

Article 2

EXCHANGE AND CHANGE IN NORTHERN NORWAY: ON RECIPROCITY IN NATURE-BASED TOURISM

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This article explores the reciprocal relationship between nature-based tourism entrepreneurs and locals outside the tourism industry in a small community in Northern Norway. In this article I argue that we need to recognize the norms of reciprocal behavior and how these norms play a vital part within nature-based tourism—as it does outside the industry. As business owners are both confirming and violating these norms they contribute to a constant negotiation of acceptable reciprocal behavior. Two contrasting cases show how tourism entrepreneurs can incorporate reciprocity into their business strategy, either conforming to or violating the norms. Social sanctions will potentially have a great impact for a company as it might affect agreements and cooperation with locals. The potential reward in the form of access to private property is equally important as it may be beneficial for the ones conforming to the norms. The analytical part of this article is anchored in Marshal Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics*. The data collection in this research are based on participant observation through internship in several tourism companies. This includes formal and informal interviews.

Key words: Nature-based tourism; Northern Norway; Reciprocity; Norms; Social sanctions

Introduction

This article explores the reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurs in nature-based tourism and locals outside the industry in a small community in Northern Norway. It shows how reciprocity can be an essential part of tourism development and, furthermore, how it is a dynamic and negotiable part of social life. Looking at reciprocity in tourism can tell us just as much about the industry itself as it does about the community from where

it originates. I will argue that we need to recognize the social aspects of nature-based tourism in order to understand how tourism is integrated in normative negotiations about reciprocity in everyday life in Northern Norway.

The relationship between tourism and local communities has received considerable attention in tourism research (R. C. Davis & Marvin, 2004; Smith, 1989; Smith & Brent, 2001; Waldren, 1996). This article, however, will be rooted in economic anthropology. The theoretical foundation that is the point

of departure for this article is anchored in Sahlins' book *Stone Age Economics* (1972). Drawing on the previous work of Mauss and Polanyi, Sahlins (1972) makes a distinction between three different forms of reciprocity: generalized, balanced, and negative. Sahlins takes a pragmatic approach to define reciprocity. He calls generalized reciprocity the *solidary extreme*, as it can be associated with social interaction such as sharing, hospitality, help, and generosity (p. 194). Its features are all basic elements and social forces of a normative exchange dynamic in a society. Balanced reciprocity, on the other hand, refers to direct exchange. He characterizes it as "less personal than generalized reciprocity," and it is furthermore "more economic" (p. 195). Trade—buying and selling—is an example of balanced reciprocity according to Sahlins. While balanced reciprocity does have an obligation of immediate repayment, generalized reciprocity is vaguer in terms of time span. However, to completely refuse to reciprocate characterizes the third form—negative reciprocity. This *unsociable extreme* describes a situation where one of the participants is "looking to maximize utility at the other's expense." (p. 195).

Just as Sahlins suggests that "Malinowski's perspective may be taken beyond the Trobriands and applied broadly to reciprocal exchange in primitive societies" (p. 193), I suggest that Sahlins' reciprocity forms may also be applied to Western rural societies. Through two contrasting examples, I will show that the exchanges in question actualize all these forms of reciprocity and that this has a profound effect on nature-based tourism and the way it is conducted in this area today. Furthermore, I will argue that the forms of reciprocity are not characterized by separated social units, but rather spheres where constant conversions create a notion of social relationships. This negotiation can transform and consequently change the premises for nature-based tourism. Transactions that might be described as examples of balanced reciprocity have, in a given context, a generalized potential—they are *generalizable*. In contrast, I will show cases where there are transformations from balanced to negative reciprocity, something also referred to as *grifting* (Walsh, 2009). If the proverb "I'll scratch your back, if you scratch mine" is describing a gift exchange, one might say that the gift will result in only one scratched back. The gift has much

resemblance to the gift and they are both of importance in maintaining and reproducing social and economic networks. Grifting, however, only works when the ones victimized think they are dealing with a gift. With reference to the work of the linguist Maurer (1974), Walsh (2009) argues that the grift bears resemblance to betrayal as it requires confidence from the ones that are exploited.

Both conformity to and violations of this reciprocal system are a part of tourism development today—inviting research questions investigating the complex relations between tourism enterprises and local communities. The questions that are the point of departure in this article are as follows: How can we understand reciprocity as part of nature-based tourism in Northern Norway today? What do the different forms of reciprocity and their dynamic in tourism tell us about the culture in which the enterprises are situated?

Short Introduction to Troms

Troms is one of three counties in Northern Norway. Troms has approximately 160,000 inhabitants, with Norwegian, Sami, and Kven heritages.¹ About half of the population in the three counties lives in one of the three cities in the area, leaving quite a substantial percentage of the population in rural areas. The nature varies from coastal fjord landscape to barren land in the northeast part of the region.

In terms of tourism, Troms, despite many attempts, has not managed to establish a flourishing tourism industry. However, there are statistics indicating an increase in winter tourism over the last decade. From 1998 to 2012 the number of overnight stays by foreign visitors between January and April has gone from 171,637 (1998) to 288,789 (2012). As late as 2003 the number was 169,399, showing that the major increase has been over the last 10 years. The increase from 2011 to 2012 alone was 58.1% (<http://www.statistikknett.com/nord-norge/>). This development has been seen in relation to a growing demand for northern lights products (Heimtun, Morgan, & Pritchard, unpublished).

