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### **Sakte-TV som format for urfolks medieproduksjon: Tilfellet Giddajohtin**

**Sammendrag:** *Giddajohtin, en direktesendt, minutt-for-minutt sakte-TV-produksjon, ble vist på NRK fra 24. april til 3. mai 2017. I denne artikkelen analyserer vi Giddajohtin som en urfolksmedieproduksjon og utforsker NRKs beslutning om å produsere programmet. Vi belyser også hvordan sakte-TV-formatet ble brukt for å muliggjøre historiefortelling fra et urfolksperspektiv. Vår studie er basert på et formålsstyrt utvalg av kvalitative intervjuer med nøkkelpersoner involvert i utviklingen og produksjonen av programmet. Nøkkelaktørens kunnskap og kompetanse innen reindrift og arealbruk var grunnleggende for programmets narrativ. Nøkkelaktørene bidro også til økt oppmerksomhet i offentligheten om konflikter knyttet til urfolks liv. Vår analyse viser hvordan urfolksmedieproduksjoner kan innebære samarbeid mellom ulike aktører i allmennkringkastingsorganisasjoner, og hvordan disse aktørene kan inkluderes på alle nivåer av beslutningstaking. Samtidig krevde beslutningen om å produsere Giddajohtin en tilpasning av interesser mellom aktører med ulike maktposisjoner hos NRK.*

**Emneord:** *Urfolks-medier, sakte-TV, public service-medier, offentlig sfære, samisk*

Fagfelle­vurdert

# Slow-TV as a format for Indigenous media production: The Case of Giddajoh­tin

**Abstract:** *Giddajoh­tin*, a live, minute-by-minute Slow-TV production was broadcast by NRK, the Norwegian public service broadcaster, from 24 April to 3 May 2017. In this article we analyse *Giddajoh­tin* as an Indigenous Media production and explore the NRKs decision to produce the programme. We also highlight how the Slow-TV format was used to enable storytelling from an Indigenous perspective. Our study is based on a purposive selection of qualitative interviews with key individuals involved in the commissioning, development and production of the programme. The key actors' knowledge and competence of reindeer husbandry and land use were essential to the programme's narrative. The key actors also raised awareness in the public sphere about everyday conflicts relating to Indigenous life. Our analysis shows how Indigenous media productions can involve collaboration between different actors in public service broadcasting organisations, and how these actors can be included at all levels of decision-making. At the same time, the decision to produce *Giddajoh­tin* required an alignment of interests between actors with different positions of power within NRK.

**Keywords:** *indigenous media, slow TV, public service media, public sphere, Sámi*



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One of the most spectacular scenes of the Slow-TV production *Giddajoh­tin* became known as 'Romance in the Arctic', the moment when Aslak Ante Sara declared his love for his wife, Rávdná, by creating an image with the family's reindeer herd. The drone cameras observed as he, driving his snowmobile, led the herd to form a heart surrounding the letter 'R' (for Rávdná) on the snowclad tundra (Figure One). Rávdná responded by throwing a kiss to her husband via the camera. The scene was shared across social media and viewed over 100,000 times on Facebook. It was also reported by news media across the globe. Apart from the beauty of the landscape and the act, the scene also comprises the essential elements of this production: the broadcasting of the participants' intimate and deep knowledge and competence about Indigenous life, the experimental character of the technical production where drone photography was tested and used in the Arctic tundra for the first time, and the rough and vulnerable circumstances in which the programme was produced.

*Giddajoh­tin* (or 'Springtime Reindeer Migration'), was a live-streamed, Slow-TV-production, broadcast on NRK, the Norwegian public service broadcaster, in 2017. It lasted nine days, from 24 April to 3 May and thus represented one of the largest Indigenous media productions in Norway to date, both in terms of time and resources allocated<sup>1</sup>. Following an increased media political awareness of the need



*Romance in the Arctic / Kjærlighet på Vidda (NRK.no).*

for a greater understanding of Indigenous issues in the public domain, and in response to a submission by the Norwegian Sámi parliament<sup>2</sup>. NRK's remit was expanded in 2014. The revised mandate required the organization to produce programming of relevance both to the Sámi and Norwegian audiences in Norway. It also specified that NRK had a responsibility to strengthen the Norwegian and Sámi languages, identity and culture<sup>3</sup>.

*Giddajohitin* followed a Sámi family, throughout this article referred to by their last name, the Sara family, as they herded their reindeer from winter to summer pastures, a journey of 550km across the arctic tundra. In keeping with other Slow TV programmes broadcast by NRK, *Giddajohitin* followed this process in real time, allowing the audience to observe the journey and the work involved as it unfolded. The production relied on extensive knowledge of reindeer herding, and of the land involved in the migration process. The extended Sara family participated and, as the production showed, several generations took part, including small children. The family members divided the work between them.

Although the migration was the main theme of the programme, the Slow TV format also allowed additional issues relating to everyday Indigenous life to be raised. The audience was for example informed that one family member, Jovsset Ánte Sara, was party to a court case regarding a compulsory order from the Norwegian government to cull his herd of reindeer from around 350 to 75 animals. This reduction threatened the viability of his livelihood as a reindeer herder. At the time of the production this case was unresolved and highly controversial. It would take a further seven years until the UN Human Rights Committee, in August 2024, found that Jovsset Ánte Sara's right to pursue his way of life as a reindeer herder had been violated by the Norwegian government.<sup>4</sup> Since the production, a major artwork produced by

Jovsset's sister Máret Anne Sara, entitled *Pile O'Sapmi*, produced in protest about the situation, has been included as a primary attraction at the National Museum in Oslo, further extending awareness of conflicts relating to Indigenous life in the public sphere<sup>5</sup>. As such, *Giddajohtin* addressed issues of controversy surrounding reindeer herding in Norway.

