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More than just a job: exploring the meanings of tourism work among Indigenous Sámi tourist entrepreneurs

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**ABSTRACT**

In northern Sweden, the positive effects of tourism involvement by Sámi Indigenous people are mostly shown in terms of employment, yet at times have been shown to go beyond economic ones and include other equally important benefits. Only when all components are seen at the same time can we get a true understanding of tourism as a livelihood strategy. This paper uses a sustainable rural livelihoods approach to investigate the different roles and meanings of tourism among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs in northern Sweden. It does so using data from 13 semi-structured interviews with Sámi Indigenous tourist entrepreneurs. The results indicate that there are many goals and objectives tourism jobs serve among Sámi Indigenous people in the Swedish north. For example, the tourism business is at times seen as a more sustainable way of using reindeer. Tourism was also a way for Sámi to express themselves and keep certain traditions alive. Another leading conclusion relates to tourist entrepreneurs as cultural ambassadors for Sámi issues. By presenting factual information about Sámi people, challenging stereotypes and by making others aware of the many hardships reindeer herders face, Sámi tourist entrepreneurs attribute to their work meanings that are social, cultural and even political.

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**Introduction**

Indigenous tourism has been a topic of academic attention for some time and has been addressed in multiple publications (e.g. Butler & Hinch, 1996, 2007a; Ryan & Aicken, 2005). As Hinch and Butler (2009) summarize, particular focus has been on tourism as a way of empowerment, and in a recent special issue of *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) claim that there is a need for approaches that acknowledge Indigenous tourism stakeholders and their interests. Lemelin and Blangy (2009) provided a step toward this by presenting a collection of papers co-authored by Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors in a special issue of the *Journal of Ecotourism*. Though it is easy to agree to these claims, there is an inherent risk that Indigenous peoples are homogenized, not acknowledging the role of geographical context and what this means for Indigenous peoples in terms of accomplishing a sustainable livelihood. Obviously, there is no single way of achieving successful Indigenous tourism (Butler & Hinch, 2007b; Getz & Jamieson, 1997) and indeed even the dominant understandings of tourism development as solution and as threat for Indigenous peoples, do not necessarily match Indigenous realities everywhere (Müller & Huuva, 2009). For the Indigenous Sámi of northern Europe, it has been said that they are modern and emancipated in terms of...
opportunities and career choices (Keskitalo, 2017; Müller & Viken, 2017; Viken & Müller, 2017). Hence, an engagement in tourism is just one of many opportunities for the members of the Indigenous communities, and it is certainly not the only way of making a living. This raises questions regarding what other life strategies may accompany an engagement in tourism.

Indigenous tourism is most positive when there is Indigenous control and the product offered is Indigenous-themed (Butler & Hinch, 2007a). Having an Indigenous-themed product with Indigenous control, however, might not be enough to guarantee positive outcomes. In northern Sweden for example, the positive effects of tourism involvement by Sámi Indigenous people are mostly shown in terms of employment (Leu & Müller, 2016; Lundmark, 2005; Müller, 2013). Tourism and tourism-related activities such as handicrafts are being promoted as a viable economic strategy helping maintain a stable population and functioning services for people living in northern Sweden, a sparsely populated area characterized by unfavorable demographic changes such as an aging population and outmigration (Lundmark, 2005; Statistics Sweden, 2017b). The Swedish Sámi Association, an organization looking out for the interests of reindeer herders and other Sámi enterprises, has initiated tourism programs aimed at providing alternative sources of income to support reindeer herding households (Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017). A diverse portfolio of economic activities would allow Sámi Indigenous people in northern Sweden to maintain their desired lifestyle and their links to the historic homeland. Hence, the question regarding tourism as part of a diverse portfolio of economic activities is an important one; but so are also the non-economic outcomes as experienced from the point of view of tourism workers (cf. Sörensson, 2008; Veijola, 2009). Only when all components are seen at the same time can we get a true understanding of tourism as a livelihood strategy (Tao & Wall, 2009). Thus, this paper aims to uncover the different roles and meanings of tourism as part of the livelihood strategy among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs, and as such add important insights to this less understood component of Indigenous tourism in northern Sweden.