Economic Anthropology and Reciprocity

Economic anthropology was established as a sub-discipline based on a reaction towards what were

seen as the universalistic worldviews of social economics. Malinowski, as one of anthropology and economic anthropology's pioneers, showed that economy as part of a specific culture needs to be understood on its own terms. Early in the 20th century, anthropologists like Malinowski represented a new focus when they turned their attention towards economies outside Western societies. In doing so, they needed a distinctly different approach to economy than the universalistic and uncentric understanding offered by social economy.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new debate emerged within economic anthropology. The distinction between the formalist and substantivist positions lay in how they dealt with questions of how we understand social change as part of economic life. Inspired by Polanyi, the substantivists suggested that social change must be understood by looking at large-scale dynamics—not individual behavior. According to the substantivists, economy is embedded in economic institutions in different cultures. This perspective was criticized for, among other things, being profoundly relativistic and it was challenged by a faction inspired by social economics—the formalists. Barth (1963, 1967, 1981) and Firth (1965, 1966, 1967), among others, argue that *maximizing individuals* exist in all societies. According to the formalist position, in order to explain social change we must locate those individuals that challenge conformity. Barth's (1966) generative model stresses the need to discover the processes that generate form in a society. The maximizing individual is driven by options—individual choices that, given positive evaluation and possible mimicking from others, generate new social forms. The substantivist response to this was that the maximizing individual was modeled on Western cultural logic and consequently not a fruitful starting point to understand economic aspects of social change in other parts of the world (Dalton & Bohannan, 1965; Polanyi, 1944; Sahlins, 1972). By the 1980s the debate was considered dead; however, it is still revisited from different angles.²

In more recent works, like *Economics and Morality: Anthropological Approaches* (Little, 2009; Robbins, 2009; Walsh, 2009), the Maussian ideas of reciprocity are reconsidered. According to Browne and Milgram (2009), the Maussian legacy has (unintentionally) contributed to a dichotomized understanding of

“noncapitalist societies as static and morally superior . . . [and capitalist societies as] impersonal and driven by self-interest and material gain” (p. 12). It has further contributed to a misleading perception to “treat the world of gift exchange as non-exploitive, innocent and even transparent” (Parry & Bloch, 1989, p. 9). Consequently, there has been less attention paid to gift exchange in the West.³ J. Davis (1992) argues that we have failed to recognize and understand elementary forms of exchange in our own society. His examples from Great Britain show diversity in reciprocal relationships—diversity that requires just as much emic contextualization as expected from perspectives on economy, morality, and exchange outside a market economy.

Social networks and exchange systems as a social phenomenon in tourism have been given attention in tourism research. Saxena (2006) argues that we need to recognize the importance of personal and social bonding processes in tourism development. She further argues that this is important, not only because small rural tourism businesses that adapt to a set of local norms are given a competitive advantage, but also that this is contributing to a sustainable tourism development (Saxena, 2006). The Chinese concept of *guanxi*, best described as “personal relationship networking” (Li, Lai, & Feng, 2007, p. 115), has also been analyzed in a tourism context. Li et al. (2007) shows how *guanxi* can play a major part in community tourism as it can create both opportunities and obstacles for tourism entrepreneurs. Similar cultural-specific reciprocal institutions can be found other places like the *utang na loob* in the Phillipines (Dancel, 2005). These are all social institutions that have been given attention in tourism research.

Reciprocity in Northern Norway

Although economic anthropology has approached reciprocity in different ways, the debate has to a large extent been polarized. This has not created many new questions challenging the view that we examine either money and modernity or gifts and traditionality. It seems as if Sahlins' (1976) famous statement “money is to the West what kinship is to the rest” (p. 216) is describing what was a more fixed understanding of economic life, which leaves little room for investigating the dynamic and ambiguous

field of reciprocity in market economies. J. Davis (1992) points out the problem of such a dichotomized debate based on “West and the rest” – a point of departure which is just as challenging in understanding the relationship between cultures, as it is in understanding ourselves.⁴ J. Davis points out that there has been “a general assumption that market models are adequate for Western industrial economies, but other economies need different models because they are based on other principles” (p. 8). He further argues that “OECD economies are also based on other principles” (p. 8).

Despite the fact that Norway is a modern society with a strong market economy, economic institutions that are normally associated with gift-based economies have a natural place in many communities. With reference to Sahlins (1972), Wo et al. (2006) claim that the different forms of reciprocity are essential in all economic life and should therefore be given attention in research aiming to understand reciprocity. Sahlins’ etic typology has furthermore had a great impact on the development of exchange theory. Generalized reciprocity refers, as mentioned, to the different forms of more-or-less institutionalized obligations that make people reciprocate. Alongside balanced and negative reciprocity, generalized reciprocity constitutes an essential part of an economic reality in Western society today. However, few attempts have been made to locate the more dynamic aspects of reciprocity. Some proverbs, however, indicate that people also see reciprocity as a dynamic aspect of social life. We understand that despite that a gift has been bought, it has the potential to enable us to see “the thought behind the gift”—not the price tag. “There is no such thing as a free lunch” is a proverb indicating that we understand that a meal could have been balanced reciprocity in another context, and transform into an expectation of some repayment other than money or a meal.