In this article, we analyse *Giddajohtin* as an Indigenous Media production and explore how the decision to produce the programme was supported by its potential to achieve additional goals within the broader NRK organisation, including the potential to test new solutions for broadcasting from remote locations and for cross-sectional collaboration within the organisation. We also highlight how the Slow-TV format was used to enable storytelling from an Indigenous perspective about matters of relevance to the Sámi community, as well as to the broader Norwegian society.

The background, theory, and methodological framework for the analysis are discussed in the following paragraphs. This includes references to research about Indigenous media production and the Slow-TV format as a vehicle for innovation in public service broadcasting<sup>6</sup>. To begin with, we locate the production culturally, geographically and historically.

### Cultural and historical context

The exact size of the Sámi population is unknown, as it is prohibited to register ethnicity in public statistics in Sweden and Norway, while in Finland, the definition of who is Sámi is controversial. Electoral rolls are open to those who are eligible and want to register as voters for the Sami parliamentary elections in Norway, Sweden and Finland, but they only comprise self-declared Sami voters over 18 years. The number of voters has steadily increased since the Sami Parliament in Norway was opened in 1989, and in 2019 the electoral register held 18,103 names<sup>7</sup>. Key sources estimate that 40,000 Sámi reside in Norway, 20,000 in Sweden, 7,500 in Finland, and 2,000 in Russia<sup>8</sup>. The Sámi are thus a considerable minority within the overall Norwegian population of about 5.6 million people<sup>9</sup>. With regard to broadcasting, as other sources in this special issue show<sup>10</sup>, little programming, and in particular TV programming, has historically been produced for or about the Sámi community. At the same time, as an Indigenous community within the Norwegian state, the Sámi have a right to the protection of their language, culture, and way of life. This includes a right to access relevant media content.

According to our interviewees, the Slow-TV production *Giddajohtin* was initiated by NRK Sápmi. Reindeer herding is a theme which is relevant for both the Sámi community, and the broader Norwegian audience. It is a way of life that only a small percentage of Sámi people practice, however, it has an important and protected position. Our interviewees emphasise that most Sámi people do not live or work within reindeer herding families. This way of life, nevertheless, is a backbone in Sámi culture, as use of the Sámi languages, traditional knowledge, and conservation of nature through sustainable use of resources are inherent to the praxis. Today, in Norway, the right to engage in reindeer herding is (almost) exclusive to the Sámi people. Conflicts surrounding Indigenous life have a long history in Norway, most notably with reference to the Alta-conflict in the 1970s and 1980s (which concerned protests by Sámi people against government plans to build a hydroelectric dam which would flood the Alta plain), and more recently the Fosen-conflict (from 2020 onwards) which concerned protests against the establishment of wind turbines on land used for reindeer herding. Reindeer herding requires use and access to lands that have traditionally been used but not owned, and colonisation and settling of traditional Sámi lands have caused conflicts over land rights and land use for centuries. Further, reindeer herding is subject to state regulations that impact the economy and viability of this way of life, among them requires culling of herds and other measures<sup>11</sup>. As such, it is relevant for NRK to produce programming which enhances



knowledge about reindeer herding in the public domain.

*Giddajohtin* was relatively successful with its target audience, reaching 1,9 million viewers, and 0.4% of the audience share. The audience reached was located in 137 different countries. 90,000 users accessed the live stream, and 140,000 users visited the website. It generated ca. 9,000 interactions on social media, and ca. 7,000 live chat interactions on NRK's website. It was mentioned in 240 articles in Norwegian media and 20 international reports, including *the BBC*, *The Guardian*, and *the Daily Mail*<sup>12</sup> These figures are particularly significant to NRK Sápmi who have a much more limited core target audience than the overall national public service broadcasting channel.

The programme was set in Finnmark, the largest and northernmost Norwegian province. It was broadcast in a season characterized by the locals as the "Spring-Winter", meaning that it took place in a cold, snow-covered landscape. Days were long, nights short and the colours of the sunset and sunrise over the vast Finnmark Plain offered spectacular TV images. In keeping with the Slow TV format<sup>13</sup>, the pace of the broadcast was extremely slow. It lasted as long as the journey unfolded in real time and was mediated at the same speed as in reality. Often nothing in particular happened, while beautiful images of landscapes, people, and animals were shown. Reindeer migration is dependent on weather conditions and on the availability of food for the herd. This meant that the start and end point of the migration were uncertain, in turn presenting difficulties for programme scheduling. Furthermore, the migration took place in areas of the Arctic Tundra where no permanent broadcasting transmission network existed. The requirement to develop new technical broadcasting solutions has also been a central feature of other Slow TV programmes developed and produced by NRK<sup>14</sup>. A combination of local knowledge and competence, as well as technical production skills, were therefore critical to this production.

### Indigenous Media

Indigenous media are defined by Wilson and Stewart<sup>15</sup> as forms of media expression conceptualized, produced, and/or created by Indigenous peoples across the globe. Research relating to Indigenous Media usually has a normative starting point, with what McCallum and Posetti<sup>16</sup> have outlined as two important goals. The first is to improve media representations of Indigenous peoples. The second is that non-Indigenous peoples should learn about Indigenous people and understand them. Thus, Indigenous Media productions are often forms of political communication. These normative goals arise from the historical context that mainstream media, including public service media, have marginalised Indigenous peoples, or engaged in stereotypical or conflict-oriented representation, thereby contributing to processes of assimilation<sup>17</sup>. Based on these definitions, we consider *Giddajohtin* to be an Indigenous media production.