In this paper, tourism is investigated by studying the lived experiences of Sámi Indigenous tourist entrepreneurs in the sparsely populated areas made up by the three northernmost counties of Sweden: Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten. Additionally, a sustainable rural livelihoods approach is used in this paper, as a conceptual framework to investigate the role tourism plays among the Sámi Indigenous people in sparsely populated areas in Sweden. This approach goes beyond the most common approaches to tourism research and looks at tourism as a livelihood strategy, where in order for it to be a sustainable livelihood it must not only induce economic capital, but also social, human and natural capital (Scoones, 1998). Current research on tourism development in northern Sweden mostly uses a restructuring lens to investigate tourism in terms of employment potential (Lundmark, 2006; Müller, 2013). The sustainable livelihood approach is widely used in rural development research in western countries, especially in regards to the agriculture sector, but less often in tourism research (Tao & Wall, 2009). This paper continues as follows: after this introduction, tourism as a livelihood strategy is presented as a conceptual framework shaping this study, after which the theory is being contextualized with reference to Sámi Indigenous people in northern Sweden. The paper then goes on to explain the methods. Following that, it presents an analysis of the results. Finally, the paper concludes with some remarks on the most relevant findings.

The sustainable rural livelihoods framework

The concept of sustainable livelihoods (SL) has been adopted by many scholars researching rural development. Scoones regards livelihood as:

> the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base. (Scoones, 1998, p. 5)

Scoones (1998) more specifically introduced a sustainable rural livelihoods framework consisting of a few key components, see Figure 1.
The first one is the context in which rural life is taking place; this, for example, includes the history, demography and politics that exist in a place. The livelihood resources available make up the second component. These are the various forms of capital: natural, economic, human and social capital, including reliance on the social support of family and community members (Helmore & Singh, 2001, quoted in Tao & Wall, 2009). An important element in Scoones’ SL framework is the importance given to institutions and organizations. Scoones (1998) adopts the definition of institutions from Davies (1997), which states: “institutions are the social cement which link stakeholders to access to capital of different kinds to the means of exercising power and so define the gateways through which they pass on the route to positive or negative [livelihood] adaptation” (p. 24, quoted in Scoones, 1998). Reaching SL is complicated and is often dependent of mediations between and within formal and informal institutions. Concealed and unconcealed rules as well as social norms form a complicated institutional blend that can serve as both barriers and opportunities to reaching SL (Scoones, 1998). As planning and policies can influence institutions, which in turn influence the way livelihood assets are transformed (e.g. agriculture policies, infrastructure and services) (Kinsella, Wilson, de Jong, & Renting, 2000), looking at rural development through a sustainable livelihood lens provides a way of understanding how policies can affect demographic patterns in rural areas.

Next, as outlined by Scoones (1998), are the livelihood strategies that are adopted from the available livelihood resources. Examples of livelihood strategies are agricultural intensification, migration and livelihood diversification. Livelihood diversification refers to diversifying the household income sources to offset the income variability that is often present in rural economies based on agriculture. Tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy has been found to be common among Sámi living in northern Sweden (cf. Leu, 2018; Leu & Müller, 2016). Finally, the result of transforming resources into strategies will produce the livelihood outcomes. The outcomes can be observed in the form of poverty reduction, increased number of working days, general lifestyle improvements as well as sustainable use of natural resources and resilience (Scoones, 1998). Importantly, the sustainable livelihood approach has as part of the set of successful outcomes not just economic benefits but also concepts of personal welfare. In this paper, it is argued that SL must also imply social and cultural aspects. Such dimensions would see that involvement in tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy should also contribute in positive ways to such components as self-esteem, vulnerability, power and

![Figure 1. The sustainable rural livelihoods framework adopted from Scoones (1998, p. 4)](image_url)
exclusion (Scoones, 1998). The latter aspect is given very little attention in previous research on tourism development in sparsely populated areas of Sweden. Below, the sustainable rural livelihoods framework is contextualized in relation to northern Sweden.