In Northern Norway, cloudberries are a much-appreciated resource⁵ with a substantial potential market value. However, as described by anthropologist Lien (1992), these berries are also part of a generalized reciprocal system. Resisting commodification of these berries allows people to use them to maintain social relations, as these berries can be given away but not sold.⁶ Social sanctions prevent some resources from entering the market economy

as commodities, retaining them as a form of social currency. This is also the case for the fresh fish in the north Norwegian context, known as *kokfisk*. *Kokfisk* resembles cloudberries regarding Appadurai’s (1986) terminology—*social life*. As Brox and Gunneriussen (1984) point out, *kokfisk* is a gift-based institution in Northern Norway, which still has importance today. The school of fish that comes to the north Norwegian coastline has been essential to the region’s history. Coalfish and cod come to feed and spawn during different times of the year, providing a stable source of fresh fish. At times the number of fish results in such a good catch that one household gets more than it can consume. Deep freezing has only been an option for a few decades, but *kokfisk* as a gift has outlived the technological progress and remains a vital part of north Norwegian reciprocity.⁷

Equally interesting is the Norwegian moose hunt, where the meat is distributed primarily outside of grocery stores (Døving, 2003).⁸ More than any other game in Norway, moose constitutes a complex distribution system where tenderloins, roasts, and soup meat can be gifts as well as being recognized as a potential commodity. These constant transformations between a generalized and balanced reciprocal sphere are important in defining social relations. Some things are more suited to expressing conformity to a generalized reciprocity than others. Moose meat, cloudberries, and *kokfisk* are still important elements in recreating social relations through a generalized reciprocity in Northern Norway. Even though gifts come in all forms, some of them incorporate more of the gift giver than others.⁹ Cloudberries have, for some people, a social force outside a commoditized circulation. Sahlins (1972) points out that food seems to be a central element in generalized reciprocity and is often more important in (re-)creating social relations than other objects.

Hunting, angling, and outdoor recreation constitute some of the most important practices and traditions in Northern Norway. Unlike other forms of tourism, nature-based tourism relies on knowledge, practices, and resources that are deeply embedded in local culture. Before moving on I would like to point out why reciprocity is so important in dealing with nature and why this incorporates a different social dynamic that affects nature-based tourism

differently than other forms of tourism. Public access to nature is a fundamental legal principle in the Norwegian outdoor tradition (Reusch, 2012). Although the freedom to roam does not include hunting and angling, public access to all resources including fish and game has been an underlying management ideology in Norway. Hunting, angling, and harvesting have never been exclusive and characterized as an upper class activity. Organizations like the Norwegian hunting and angling association (NJFF) are important stakeholders as they work to secure a broad public access and affordable hunting and angling.¹⁰ Although a broad public access is fundamental in securing these practices and traditions, it is also implicitly creating a competitive dynamic between individuals. Without going into the debate on the tragedy of the commons that Garrett Hardin (1968) set in motion, it is safe to say that public access to nature creates a distinctly different social dynamic than exclusive access. This is why nature-based tourism draws on a different set of social practices than other parts of the industry, as it is depending on the same access as everybody living in the region. Things like secrecy (Maurstad, 2002; Olsen & Thuen, 2013), deceit (Anderson, 1986), and sharing knowledge and spoils (Svensson, unpublished) are all part of the complex social practice that surrounds hunting, angling, and outdoor recreation today. Reciprocal institutions must always be seen in relation to how and what is not shared. In other words, to give away a fish is very different from giving away information about the location of where it was caught. Just as nature-based tourism depends on the freedom to roam in its use of nature, one is also entering a complex social field that is touching on a different part of Norwegian culture than most other forms of tourism. Reciprocity and nature, which also involves things like secrecy and deceit, constitutes the informal nature management that can affect the premises of nature-based tourism.

With reference to Clifford Geertz (1974), a *native point of view* on these reciprocal institutions requires socialization into specific norms. These codes of conduct reveal a complex dynamic where conformity or violations are defined. These are simple but essential social factors in people's everyday lives in Northern Norway. The fact that a potential gift can circulate both within a monetary balanced and

a generalized reciprocal system is a matter of context as it is a part of people's doxa. It is therefore visualized most efficiently through different forms of violations. Durkheim (1893/1933) taught us long ago that the constant violation of norms in society is of importance in creating consensus on acceptable behavior. The acceptable is always in constant negotiation with the opposite—a negotiation that decides what is considered normal in a given time and place.

Methods

Participant observation has become a more common methodological approach in tourism research as more anthropologists have shown increasing interest in tourism as a social phenomenon. The advantage of anthropological fieldwork in nature-based tourism is the attention towards the more implicit and tacit aspects of the business. Some of the questions regarding everyday life as a tourism enterprise are best formulated and expressed through a participation approach, where new questions emerge as a result of interaction: verbal and nonverbal communication. To study everyday life without being a part of it seems, with reference to anthropological ideals, like a contradiction. To be *resocialized*, as (Nielsen & Smedal, 2000) characterize anthropological fieldwork, simply refers to the process that enables the researcher to locate questions that otherwise would be difficult to discover. Socialization in this context refers to a process where, in Geertz's (1974) words, the *natives' point of view* provides the researcher with an understanding of what the good questions are rather than the good answers.

Domestic anthropology has a substantially shorter history than the more classical fieldwork conducted in other cultures. Home blindness, among other things, describes some of the criticism towards anthropology at home. *Home* can of course mean different things, but in essence, it refers to the risk of entering fields where the researcher's habitus can affect what one sees, and maybe more importantly, what one does not see. This is just one of many examples of dilemmas researchers face regarding cultural biases.