Research about Indigenous media is often concerned with questions of agency, impact, empowerment, and representation, supporting enhanced visibility of Indigenous peoples and their perspectives. When discussing Indigenous journalism for example, Folker Hanusch<sup>18</sup> highlights the importance of access to media, whereby people can 'tell their own stories', and 'gain voice to document Indigenous cultural traditions from an Indigenous perspective'. Hanusch also argues that Indigenous media are almost always a response to the dominant culture's media treatment of Indigenous people. However, Todorova<sup>19</sup> maintains that characterizing Indigenous media in this way represents an essentializing view and constructs an artificial contrast between mainstream and Indigenous media. The production of *Giddajohtin* is therefore more in line with Todorova's definition, as it situates the reindeer migration process in a broader context, produced and broadcast by NRK for both the Sámi and Norwegian audiences.

Importantly, the Indigenous broadcasting division NRK Sápmi is also situated within the larger Norwegian public service broadcasting organisation and is the most important Sámi media organisation in Norway.

The literature on Indigenous media has furthermore produced different understandings of audiences. Positioning Indigenous media in opposition to ‘western media’ is considered problematic because it can make the situation seem overly static<sup>20</sup>. Very few empirical studies find this kind of opposition. Ross<sup>21</sup> for example finds that media consumers who belong to particular ethnic groups have an interest in news content that extends beyond content relating to their ethnicity. Hokowhitu<sup>22</sup> also rejects the notion of Indigenous journalism as a distinct process or institution. Focusing in particular on rights to land ownership and use, Waller et al<sup>23</sup>. point out that mainstream programming that marginalises Indigenous voices can reinforce social imaginaries that perpetuate processes of colonialism. In this article, we argue that *Giddajohtin* provides further nuances to our understanding of Indigenous media, both as vehicles for the expression of Indigenous culture, but also for increasing awareness of Indigenous culture and history in the broader public sphere of which Indigenous media services and channels are a part of. These media also enable the broadcasting of content of relevance to support a greater understanding of contemporary social conflicts surrounding Indigenous issues.

Recent research focusing on Indigenous participation in digital media has furthermore highlighted the importance of expanding the emphasis on access in Indigenous media research to include an exploration of how Indigenous voices are heard and listened to in public policy debates. Dreher et al<sup>24</sup>. find that while digital media present unprecedented opportunities for access and voice, there is a limited understanding of whether increased participation in digital media necessarily leads to increased democratic participation. Waller and Waller et al.<sup>25</sup> question for example the extent to which issues of land ownership and land use are recognized in the broader public domain. By extension, we submit that the ways in which Indigenous media can contribute to a greater understanding of Indigenous issues and ways of life, and conflicts surrounding these, require further investigation. It was after all partly for this reason that NRK’s remit was expanded in 2014 to specifically include the production of programming for both the Indigenous Sámi audience, and for the Norwegian audience<sup>26</sup>.

### Slow-TV as a format for Indigenous Media Production

A total of 19 Slow-TV programmes were produced by NRK between 2009 and 2020<sup>27</sup>. These have been quite popular, in particular *Hurtigruten*, which live-streamed the journey of a daily ferry ship along the Norwegian coastline and had over 1 million viewers at its peak<sup>28</sup>. The format was introduced by NRK in 2009 with the production of *Bergensbanen* (a programme that followed a train journey from Oslo to Bergen). Puijk and Urdal<sup>29</sup> point out that at this time, convergence and digitalization had led to the development of an additional channel for NRK, which in turn provided capacity for more experimental and time-consuming productions. This also provided new opportunities for audience participation and interaction.

In defining the Slow-TV genre, Urdal<sup>30</sup> identifies four important criteria. These productions should be a) live, b) have an unbroken timeline where all the content is included, c) be high-quality TV productions, and d) be about a journey or a story that is worth telling. Puijk<sup>31</sup> also finds that Slow-TV is a vehicle for innovation within public service media. Puijk<sup>32</sup> and later Puijk and Urdal<sup>33</sup>, identify a number of factors that contributed to the success of the Slow-TV format, namely audience participation and interaction, national identity, and nature.

Certain media institutional factors which are characteristic of public service media may support experimental and innovative production, such as those that are required to broadcast Slow-TV productions. These include independence from commercial business plans; freedom from a requirement to broadcast advertising content; scheduling and the obligation to broadcast programming that promotes cultural plurality. As Puijk submits:

The economic rationale so often seen as spurring innovation in commercial broadcasters does not apply to their licence-based, public-service counterparts, such as the NRK and BBC. The link between success in the market and income is weak, at least in the short term<sup>34</sup>.

As a format, Slow-TV is characterized by Puijk as an observational live broadcast with a deliberate calm pace that provides a contrast to otherwise fast-paced contemporary media content<sup>35</sup>. Puijk traces the format's history to art cinema and slow film, tourist film and early documentary formats. From its initial conception, *Giddajohtin* was intended as a Slow-TV production. It was designed to observe the migration process, from start to finish, and to broadcast this process in real time. The content focused on issues of local identity, and particularly an Indigenous way of life. At the same time, the programme format provided an opportunity for NRK Sápmi, and for the reindeer-herding Sara family, to communicate issues relating to Indigenous culture, including issues that were the subject of conflict relating to land use and the culling of herds to the Sámi and Norwegian audiences. This allowed for more of the nuances regarding controversial aspects of reindeer husbandry to be raised. The time and space allocated to the discussion of these issues provides a contrast to historically more concise and conflict-driven coverage of Indigenous issues, as has been documented in newspapers and other formats<sup>36</sup>.

