hunting trips”. These offerings share a use of nature, in both indirect and direct ways, that could also come with the risk of conflicts and potential exploitation of cultural and natural environments. My findings underscore the need to balance tourists interests with sustainability of cultural and ecological aspects in the Arctic.

The analysis indicates that the studied websites are emphasizing on passing down cultural practices, knowledge, and values to future generations, local inhabitants and to potential tourists. The Sámi entrepreneurs create new perceptions of Sámi culture that may strengthen the culture, and lead to increased respect but also stronger cultural pride among Sámi people. Narratives on the selected websites, empower Sámi tourism entrepreneurs, because these entrepreneurs are shaping their own cultural representations. Furthermore, the efforts to pass down cultural practices, knowledge, and values align with sustainability by fostering

intergenerational continuity and promoting a deeper understanding of Sámi culture, contributing to the overall sustainability of the community.

Even if the studied websites have a strong emphasis on the cultural aspects of sustainability, there are also some improvements to be considered. Representations of Sámi culture in an online environment are still in an early phase, and there is also a need to develop new storytelling strategies that contribute to more diverse representations of contemporary Sámi community. There is a potential for an increased focus especially on the social aspects, as the research highlights the necessity for a broader and more diverse representation of Sámi culture and society. A more diverse representation can contribute to an intercultural understanding, developing knowledge, challenging stereotypes, and fostering respect and appreciation between Sámi people, local community and inhabitants and the rest of the world. This can lead to increased cultural appreciation, stronger community bonds, and a positive impact on the overall sustainability of Sámi culture.

My study also highlights the potential for Sámi tourism to broaden the concept of nature in relation to Sámi culture, representing the unique Indigenous perspective on nature interactions. Findings from my study reveal that some of the Sámi entrepreneurs are still emphasizing on the “tourist gaze” while others present an environmental mindset and coexistence with nature in their narratives. The sustainable nature representations can deepen tourists’ understanding of Sámi people’s connection to the environment and encourage responsible interactions. That further could lead to responsible choices among tourists, and the impact on nature can be minimized.

In relation to economic sustainability there are some concerns regarding Indigenous tourism and the pursuit of economic growth. However, there is not any negative about economic growth as long as the Sámi entrepreneurs are driving the pace and direction of their business development. Economic stability derived from tourism can have a positive impact for the entrepreneurs, taking control of their own representations, strengthening both the entrepreneurs and the local community.

Overall, sustainable digital storytelling is a tool for strengthening local community, empower Sámi people, rework colonial images, avoid cultural conflicts, nature preservation, and attract a broader and more responsible tourist segment of tourist, and also contribute to economic sustainability.

5.1 Suggestions for further work and cooperation with DMOs

Considering the findings of my study, I would like to add some suggestions for further work, especially concerning representations of Sámi culture on a national and destination level.

According to recent studies (Olsen & Pashkevich, 2023) there has been a shift in emphasis, particularly on Visit Sweden's website, highlighting Sámi art, design and knowledge of nature and downplaying the use of the emblematic and pre-modern Indigenous narrative. This is an example of how a national marketing organization has implemented diverse representations of Indigenous culture that challenges the standardized portrayals by destination marketing organizations (DMOs). In Norway, this work is still in its' maturity, with the recent National Tourism Strategy (2021), that underscores the necessity for creating a new strategy and framework on how to market and promote Sámi culture.

In relation to further work with Sámi tourism representations, it is crucial that further development is managed by the Sámi tourism industry in cooperation with other marketing organizations. To achieve successful outcomes in any tourism endeavor, effective governance, collaboration, and the integration of Indigenous values and worldviews are important (Carr et al., 2016). This means that the process of developing new storytelling strategies, should not be a responsibility for the Sámi tourism industry alone. It requires a holistic approach, which emphasizes the need for cooperation between Sámi tourism entrepreneurs and destination marketing organizations, such as Northern Norway Tourist Board and Visit Norway. Sámi tourism entrepreneurs, and individuals from various Sámi regions across Norway, should participate in developing a Sámi tourism marketing strategy rooted in shared values, knowledge, and traditions that encompasses the diversity of Sámi culture.

5.2 Future research

In this project I have studied narratives and representations of Sami culture in a tourism context. This project has unveiled crucial insights, but it also raises new questions and possibilities for further research.

As highlighted in the discussion chapter the impact of digital narratives on both tourists and local destinations is a complex area with potential positive and negative impacts. While my study has offered glimpses into how tourists perceive narratives, the tourist's lens is multifaceted with different motivations, values, and beliefs. Online documents should

according to Asdal (2015) also be analyzed from a reader perspective and context. There is a possibility for future research to delve further into the market perspective to be able to understand tourists' deeper values, motivations, knowledge of Sámi culture and perceptions in more detail. Future research can also include a more comprehensive examination of how representations of Sámi culture influence tourists' decisions and experiences.

Simultaneously, further research can also investigate the impact on Sámi tourism companies, local communities, and the overall sustainability of culture and environment. Conducting interviews with tourists or employing digital ethnography/netnography methods can provide a more nuanced understanding of these issues.

Beyond websites, digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Tripadvisor and travel blogs are interesting platforms for further research. Especially research on travel blogs has not reached maturity (Banyai & Glover, 2012). Future research should encompass these digital spaces to understand how narratives are adapted and conveyed differently across diverse online channels.

In the realm of Sámi tourism, an avenue worth exploring lies in the process of co-creation and engaging in meaningful dialogues with the Sámi entrepreneurs. Central to this exploration is the question: What are the narratives and representations that Sámi tourism entrepreneurs aim to convey through their websites? Sami tourism entrepreneurs, travelers, and researchers could participate in collaborative research. Through dialogues and co-creation, future research could investigate intentions, perceptions, and realities, ultimately contributing to a more profound understanding of Sámi tourism but also for exchange of knowledge.

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