In order to gain knowledge about exchange associated with nature-based tourism, I felt a need

to locate those stakeholders engaged in interactional relations that include exchange. Even though exchange is more or less a universal social phenomenon, it does not mean that it can be observed anywhere. Through an internship¹¹ with the company Arctic Sensation (all companies, persons, and places are anonymous in this article, with the exception of the city of Tromsø) between 2011 and 2012, I had the chance to participate in their everyday life with and without tourists, and with locals. Throughout the internship I got to work as a co-guide and tag along as a tourist for some of their core activities like dogsled tours and glacier hikes. One event, however, turned out to be a turning point in this fieldwork, as I felt the need for some contrasting examples to understand exchange in the Vuopmi Valley. Arctic Sensation hosts an annual event that they call "Open Day," where they invite the whole community to their camp. During Open Day I got to see how a tourism company can work explicitly with social relations in the local community. This can be seen as interactional data, where social relations are visualized and are thereby observable in a different way than in many other social situations. During an informal interview with one of the locals at Open Day, I was made aware of some controversies in Vuopmi Valley regarding the company Peak Experience. This was made relevant as Open Day in itself serves as a contrast to the reciprocal behavior of Peak Experience, according to the man that told me the story. It makes sense to point out someone taking something from the local community as deviant behavior when you are participating in something that represents the opposite.

Formal and informal interviews provide distinctly different opportunities in data collection. These are tools that can make the difference between getting access to certain data or not in a given situation. A combination of the two approaches is also a common way to enable the researcher to see contrasts that would otherwise be harder to observe. This combination makes the researcher able to rephrase and refocus while in the field—making the fieldwork part of what Spradley (1980) calls the "ethnographic research cycle" (p. 29). "As you go through the ethnographic research cycle you will discover new questions to ask; these will guide your data collection" (p. 32). The decision to use both formal and informal interviews is anchored in

the scientific backbone of this research. This being part of an abductive phenomenological approach has certain implications in methodological dispositions, calling for tools that enhance the dynamic aspects of research. The new questions that emerge in interaction with informants constitute a dynamic research situation, where the phenomenon in question is constantly revisited from different angles where neither the questions nor their answers are in any way fixed. It is through the switch between the formal and informal interviews in participant observation that the potential of locating new questions lies. This is the kind of resocialization in science that encourages reflections that involves the researcher's biases.

After some time during Open Day, I felt the need for a different approach beside the formal interviews. My conversations with the locals visiting during the day must be characterized as informal interviews. The shift between a formal and informal interview can give a new input to relevant questions. In my case, the informal interviews made me aware of potential conflicts and contrasting ways of dealing with reciprocity, information that would have been less available through a formal interview. This allowed what Spradley (1980) calls "dyadic contrast questions." "A dyadic contrast question takes two members of a domain and asks: 'in what ways are these two things different?'" (p. 125). As I was told the story about Peak Experience, and how their actions differed from Arctic Sensation's, I had a good opportunity to ask dyadic contrast questions, so I simply started to ask questions like: How are these two companies different in terms of reciprocal behavior? Why is this difference important?

The intention of using internship as a part of a participant observational approach was simply to get access to the everyday life of guides and company owners in their interaction with tourists and locals. During the internship with Arctic Sensation I was given the freedom to enter different roles as co-guide, tourist, and researcher. Arctic Sensation's CEO Petter informed all partners and employees about my intentions behind the internship and I never had anyone questioning my presence. This might also have to do with the fact that Arctic Sensation has been involved in research projects previously. As I have both educational and practical background as a nature guide the role as a co-guide

felt quite natural. In the events that I partook as a co-guide, the guides started by explaining my role to the tourists. During these events no one commented or asked about my role in Arctic Sensation. As for the locals, many seemed to associate me with Arctic Sensation more than the University of Tromsø. The data that came as a result of informal interviews with locals must be seen in relation to my affiliation with Arctic Sensation. Statements painting a positive picture of Arctic Sensation can also be seen as courtesy toward me as a representative for Arctic Sensation, regardless of their knowledge of my presence as a researcher. However, this does not affect the importance of contrasting examples of reciprocity that locals gave during my fieldwork.

All science is positioned with a need of a context that provides the reader with an understanding of the premises of the research. Reflexivity here refers to discussions on how knowledge is generated. Our research is a result of methodological dispositions of how we choose to place ourselves in the field. This article is no exception. The decision to use an internship as a way to understand how a social institution like reciprocity affects tourism enterprises has consequences for what appears important and what becomes blurry. Identifying oneself with a company like Arctic Sensation has some challenges in terms of becoming bias. However, one could argue that what you see will always be a result of where you stand. A descriptive bird perspective is fundamentally different from the participating researcher who strive to understand a phenomenon through the eyes of his or her's informants. This is furthermore underlined by the distinction between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. A native's point of view is always a product of the researcher's perception of the world. The dialogue that is created through interaction with one's informants is a way to understand a phenomenon as they see it. This is intersubjectivity—knowledge created through a dynamic interaction and dialogue with ones informants.

Vuopmi Valley: Arctic Sensation and Peak Experience

The Vuopmi Valley stretches over two different municipalities in Troms County. The valley is approximately 50 km long as is surrounded by

peaks up to 1,600 m. It is hard to make an exact estimate of how many people live in the valley as it is located in two different municipalities; however, despite being sparsely populated, the total number could be as high as 300. As many of the young people move away, the average age of the population is increasing. Apart from the ones that commute, most people work in the primary sector as farmers. Hunting, fishing, and gathering are still important activities and part of the household economy.