Against this theoretical backdrop, we analyse *Giddajohtin* as an Indigenous Media production and explore how the decision to produce the programme was supported by its potential to achieve additional goals within the broader NRK organisation. We therefore identify the key decision-making moments in the production of *Giddajohtin*. We then identify how actions taken within these decision-making processes facilitated storytelling from an Indigenous perspective about matters of relevance to the Sámi community, as well as the broader Norwegian society.

## Methods

Similar to Puijk<sup>37</sup> in his explorations of various Slow-TV productions, we implemented an embedded case study to analyse *Giddajohtin*<sup>38</sup>. As we were interested in the decision-making processes that facilitated this Indigenous media production, our primary data was gathered from a purposive selection of qualitative interviews with key individuals involved in the commissioning, development and production of the programme, namely the CEO of NRK, the Director of NRK Sápmi, the Production Manager involved in Slow-TV production, and the Publishing Editor of NRK Sápmi. We also used the production itself, and in particular interviews and conversations with the Sara family in the programme, as data sources. The selection included both Sámi and non-Sámi interviewees.

The interviews were systematically coded to identify key decision-making moments. Through this process, our analytical themes of (a) programme decision; (b) access; (c) scheduling; (d) dramaturgy; (e) technical production; and (f) interaction were identified.

Our interview material was supported by a review of additional relevant source material including the initial live broadcast of *Giddajohtin* on NRK Sápmi in the Spring of 2017. During the nine-day broadcast, we, the authors, followed the production but it was obviously impossible to watch the entire broadcast continuously in real time. We subsequently accessed and reviewed the production from the archives on NRK's website<sup>39</sup>. While our viewing of the programme after the event did not allow for a live analysis in real time, we documented and discussed our individual viewings at analytical meetings and during our interviews with participants. We have also accessed and reviewed additional documentation relating to the production, including the NRK website, social media feeds, and news articles.

Our position as researchers: As researchers who never participated in reindeer herding, we do not



have the knowledge or competence that would allow us to fully understand and analyse the representation of this way of life from an Indigenous perspective. We are non-Indigenous researchers who have been and are connected to Indigenous settings through relating to Sámi people and society as family, friends, neighbours, citizens, and colleagues. As researchers we are positioned at what Olsen<sup>40</sup> describes as a 'cultural interface'. This concept indicates the existence of plural subject positions both for individuals and within a community.

As non-Indigenous researchers with a cultural interface to Indigenous settings, we are therefore sensitive to the importance of taking a critical approach to investigating Indigenous media production and are interested in how this kind of production can facilitate the discussion and debate of Indigenous issues in the public sphere. The production of *Giddajohitin* confirms that Indigenous media, voices and audiences are part and parcel of the communication systems we research and should be analysed on that basis.

### Findings: *Giddajohitin* as an Indigenous media production

To answer our research question, we identified key decision-making processes in which four groups of actors engaged in the production of *Giddajohitin*. These are (a) the NRK Sápmi division of NRK; (b) the Sara family; (c) the audience; and (d) the NRK organization and its Slow-TV production team. In subsequent analytical steps, we identified key decision-making moments and focused on how various factors influenced these decision-making processes. The key processes were identified as (a) programme decision; (b) access; (c) scheduling; (d) dramaturgy; (e) technical production; and (f) interaction.

#### (a) Programme Decision

The idea to produce *Giddajohitin* was initially developed and promoted by NRK Sápmi. However, the production demanded resources that extended beyond this division's control. As such, the idea had to be accepted and adopted by the parent organization, NRK. In this regard, we note that the Director of NRK Sápmi sits on the board of directors of NRK, and therefore has a significant position of power within the overall public service organization. This allows the director to influence top-level decisions regarding programme production.

Because significant resources were required, the programme had to balance a range of interests and appeal to a larger audience than that of NRK Sápmi alone. In this regard, the CEO of NRK noted:

It might be the case that the Sámi remit alone would not have been enough to justify this kind of project, but here the Sámi remit also fulfilled other requirements, such as innovation and collaboration across the organization. Many people that had never worked with NRK Sápmi suddenly became aware of their remit within the organization (Interview, 4 May 2018).

The Slow-TV format also facilitated NRK in realizing its obligations as a public service broadcaster with a mandate to serve both the Norwegian and the Sámi communities (as amended in 2014), while at the same time creating a safe space for experimentation and content innovation<sup>41</sup>. The development of *Giddajohitin* was therefore implemented as a collaboration between NRK Sápmi and NRK's Slow-TV production team. As the CEO of NRK points out:

This shows that NRK as a whole must get involved in delivering on the Sámi remit. NRK Sápmi would never have managed this alone. But in this case, all of NRK collaborated on that idea from Sápmi and that made it possible (Interview 4 May 2018).

The production also relied on the availability of a sufficient budget. If the scheduled live event did not start on time (which it did not), or if it did not progress at the pace that was planned (which it did not), this would have economic consequences. When asked about the cost implications, the Director of NRK Sápmi acknowledged: 'It was much dearer than we had anticipated. There were three extra days ... It was very much more expensive' (Interview, 8 May 2018). At the same time, as Puijk points out, the production cost around 28,500 Norwegian Kroner per hour (ca. 2,400 Euro) and was significantly cheaper than all of the other Slow-TV productions, with the exception of *Hurtigruten*<sup>42</sup>.