The sustainable rural livelihood framework in northern Sweden

Context and conditions

The history and geography of northern Sweden provide the context in which tourism takes place and the consequences it has on the livelihoods of Sámi Indigenous people. While Sámi reindeer herders are also found in Norway, Finland and Russia, due to different histories and contexts the results of this study are not necessarily valid in the other countries. For example, in Finland, reindeer herding is not a right exclusive for Sámi people (Keskitalo, 2008); in Northwest Russia, reindeer management strongly resembles Soviet-style state farms (Konstantinov, 2000); while in Norway, herding takes place on a larger scale and has a more dominant position than in Sweden (Keskitalo, 2008). Norway also differs in legislation where subsidies tend to favor owners of large herds, which are least likely to engage in other activities, and tourism is not included in value-added programs supplying important funds (Ulvevadet, 2004).

The Sámi have lived in northern Sweden since time immemorial, subsiding on a diverse livelihood of fishing, hunting, reindeer herding and handicraft trade (Eira et al., 2008). Colonization of the area, implying a shift from reindeer pastoralism to agriculture and an immigration of non-Sámi people, began in the seventeenth century and was most intense during the nineteenth century (Brännlund & Axelsson, 2011). Research on place identity and place attachment shows how place and belonging to a place may become more complex for people with histories of displacement and dispossession, such as Indigenous groups (Massey, 2005; Nash, 2002). This together with the fact that the Sámi are a non-visible minority relying on external signifiers as identity markers makes a connection to Sápmi, the Sámi homeland, alongside language and dress, important indicators of Indigeneity (Olofsson, 2004).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Swedish state policies backed reindeer herding as the quintessential Sámi trade. Only Sámi involved in reindeer herding were registered as Sámi, families involved in other trades such as agriculture were not and gradually lost their Indigenous identity (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006). As a result, today reindeer herding in Sweden is an exclusive right reserved for people of Sámi descent and is closely associated with Sámi identity (Beach, 2007; Labba & Jernsletten, 2004). Today only around 10%–15% of Sámi in Sweden are engaged in reindeer herding (Beach, 2007). Out of those members of the Indigenous community that are involved in herding it is frequently considered to be more than an occupation but a way of life (Nordin, 2007), and for many giving up this lifestyle is not an option (Kaiser, Nackter, Karlsson, & Renberg, 2015). The total Sámi population of Sweden is around 20,000 (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006), although by some estimates that number is at least twice that (Hassler, Johansson, Sjölander, Grönberg, & Damber, 2005).

The research area is comprised of the three northernmost counties in Sweden: Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten. Sparsely populated, with a population of almost 650,000, the three counties together equal about 6.5% of Sweden’s population (Statistics Sweden, 2017a). Employment in the long-established forestry and other extractive industries has generally decreased in the last half a century or more (Lundgren, 2005; Ö. Pettersson, 2002). With the decline in employment potential of the primary industry, the region has turned to tourism as a suitable alternative (Müller & Ulrich, 2007); however, the extent to which tourism can replace these industries in terms of employment is often brought into question (Lundmark, 2006). Public spending on tourism in sparsely populated areas in Sweden does target specific enterprises such as accommodation but appear to prioritize regions that already have a diversified tourism industry, further questioning the tourism sector’s ability to restructure the economy of these areas (Almstedt, Lundmark, & Pettersson, 2016). However, while a direct replacement of other declining economic sectors is not being observed, there may
well be other benefits to tourism that remain unrecognized as long as research maintains a focus only on employment potential.

The tourism industry in sparsely populated areas is mostly dominated by small and micro businesses (Brouder & Lundmark, 2011) and this applies to Sámi tourist companies in the region as well (Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017). The reasons why tourist companies remain small are not necessarily due to any socioeconomic constraints as for many it is a lifestyle choice (Müller & Brouder, 2014).

Livelihood resources

Various forms of capital make up the livelihood resources available for Sámi tourist entrepreneurs. Regarding human capital, Sámi people’s skills and credentials linked to Indigeneity become a valuable resource. Touristic interests in Sámi-related experiences is increasing as it becomes a larger share of the overall tourist demand (Pettersson & Viken, 2007; R. Pettersson, 2002), placing those entrepreneurs offering Sámi Indigenous products in an advantageous position. In reference to the natural capital, the sparsely populated areas of northern Europe possess features related to nature-based tourism such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling and dog-sledding (Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016), and peripheral features perceived as remote, natural and unspoiled which are strong tourist attractions (Blomgren & Sørensen, 1998). It has been shown that for some Sámi tourist entrepreneurs the reasons why they got involved in tourism relates to the fact that they already possess the competitive edge by being familiar with the area, for example, knowledge on where to find moose or the best places to hike (Palomino, 2012). The successful pursuit of any livelihood strategy is highly dependent on availability and access to economic capital. In contrast to many Indigenous groups worldwide, the Sámi do not differ much from the Swedish population in general when it comes to factors such as material standards (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006). With respect to social capital, an increased emphasis on Sámi identity is being observed among young Sámi (Jacobsson, 2012). Affiliations and links to herding are also of importance. Herder families are dependent on collective community values (Ahrén, 2008; Nordin, 2007). The Sámi community, in general, is considered to be more communal in nature than the population at large (Ronning, 2007).