Arctic Sensation is a company that specializes in nature-based tourism. The company was established in July 2007 in Troms County in Northern Norway. It is located in Vuopmi Valley, about a 2-hour drive from Tromsø, which is the largest city in the region. Arctic Sensation offers a wide selection of activities all year round, but still has a main focus on winter activities like dog mushing, snowmobile trips, Sami adventures, and reindeer sledding. These were their core products during their first winter in 2007–2008, and still are today, alongside an increasing demand for northern lights safaris. Arctic Sensation employs 18 people on a seasonal basis and there are 12 people that draw their main income from the company. They have expanded rapidly from 1,500 guests in the first season to 10,000 in 2012–2013. This makes Arctic Sensation one of the fastest growing enterprises in the industry. Apart from their expansion, and the fact that they have managed to establish a flourishing business in a very remote area, their most interesting aspect is their business model—a model that reveals a close dialogue with the local community.

Arctic Sensation might appear similar to other tourism enterprises in terms of their products and their facilities. What makes their story different is neither their products or guides, nor their location; rather, it is how they interact with the local community that serves as a contrast to many other companies in the tourism industry today.

Peak Experience is in many ways Arctic Sensation's opposite in terms of turnover and employment. They are, however, quite representative of companies in the region. Peak Experience is a sole proprietorship that was established around the same time as Arctic Sensation. They specialize in backcountry skiing. The owner, Christian Hansen, offers both guiding and accommodation alongside being the organizer of international free-ride skiing competitions.

Altogether, Hansen has been highly influential in introducing backcountry skiing in the area.

In the following section I will offer two contrasting cases from Vuopmi Valley based on Arctic Sensation and Peak Experience. These cases show how reciprocity can be part of tourism in different ways, and further show how this affects tourism entrepreneurs in their everyday lives. The first story is more or less a success story, while the second is an example of social sanctions that can follow exploitation of common resources. As I will argue later, these cases correspond with the analytical terms gifts and grifts.

A Day at the Camp: Open Day

As I agreed to come early to help out with maintenance of the camp, I parked my car beside the parking lot on a bright sunny morning in mid-June. Arctic Sensation has transformed what used to be a gravel pit into what appears partly as a traditional Sami *siida* (traditional reindeer herding family unit). Surrounded by steep mountains, three tents (Sami *lavvo*) create the entrance, while there are two cabins and several dozen huskies further behind. Most of the dogs were sleeping, and the recently sown grass behind the tents had started to germinate into little green needles.

The plan was to get as much done in the camp before we welcomed the locals to the camp later that day. This is what Arctic Sensation refers to as “Open Day”. This has become a tradition where locals are invited to come to Camp Vuopmi to see and learn more about the company by receiving a tour around the camp and hearing a presentation about the last year and future plans. Prior to my first participation in Open Day the previous year, I had never heard about anything similar. As I asked *Petter* (the manager of Arctic Sensation) about this event he told me that:

The idea behind Open Day came from Roy (camp administrator) who is local. He came and said that now that we had been in business for 2–3 years it was about time that the local community got to meet us. . . . But this [Open Day] is an invitation to all the others, everyone who sees a bus passes every day and wonder what this really is.

As one of the guides passed us with a jacket with an Arctic Sensation logo on the back, I asked *Petter*:

Researcher: Are people proud to be associated with Arctic Sensation do you think?

Petter: I am told that the guides are proud to walk around with my jacket and be in a way a part of Arctic Sensation. I have heard now that the municipality administration is proud to have Arctic Sensation in their area. You know it is actually fulfilling to have something to show for and be a part of. The community here is very much a part of the Arctic Sensation. That is what we intended and I think it is something we managed to do in a good way.

After a couple of hours cleaning up one of the tents we took a coffee break on one of the benches outside. I asked *Petter* more about the intentions behind Open Day:

Researcher: But besides showing people what you are doing here, what is your goal for the day, who do you hope will come?

Petter: We will probably have quite a few people coming here today. But I really hope that one of our neighbors, an old lady, is coming too. She owns some land that would be an interesting place for a new camp in the future. We need some alternatives to this [*Petter* is pointing on the camp] as well if we want to expand further.

Arctic Sensation has an explicit strategy of shopping and hiring locally, which has a substantial financial impact. Their gas spending alone is stipulated at 150,000 kr. annually. It seems like a tempting possibility to do the shopping in Tromsø, as this potentially would save them some money. However, they have chosen not to do that. As one of the partners—a catering company—pulled up beside the tent, I asked *Petter* about their strategy in terms of shopping and hiring:

Petter: We have chosen to buy what we can locally, like food, firewood, *lefse* [traditional cake] – things at all possible levels and local people as guides. I think people are starting to recognize this.

Researcher: Does this involvement include volunteer work?

Petter: Well, it is nothing we have been talking about like food and other stuff, but the guys get involved in community work every now and then.

Researcher: I saw John [one of the partners in Arctic Sensation] in *Nyhet I Nord* [local newspaper].

He was giving kids reindeer sledding tours during Sami week in school. Is that a sort of thing you would do on a regular basis?

Petter: Oh yes, he does stuff like that every now and then. So do the other guys.

After the presentation, Roy, the camp administrator, gave a tour of the camp. One of the guests asked how much a dog sledge trip costs, Roy replied: "We will work something out if you want to try it."

When I asked Petter what Roy meant he said:

Petter: We have encouraged people to come here and experience this for themselves. We have offered this with really reduced prices or in some cases for free. It is important to us that they understand what we are doing.

Researcher: So do locals want to try this?

Petter: Yes, we have had quite a few locals that have been here.