Despite these relatively low overall costs, the informants emphasised that the programme could not have been produced without the organisational resources provided by NRK. At the same time, the participation of NRK Sápmi, the Sara family, and the audience were critical. Competence in Sámi culture and language; reindeer herding; topography and geography; climate and weather; production and technical skills were needed. The interviewees also agreed that NRK built organizational knowledge and competence through this production. This related perhaps most importantly to the competence to produce Indigenous media, and to manage programming that was difficult to schedule. The CEO of NRK, for example stated that:

Previously nothing like this would have been broadcast on TV without a year's planning. However, in this case, there were factors that could not be controlled, for example weather. They were held up there for three or four days because of the weather. So that is a kind of training (Interview, 4 May 2018).

The Production Manager also noted the importance of taking risks in order to develop organizational competence:

NRK have used the Slow-TV projects both technically and in terms of collaboration as a kind of a sandbox where the organization can test things and where there is a lower threshold for the fact that things can go wrong. We have had support for that. In this case there was still a risk, but it was an accepted risk. We would never have managed to make this kind of project if we had to safe it on all fronts (Interview, 6 June 2018).

### **(b) Access**

NRK Sápmi approached the Sara family and negotiated their participation in the programme. It was of central importance to gain the trust of the family and their acceptance of the approach to production. The migration itself is a demanding and vulnerable process involving serious risks caused by harsh climate, the likelihood of bad weather, the risk that herds will be mixed, and potentially extreme challenges for people as well as animals. The production took place in landscapes mainly without roads, services, electricity, and communication infrastructure. The idea of producing a live TV-programme within this framework, involving a large production team and heavy equipment, was bold. At the very least, it required that the reindeer herders, the Sara family, accepted these risks, and were willing to tell their story and invite the production team and huge audiences that had little or no knowledge or experience of the migration process, into their personal lives. Bearing in mind the history and official policies of racism and assimilation that the Sámi population have been subjected to, this also involved risk-taking on a personal level for the family. Further complicating this, and relating directly to conflicts about land rights, was the on-going court case against the Norwegian state with regard to requirements to cull herds, which directly impacted Jovsset Ánte Sara. By accepting these risks, the Sara family provided the audience

with unprecedented access and insight into one of the most important processes in reindeer husbandry.

The Production Manager, who was non-Sámi, but experienced with the Slow-TV format, emphasized strongly that the production could not have been realized without NRK Sápmi taking the lead and having the knowledge, competence and skills about Sámi culture and reindeer herding in particular, to negotiate access and consent with the Sara-family:

You have to know the culture and the language in order to gain the trust of the Sámi participants. The people in NRK Sápmi had these resources. An outside production team would never have that (Interview, 6 June 2018).

The production also provided access for Sámi and Norwegian audiences to an element of Sámi culture that few Sámi and even fewer non-Sámi people ever experience: “Most Sámi people never get to participate in that journey, and hardly know how it happens or what challenges are involved” (Interview, Publishing Editor NRK Sápmi, 9 November 2018). Illustrating this point, the Production Manager noted:

I was, just like anybody else, fascinated by Sámi culture. I was only partly aware of the clichés of this culture before, the relationship to time, to nature, to animals. This is something that very few people experience. That’s why there is an interesting and unique story there (Interview, 6 June 2018).

By spending nine days following the migration process in close detail, and interacting with its audience, the production disseminated information about reindeer herding, about many of the challenges facing those who partake in this industry, and about Sámi culture in general. It also provided a way for the Sara family to raise and discuss issues relating to ongoing conflicts from their own perspective. It thus contributed to enhancing an understanding of Sámi culture and ways of life in the Norwegian public sphere.

### ***(c) Scheduling***

One of the main challenges the production faced was the fact that reindeer migration happens when a combination of natural factors falls into place. The ultimate goal is to get to a place where the reindeer can calve safely. While this is a difficult challenge for reindeer herders, it also required that the production team, in an unprecedented approach, allowed the Sara family to make the final decisions about when the production should start and end. The reindeer moved independently of the production team, and it happened several times that this interrupted or totally changed the course of the broadcast. In this regard, the Publishing Editor of NRK Sápmi noted:

I don’t think we could have dramatized this broadcast to any greater extent. Everything was dependent on whether there was food for the animals, what the weather was like, if the machines and the animals were working or whether we had the technology to broadcast. There were so many factors that were beyond our control, and that resulted in this rather strange narrative that people got caught up in. (Interview, 9 November 2018).

The family and the local production team insisted on respecting the process and refused to push the animals to move to fit the production schedule. The Director of NRK Sápmi stated:

It was fundamental for us that we were only there as long as the animals tolerated us. That also

required us to be innovative, in terms of negotiating scheduling. Planning a broadcast where a six-day programme might not start on time is demanding. We knew that anything could happen, but we did our best to ensure that it went well (Interview, 8 May 2018).

While prioritizing the animals' needs was preferred by NRK Sápmi and the Sara family, it was not immediately apparent to the broader production team that this was a good idea:

*Giddajohitin* was a wonderful personal journey for me, particularly concerning the relationship to time. The Sámi word for 'it depends' came to be the headline for the whole project. At first it was fascinating, then I was driven demented by it, and then I became a little fascinated again. That journey took a bit of time, it took possibly that week with *Giddajohitin*. We got on well and had a laugh together, we from the outside and the people from Sápmi who in a way stand in both camps culturally (Interview with Production Manager, 6 June 2018).

This tension around the approach to scheduling was something that the production team needed to overcome in order to work together. The Sámi participants, as represented by the Sara family and by NRK Sápmi, played a central role in deciding how the programme would be scheduled. They ensured that the herd of reindeer were respected and that the animals were not forced to move to comply with the planned broadcasting schedule of NRK. This contributed to organisational learning regarding cross-cultural television production and the need to respect nature, animals, and traditional ways of life.

#### **(d) Dramaturgy**

The Sámi family and the production team did not make decisions about the dramaturgy of the programme in isolation. The scene that we described initially, 'Romance in the Arctic', was initiated by the NRK production team who were interested in experimenting with drone cameras and planned this in collaboration with the Sara family. The drones provided a useful way of photographing the herd of reindeer on the move and could be tested out in various locations and angles. Aslak Ante Sara was asked by the production team whether he could manipulate the herd in a way that would be interesting to show using a drone camera. The subsequent scene is described as a declaration of love. When interviewed about this, Aslak's wife, Rávdná, stated:

'We were asked (by the production team) to make a pattern with the feed, and so I said that he had to make an R for Rávdná. And it turned out to be so much more beautiful!<sup>43</sup>

As part of the scene, and in response to her husband's declaration of love, Rávdná is also filmed throwing a kiss to him via the camera.

While the producers had broadly planned the dramaturgy, in terms of key milestones and thematic content, they primarily wanted to maintain an open and observational approach:

We decided that we should be true to the Slow-TV concept. We didn't want to include too many dramaturgical elements. We met the audience half-way a bit by increasing the use of information and using text on the screen, but we were very economical and certain that this shouldn't be educational tv. It should first and foremost be an experience (Interview, Publishing Editor NRK Sápmi, 9 November 2018).

The production missed its anticipated climax because the animals, and the wishes of the Sara family, were respected. The migration started later than planned, and the family, the reindeer, and the broadcasting crew were on tour three days longer than expected. Worsening weather conditions, rough terrain and an increased risk of stressing the animals led to the termination of the production before the herd reached the coast. The plan had been to film the herd as it swam across the sound between the mainland and the island where the summer pastures are located. Because of bad weather, swimming was deemed too risky by the reindeer herders. While the herd and the Sara family had to find an alternative to cross the sound (which happened after several days), NRK called its crew home. The production then faded out after many hours of waiting. The producers noted that this was very disappointing:

‘We need to be honest and say that when that happened, we were very disappointed. It would have been a fantastic final act to see the herd swimming over the sound’ (Interview, Publishing Editor NRK Sápmi, 9 November 2018).

But the Production Manager adds:

This was the right thing to do with regard to the reindeer herders, the family. They saw that we were respectful. We also showed this to the audience, that we don’t push two thousand animals out into the water if it’s dangerous for them. We stop there. And we did. So, we behaved properly (Interview, 6 June 2018).

The Sámi family and the production team therefore negotiated the dramaturgy of the programme as it evolved. In keeping with the Slow-TV format, the overall dramaturgy centred on observing the reindeer migration process. However, the development of this narrative was contingent on the decisions of the Sara family regarding the evolving risks to the herd. The inclusion of additional elements, such as the focus on ‘Romance in the Arctic’ and audience interaction also relied on a collaboration between the Sara family and the local production team who had knowledge and expertise regarding Sámi culture and everyday life, and technical expertise both locally and within the overall production team.

### **(e) Technical Production**

The participation of NRK Sápmi’s production team was critical to the technical production of *Giddajohitin*. Like previous Slow-TV productions, *Giddajohitin* required the development of flexible and mobile technical solutions to support the broadcast:

There is no coverage there, no internet, no mobile at all. So, we dragged the broadcasting network with us, as a mobile network around the surrounding mountaintops (Interview, Publishing Editor NRK Sápmi, 9 November 2018).

In addition to local knowledge, a technical team was required that could develop new ways of using link communication to broadcast. They also needed an Outside Broadcasting Unit, packed with the essential broadcasting equipment, in addition to electricity generators. This unit had to follow the migration process, as it proceeded across hundreds of kilometres of snow and ice. A solution was designed by a staff member from NRK Sápmi. He essentially designed a broadcast unit on skis, (see image next page) which become known as the ‘gumpi’, a Sámi word for a small hut on skis that is drawn alongside the



*The Gumpi. Personal photograph: Eli Skogerbø*

reindeer as they migrate The gumpi is described by the production manager here:

The idea was that we would make a mobile broadcasting unit that should weigh around 800kg. I am convinced that it weighed a ton and a half. It creaked and it grumbled as we dragged it along. And then there was the weather of course – we had no idea if it was going to be mild, if we were going to drive that gumpi in a half metre of surface water and dirt and muck. Or if it would be cold, or even too cold, so that we would have to delay the production (Interview, 6 June 2018).

One aspect which all our interviewees commented on was how forgiving the audience was for the technical difficulties they experienced:

There are dropouts, cuts and technical faults. This has happened in all Slow-TV productions. Things that otherwise in a live broadcast would have been a crisis. In this case when it happened, we said ‘we have no signal, the gumpi is out of range, we are waiting until it comes back’. The audience had a kind of understanding and patience because they knew that this was something that we had never done before, that it was experimental. Having permission to try and fail on air is an enormous learning experience (Interview with Production Manager, 6 June 2018).