Some weeks after open day I asked Petter about their options regarding new camp locations:

Petter: We have three different alternatives.

Researcher: And this is a result of Open Day?

Petter: No, not necessarily. It has been something we have been working on for some time now. It will give us some options.

Researcher: So when you go out and try to get a deal like this, or permission to use private property like on your canoe trips, does someone ever say no?

Petter: No, not so far.

Researcher: Why is that do you think?

Petter: I think probably has a lot to do with the ability to communicate. There are two aspects to it. There are others who have pointed this out, and that is the fact that I am a doctor in the community. This is an external factor that cannot be underestimated. I am very involved in the community, both as a doctor and as head of medical services. I was that in Langfjord just as I am now in Dypfjord. And the second factor is the fact that I'm doing all the negotiations with our partners. I spend a lot of time communicating what it is we really want, what we are doing and why I have contacted them

specifically. Doing it this way I have never found people to be unfriendly.

Researcher: This is the case for all contracts, also your canoe trips?

Petter: Yes. For our paddle tours I spoke with three landowners along the river. I asked for their permission to use the area where we enter with our canoes, where we have lunch midways and where we end our paddle. So I got signatures approving that we could use their land in the periods indicated. And that is exactly the same as our contract here [Camp Vuopmi].

Peak Experience: Skiing and Heli-Skiing

Christian Hansen is a middle-aged man who comes from Vuopmi Valley. He has managed to promote the area as a backcountry ski destination with his company Peak Experience. Through several international free-ride ski competitions with substantial media coverage, he has also contributed to a growing interest in skiing among the locals. The free-ride competitions, being Peak Experience's backbone, depend on helicopters for transportation. Heli-skiing in Norway is controversial but is possible with permission from landowners and county administration, environmental department. This permission has been granted to Peak Experience in many cases, allowing these events to take place.

Hansen has some private property in the valley. Part of this property was leased out to a shooting range and a *grendelags-house*¹² some years ago. This house has not been used much as intended by the local community for the last few years. With an increasing demand for accommodation, it was of mutual interest when Peak Experience started renting the *grendelags-house* for their guests. With a poor economy, this was also a welcome income for the *grendelag* (community board).

According to several of the locals I met, one incident changed their goodwill towards Peak Experience. As the *grendelags-house* is built on Hansen's property, he has the power to decline any renewal of the leasing contract when it expires. He did exactly this, and furthermore demanded that the house be removed. The *grendelag* then had a financial dilemma, as moving it would cost them money they did not have. This left them with only

one option—to give the house to Hansen. Several of the people I spoke to about this claimed that this was all calculated to provide Hansen with free infrastructure for his company.

When I met Jens, a man in his mid-60s, he expressed his frustration with this incident. “You cannot do something like that without expecting some consequences. People won’t tolerate that.” According to Jens, Hansen had a hard time getting land permission from several landowners after this. However, the competitions have been held after a relocation of the run, or *couloir*. These sanctions have had practical implications, but probably just as important is the social implications for Hansen and Peak Experience.

Giftng, Grifting, and Generalizable Reciprocity

While the stories about Arctic Sensation and Peak Experience are distinctly different, they have some important similarities. They both provide some examples of gifts given and reciprocated. This is a culture-specific social dynamic that, using the words of Walsh (2009), can be called the *rhythm of reciprocity*. Walsh argues that “the rhythm of the gift is ideally continuous, obliging givers to give and receivers to reciprocate” (p. 73). To give, receive, accept, and reciprocate describes the social loop of reciprocity in Vuopmi Valley. The stories about the two companies reflect such a rhythm of reciprocity—a rhythm that is only *potentially* mutually beneficial. Like other norms in society, there is always a risk of someone violating the norm or, more specifically in this case, breaking the chain of reciprocity. The way that the companies receive goodwill is, among other things, through permission from landowners. This kind of reciprocity is of vital importance for both Arctic Sensation and Peak Experience. However, this is only one of the potential outcomes of a reciprocal relationship, according to Walsh. With reference to Sahlins’ (1972) distinction, one could say that a reciprocal relationship remaining generalized is just one of three options—with a constant potential risk of transforming into a balanced or negative relationship. This is the dynamic feature that Sahlins fails to recognize as an essential part of reciprocal life. Where Sahlins sees distinct separated spheres, Walsh argues that we need to focus on how the different forms of reciprocity relate to

each other. This is why I think Sahlins’ perspective has limitations as a theoretical tool to understand the changes within exchange. Here, Walsh’s (2009) gift is much more fruitful as it reveals a negotiable closeness and interdependence between the different forms of reciprocity. Walsh stresses this interdependence further as he introduces the concept of the rhythm of reciprocity.

Arctic Sensation’s Open Day serves as an example of what Walsh (2009) calls the *rhythm of the gift*. This event is an invitation that is received and acknowledged by many locals in Vuopmi Valley. This further contributes to the legitimization of Arctic Sensation’s business. Volunteer work and free trips are recognized and repeatedly accepted by locals as gifts. These gifts, for obvious reasons, will not be wrapped up in paper and given like a birthday gift. However, they are treated like tokens of appreciation or favors and will be reciprocated by the locals. This relationship differs from the Maussian idea of an obligation to accept and reciprocate a gift (Mauss, 2011). In Vuopmi Valley, the locals have the power to accept this gift without reciprocating it. This is the risk that Arctic Sensation is taking as they try to convert assets from a balanced to a generalized relationship. Attempts to convert assets like dogsled trips to a generalized reciprocity, by giving them away to everybody, indicates that Arctic Sensation considers a gift exchange with the local community as potentially valuable. What Arctic Sensation is trying to achieve in this case is, along with a good reputation and personal benefits, permission from landowners that could potentially affect their business. If Arctic Sensation’s actions toward a generalized reciprocal relationship are part of a habitus integrated in their business, or if it is a more calculated part of their business strategy, is hard to say. The point here is merely that it can be a part of tourism as it can confirm or violate the norm of reciprocity through interaction with locals outside the tourism industry.