The Director of NRK Sápmi also emphasised the importance of this experimental culture, and the freedom to fail, which participating in this production brought to NRK Sápmi: ‘

All the time you have to try things out and you can do that while you are on air. This is a learning that we in NRK need’ (Interview, 8 May 2018).

In the case of this production, the NRK Sápmi team had the knowledge required to best plan a broadcast from a location with very little infrastructure and difficult weather and topological conditions. At the same time, expertise was required with regard to sending signals from location and coordinating the overall technical production. This expertise was provided by NRK via the Slow-TV production team.

**(f) Interaction: Creating a space for dialogue about Sámi culture**

Unlike other Slow-TV productions, such as *Hurtigruten*, the audience could not be invited to attend the sites of *Giddajohhtin* to participate live. Instead, they were invited to comment and chat on the programme website and via social media. This interaction developed the production in a way that activated the expertise of the NRK Sápmi production team. In this regard, the Publishing Editor of NRK Sápmi noted:

Suddenly hundreds of thousands of Norwegians sat for hours and watched paint dry – absolutely nothing happened! Whereas on social media people were commenting like crazy! Comments like ‘I’ve been sitting and watching a reindeer chewing for forty minutes and I am very happy’. After a while we started getting a lot of questions about the names of mountains, bushes and animals. Almost nothing was too small to ask about, because nothing was happening. So, they (the audience) had in a way to write their own drama and narrative into the programme (Interview, 9 November 2018).

The extent to which this interaction focused on details and aspects of Sámi culture, reindeer herding and migration, and Sámi music and place names was probably unique. While not unprecedented, i.e. in previous Slow-TV productions audiences had interacted with the producers, for example in *Hurtigruten*, the audience had commented on the musical playlist, in this production the audience called for more Sámi music and requested more local culture and knowledge. While direct and on-site audience interaction was encouraged in previous Slow-TV productions, this was not possible in the case of *Giddajohhtin*. This level and nature of audience interaction was therefore something new, and unanticipated, as the Publishing Editor with NRK Sápmi remarks:

It was planned for the most part as a TV production that would happen on-screen, and we had an Internet studio prepared to answer questions and comments that might come. But the Internet part of the production exploded relatively quickly to become an independent and a very central part of the television production (Interview, 9 November 2018).

The interaction also created a space for dialogue between the producers and their audience, which brought elements of Sámi culture into the public domain:

It was the audience that asked and taught us what they wanted to know, and we tried to answer them as well as we could. We often hear that we become blind to our own strengths and our own culture. We think that this is nothing special. But that dialogue with the audience gave us all of a

sudden both the outsider and insider perspectives. I learned a lot about reindeer herding that I had never known before (Interview with Director of NRK Sápmi, 8 May 2018).

The interaction also allowed the production team to tackle conflict head on, as it arose in social media interactions about the programme. The Slow-TV format provided space for issues of conflict to be raised and discussed, and for the Indigenous perspective about these issues to be presented. The following example relates to an ongoing conflict about rights to land use in Finnmark. During the season for reindeer migration, restrictions are placed on the use of snowmobiles in areas designated to reindeer husbandry:

Early in the programme one person joined the chat and was ostentatious and dominating. Many of his comments pointed out that there was so much space around the reindeer, and that there therefore should also be space for ordinary people to drive their snowmobiles – he didn't understand why there should be any restrictions. The debate changed character when I posted a comment about the fact that behind every mountaintop in sight there was another herd of reindeer that was on their way to the coast. Hundreds of herds were making the journey, one way or another, over the Finnmark Plain (Interview, Publishing Editor NRK Sápmi, 9 November 2018).

Both the audience and NRK Sápmi played a central role in developing this dialogue during the production. As the importance of the interaction became apparent, NRK Sápmi recruited additional staff with expertise and knowledge to answer the questions asked by the audience. They also employed additional staff with Sámi language skills, as some of the questions asked by the audience were in the Sámi languages.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The main contribution of our study is to understand how and why NRK decided to produce this large-scale Indigenous Media programme. Our analysis shows that the decision to produce the programme was supported by its potential to achieve additional goals within the broader NRK organisation, including the potential to test new solutions for broadcasting from remote locations and for cross-sectional collaboration within the organisation.

We also highlight how the Slow-TV format was used to enable storytelling from an Indigenous perspective about matters of relevance to the Sámi community, as well as to the broader Norwegian society. Our analysis shows that such productions can be made in collaboration with the traditional owners and users of the land on which they are produced. Following Waller<sup>44</sup>, we find that Indigenous Media can include participation from the ground up, and can, in all aspects of production, allow for access and sharing of knowledge between key actor groups. In our case this includes the four main groups of actors that participated in and influenced the production of *Giddaajohtin*, the NRK Sápmi production team, the Sara family, the audience, and the national broadcasting corporation, NRK.

Our analysis reveals that these actors influenced key decision-making processes relating to the production, particularly regarding respect for nature, animals and the reindeer herding process. NRK Sápmi initiated the programme and negotiated conditions for access. The Sara family, supported in their roles as participants by NRK Sápmi, became co-creators of the production and had the final say in negotiating scheduling. During the programme they were able to communicate their concerns about ongoing conflicts relating to reindeer husbandry and everyday Indigenous life in Norway. NRK Sápmi and the Sara family provided knowledge and competence about reindeer husbandry, land, weather and culture. At the same time, the production relied on budgetary, format and production resources provided by

NRK. This public service media organisation also provided additional resources in terms of personnel and equipment as required, along with a significant national platform and audience. As such, *Giddajohitin* required the alignment of a range of organisational interests within NRK.

Our study focuses on one Indigenous Media production that was well financed and resourced. Nevertheless, we highlight the need for problematising and nuancing research regarding Indigenous media production more broadly. In particular, we point to the need to explore Indigenous media as more than access to opportunities for representation and gaining voice, to studying the alignment of interests required and the distribution of power in decision-making processes which lead to these productions. The decision to make *Giddajohitin* relied on the buy-in of NRK and the position of the director of NRK Sápmi on the board of the parent organisation influenced the accommodation of the production within organisational resources. This buy-in also relied on a high degree of organisational support for experimental and innovative programming at NRK, in particular via the Slow-TV format.

In evaluating the extent to which the production served to increase the understanding of Indigenous issues in the public sphere, we note that *Giddajohitin* is reported to have contributed to an increased awareness of the importance of the Sámi remit within NRK. Furthermore, the director of NRK Sápmi maintained that the production increased professional self-confidence within her division both in terms of the ability to participate in experimental production, and the experience gained in telling Sámi stories to a national audience. It also contributed to new forms of collaboration within the broader NRK organisation and to new opportunities for learning about cross-cultural television production, approaches to scheduling and the use of new technologies.

The production may also have contributed to an increased understanding of reindeer herding as a way of life. The director of NRK Sápmi notes:

We hoped that knowledge could contribute to building more bridges between cultures rather than building walls. It was really great to hear that lots of people had turned up to help when the herd were about to swim across the sound. The Sara family said that there was a big change in the way they were met and in people's attitudes. That alone makes the production worthwhile (Interview, 8 May 2018).

*Giddajohitin* was successful because it had access to the resources of a well-funded public service media organisation, and because the management and production team allocated by this organisation believed in its importance. It also facilitated the alignment of key organisational interests including the delivery of the public service remit regarding content of relevance to Sámi culture, as well as a space for testing and learning how to use new technologies and to develop new approaches to broadcasting. However, building on the work of Waller and Waller et al.<sup>45</sup>, we consider it important to emphasise that our research focuses on one production, made at a moment in time and based on a specific process. Although positive claims are made by our interviewees about the impact of the programme in terms of supporting cross-functional working between NRK and NRK Sápmi and increasing production confidence within NRK Sápmi, our research does not explore the longer-term impact of the production. At the same time, programming that focuses on elements of Sámi culture have become more present within the overall context of NRK's programme schedule, including more recent entertainment programmes and talent competitions. Furthermore, while the Slow-TV format allows for issues of conflict relating to reindeer herding and everyday Indigenous life to be raised, further research is needed explore whether and how these issues are raised and addressed in a broader range of programming formats.

At the same time, our analysis does support a developing body of research that argues that Indigenous

media producers and media audiences should not be regarded as ‘marginal’, either in terms of media practices or consumption<sup>46</sup>. Our findings do not support Hanusch’s<sup>47</sup> claim that Indigenous media production should be understood as a response to the dominant culture’s media treatment of Indigenous people. Rather, we argue that *Giddajoh̄tin* promotes an approach to Indigenous media production where Indigenous people are recognised as part and parcel of media communities and of public debate. Our analysis shows that in order to equalize power relations in media production, we need to move beyond essentialist understandings of Indigenous media, and to explore how different actors, and actor positions, can be included and empowered at all levels of decision-making.

## Endnotes

- 1 i.e. Skogerbø, 2000.
- 2 Regjeringen, 2014.
- 3 NRK, 17 November 2022.
- 4 NRK, 23 August 2024.
- 5 Pile O’Sapmi 2024.
- 6 Puijk 2021.
- 7 Sametinget 2019.
- 8 Lehtola 2004; Pettersen 2014; Skogerbø et al. 2018.
- 9 SSB 2024.
- 10 Sara 2024.
- 11 Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen 2023; Evjen et al. 2021.
- 12 All figures from email correspondence with the Director of NRK Sápmi, May 2018.
- 13 Puijk 2021.
- 14 Puijk 2021.
- 15 Wilson and Stewart 2008.
- 16 Posetti 2008.
- 17 Eide and Simonsen 2007; McCallum and Waller 2017
- 18 Hanusch 2013,
- 19 Todorova 2016.
- 20 e.g. Cottle 2000: 9.
- 21 Ross 2017.
- 22 Hokowhitu 2013.
- 23 Waller et al. 2019.
- 24 Dreher et al. 2016.
- 25 Waller 2016; Waller et al. 2019.
- 26 NRK, 17 November 2022.
- 27 NRK, 18 November 2020.
- 28 Puijk 2015.
- 29 Puijk and Urdal 2018.
- 30 Urdal 2017.
- 31 Puijk 2015.
- 32 Puijk 2015.
- 33 Puijk and Urdal 2018.
- 34 Puijk 2015: 97.
- 35 Puijk 2021: 3.
- 36 i.e. Eide and Simonsen 2007.
- 37 Puijk 202.
- 38 Yin 2009.
- 39 Link to the production: <https://tv.nrk.no/serie/reinflytting-minutt-for-minutt>
- 40 Olsen 2018.
- 41 Puijk and Urdal 2018.

- 42 Puijk 2021: 58.  
 43 NRK, 28 April 2017.  
 44 Waller 2016.  
 45 Waller 2016: Waller et al. 2019.  
 46 Ross 2017; Hokowhitu and Devadas 2013.  
 47 Hanusch's 2013.

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