Peak Experience’s first few years seem like a success story. With a growing interest in skiing among locals, and a mutual beneficial arrangement with the grendelags-house and landing permissions, the interaction between Hansen and the locals had a rhythm of reciprocity. The breakdown in this relationship is solely located in the expropriative act when Hansen was unwillingly given the grendelags-house.

What Sahlins (1972) describes as negative reciprocity has much resemblance to what Walsh (2009) calls grift. The gift and the grift are not far apart—a closeness that is of importance in creating boundaries between right and wrong as it is being expressed in Vuopmi Valley. “Grifting only works when those who are victimized by it do not see the end coming, lulled as they are into the familiar give-and-take of relationships that they expect to be beneficial” (p. 65). Walsh’s main point is that individuals that conform to an expected reciprocity are just a *potential* outcome. Though this perspective in many ways is anchored in Mauss’ (2011) idea of the *total social fact* as collectively acknowledged obligations, it draws the attention in another direction:

Obligations do not just indicate the means by which individuals unthinkingly reproduce the systems in which they participate. In fact, by their very nature, obligations can indicate the opposite just as effectively, namely, the ever-present possibility that individuals might act in ways that threaten such systems. The fact is that obligations would neither be apparent nor conceived in the way that they are if the actors they seem to oblige weren’t actually only ever *potentially* obliged, always free to neglect the obligator. (Walsh, 2009, p. 63)

I think this perspective is applicable to the cases presented above. The reciprocal system in Vuopmi Valley has vulnerability in the sense that there is always a possibility that someone could violate the norm and take advantage of the situation. However, the risk of someone violating the norm of reciprocity, like grifting, is also what recreates and maintains the social force of reciprocity. The right thing to do will create its boundaries in a constant negotiation with the opposite—a negotiation that makes the distinction between gifts and grifts more explicit. According to Walsh (2009), social obligations create a tension in which the outcome is not given. In that sense, the norm of reciprocity is the frame of reference for both the gift and the grift. It is through violations by individuals, like Hansen, that consensus of acceptable exchange is challenged and negotiated. In other words, one might say that it is through changes like the grift that gift exchange is made explicit. This example can be traced back to the formalist approach in general, and especially the approach of Barth (1981) as it focuses on the

role of the entrepreneur. A bottom-up perspective where individual choice generates the form, or as in this case the norm, is the backbone of Barth’s theoretical position. This perspective is argued through a substantial variety of empirical evidence, including *Process and Form in Social Life* (Barth, 1981). Here, Barth argues that a consensus about forms of reciprocity is generated through individualistic entrepreneurship challenging, and consequently changing, the way people interact.

Norms and norm violations are often associated with culture-specific reactions, where violations might be subject to social sanctions. But can social sanctions like the withdrawal of land permission explain the dynamic between gifts and grifts? The two stories presented here show that there is a direct link between the way gifts are reciprocated and the way grifts are sanctioned. Permission from landowners is, in different circumstances, a substantial social force in terms of being recognized as an asset for landowners, other locals, and tourism entrepreneurs. However, the question remains: Can permission as a form of social currency explain why some choose gifts, while others choose grifts as part of their business strategy?

Looking at Sahlins’ (1972) distinction between the three different forms of reciprocity can be a fruitful way to contextualize nature-based tourism in Vuopmi Valley as it is negotiated today. However, his theory has some limitations when we want to look closer at moral economy and reciprocity. The cases presented here show that reciprocity is highly dynamic and constantly changing. Entrepreneurs in nature-based tourism will often seek different reciprocal conversion opportunities that can either confirm or violate norms of reciprocity. This creates a negotiation that, through individual actions, will potentially redefine social institutions like gift exchange. Just like the potential options for tourism entrepreneurs are constantly changing, so are the potential sanctions. When converting something from a balanced to a generalized reciprocity, and at the same time consequently changing the relationship, there is a risk of social sanctions. In the cases of Arctic Sensation and Peak Experience, the potential sanctions and reciprocated gifts are actually the same—permission or no permission. However, sanctioning the grift will also include a substantial factor of social stigma that separates the two cases

in terms of social response. Nevertheless, the permission represents both a gift reciprocated and a social sanction, and is therefore a vital component in the reciprocal dynamic in Vuopmi Valley.

The rhythm of reciprocity in this case is, as mentioned, different from the normal relations in Vuopmi Valley in several ways. The interaction between the companies and the local community is anonymous in terms of gift exchange in the sense that they do not address any specific individual but rather the whole community in general. This kind of open invitation creates a different dynamic than it would between individuals in Vuopmi Valley. While a reciprocal relationship normally would impose an obligation to accept and reciprocate a gift, this kind of exchange is characterized by the freedom to engage in a relationship. This freedom is what makes this investment more risky to initiate. There is always the risk that someone will refuse an invitation or refuse to reciprocate a gift, despite the norm being to accept and reciprocate a gift in most situations. However, this is nevertheless an effective way to obtain permission from landowners—something that would be more difficult to accomplish through a balanced reciprocity. It is worth the effort and investment despite the risk of not being reciprocated. Peak Experience's options can be held up against each other to reveal a choice. Claiming the house becomes an option through weaker reciprocal commitments—commitments that would be more binding between individuals. However, claiming property owned by the community is a norm-violating act that is sanctioned, just as it would be between individuals. It is not surprising that the value that is desired by the companies, in the form of permission, is used to sanction norm violations like grifting.

Conclusion

Etymologically, *reciprocal* refers to the Latin word *reciprocus*, which means “returning the same way” (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=reciprocal>). This corresponds with Sahlins' definition in *Stone Age Economics* (1972). *Returning the same way* in Sahlins' perspective does not mean returning the same thing, but rather returning the same *kind* of thing. This describes a reciprocal institution that allows certain conversions within a

category of exchange. The fact that Sahlins argues that these institutions do not apply to Western societies, and that they are part of a more specific sphere, has been a critical point of departure in this article. This, as I have argued, does not provide a fruitful theoretical base to understand reciprocity in nature-based tourism in Northern Norway.

As Sahlins fails to see the dynamic aspects of reciprocal behavior, I have turned towards more recent theoretical contributions within economic anthropology. Through Walsh's (2009) distinction between the gift and the grift, I have argued that we need to recognize the more dynamic aspects of reciprocity and how these basic social norms are shaping nature-based tourism today. Reciprocity has its place in tourism as it does in local everyday life outside the industry in Vuopmi Valley in Northern Norway. Successfully applying reciprocal knowhow to a tourism enterprise is potentially of great importance in several ways. Besides developing a good reputation and receiving people's goodwill, the cases in this article show that gifts might provide much needed permission and access to private property, vital to business. In contrast, violating norms of reciprocity, by not reciprocating, or worse, by exploiting common goods through grifting, will result in social sanctions. In both cases the local community's response relates to permission to use private property. Where the gift is met with permission, the grift is sanctioned through a withdrawal of the same. In Vuopmi Valley the social currency that shapes reciprocal behavior in nature-based tourism is permission to use land.

Reciprocity has been revisited from numerous empirical angles providing new questions to revitalize discussions on exchange theory. I think that basic elements in social science, like reciprocity, are well worth attention in order to formulate new questions in tourism research.

Although reciprocity and social institutions dealing with exchange have been a part of tourism research as networks and *guanxi*, anthropology has not been contributing to this to any extent. As J. Davis (1992) pointed out, anthropologists' reluctance to recognize the reciprocal dynamics of Western societies, and consequently to fail to use this as an analytical starting point in nature-based tourism I might add, must be seen in relation to the disciplinary history of social anthropology. As this

is changing and domestic anthropology is increasingly being recognized for its research contributions, one can hope that the classical paradigmatic shifts can be revisited through fieldworks at home within nature-based tourism. Northern Norway is a growing tourist destination and empirical evidence based in the region is increasing.

More recent debates within tourism research could force us to rephrase some of our questions. Cocreation and cooptation are examples of more recent discussions in tourism research. Applying reciprocity to these debates might lead to new questions—providing new knowledge on exchange theory as well as the subfields in question. What are the reciprocal elements of competitive cooperation within tourism today? In what way can different forms of reciprocity be a part of how a local identity is cocreated at a tourism destination today? These are merely a few examples of how we could use reciprocity as a theoretical tool to rephrase questions in current debates in tourism research. After all, we are standing on the shoulders of our academic forefathers—inviting us to look back to understand our pressing issues of today. Their gifts are best repaid by questions anchored in empirical evidence of today.

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Notes

¹Samies are the indigenous people in Norway and Scandinavia. The Kvens are an ethnic minority in Norway and Sweden that originally emigrated from Finland.

²Cook (2004) claims that the debate is still alive and important.

³This is referring to tendencies in economic anthropology. There are numerous examples of analyses of gift exchange in market economies, some of which will be exemplified here (Browne & Milgram, 2009; J. Davis, 1992; Døving, 2003; Ensminger, 2002; Lien, 1992; Miller, 1998; Parry & Bloch, 1989).

⁴J. Davis (1992) uses the term *OECD world* most frequently as context.

⁵Cloudberries are yellow berries that when mixed with whipped cream are enjoyed as a Christmas dessert by many Norwegians.

⁶Lien (1992) mentions that this resistance toward a practice of selling cloudberries can also be understood as a norm that maintain boundaries between Norwegians and Samis—as selling cloudberries is not frowned upon among many Samis.

⁷In the mid-1980s, the fish landing facilities changed their politics in a way that changed the distribution of *kokfisk* among friends and family of professional fishermen. This transformed fish from gift to commodity, according to Lien (1987).

⁸This has changed over the last decade with more moose meat finding its way to grocery stores. However, a substantial percentage of moose meat is still distributed outside the stores.

⁹In *The Gift* Mauss (2011) describe the Maori *Hau* institution were the gift bares the spirit of the giver, which creates a special bond between the giver and receiver.

¹⁰People under the age of 20 and over 67 can fish for free for in lakes on state-owned land. All noncommercial angling is free in the sea.

¹¹The fieldwork was conducted over a period of 12 months with internship in five different companies.

¹²Grendelag is the elected board that works for various tasks with local public interest. The grendelag is often in charge of a grendelags-house, which is a house that can be used by the public for parties or gatherings. This is often affordable accommodation maintained by the grendelag.

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