Institutional processes and organizational structures

Institutional processes and structures are what make all components of a rural livelihood bind together (Scoones, 1998). In Sweden, the welfare policy that the state abides by means that in sparsely populated areas public resources play a vital role (Wiberg, 1994). Sweden’s public sector is larger than that of many western countries. Public sector employment in such sparsely populated areas just before the turn of the century was around 40% (Wiberg, 1994). In the latter half of the twentieth century, Sweden has seen a general trend toward deregulation. The importance of public sector employment, which experienced substantial increases in the 1970s has seen sizable reductions during the 1980s and 1990s, which affected Sweden’s sparsely populated regions the hardest (Ö. Pettersson, 2002). With Sweden joining the European Union in 1995, regional development policies have also been heavily influenced by EU’s structural funds. Institutional powers were redistributed to local and regional authorities, municipalities were suddenly responsible for their own development, leaving some municipalities to outperform others (Eriksson, 2010), enhancing uneven regional developments. Outmigration and an aging population still characterize the majority of municipalities in the sparsely populated areas of Sweden. In many of these areas, tourism may be seen a way to get more job opportunities to the region; however, only in a few municipalities has tourism contributed to positive development cycles where in-migration leads to infrastructure improvements, better public facilities, which in turn contributed to investments, tourists and more in-migration (Lundmark, 2006).
Livelihood strategies

Reindeer herding has gone through its own process of intensification similar to agriculture in other rural areas further south. During the 1960s, the government supported a policy of modernization in reindeer herding where emphasis on increased productivity was a main goal (Beach, 1981). Reindeer herding today is not very profitable and the only way to increase income from herding is to increase slaughtered weight (Nordin, 2007), and since the total number of reindeer allowed in each Reindeer Herder Cooperative is dictated by the county government as a function of the capacity of the land, it becomes nearly impossible for an individual to increase herd size, making the strategy of intensification beyond the reach of most Sámi herders. Regardless of these challenges, many reindeer herders are unwilling to give up the occupation considering its close association with Sámi culture. As a result, an adaptive strategy to the low profits of herding is the diversification of the livelihood (Leu, 2018; Turunen, Rasmus, & Bavay, 2016), meaning additional income from non-herding sources. Locally, for example, mining is an important employer and despite conflicts with reindeer herding, herders frequently work in mines because of the need for additional income (Revelin, 2013). Tourism as a livelihood diversification is a common strategy among Sámi reindeer herders as well as Sámi Indigenous people living in sparsely populated areas in general (Leu, 2018). There is an Indigenous component to tourism demand in northern Sweden (R. Pettersson, 2002), and representations of Sámi culture in tourism are often related to reindeer and reindeer herding (Müller & Pettersson, 2001) placing Sámi people, and reindeer herders in particular, in an advantageous position to get involved in tourism. Indeed, income from tourism has been shown to be more common among herder families in the Swedish north than geographically matched farmers (Leu & Müller, 2016). At the same time, the non-economic roles and meanings of those tourism jobs continue to be less well understood.

Livelihood outcomes

The success of all livelihood strategies will influence a variety of different outcomes. As laid out by Scoones (1998), livelihood outcomes can, for example, increase the number of working days. Which among Sámi living in sparsely populated areas can lead to financial independence or for those who are also involved in reindeer herding can help the household to continue involvement in the tradition. While the original sustainable livelihood framework included poverty reduction as an outcome, in the Swedish Indigenous context, it is best rendered as maintaining a standard of living that matches the Swedish population at large. Outcomes related to well-being go beyond material conditions and include elements of stress, happiness, power and exclusion. The adoption of livelihood strategies can also enhance resilience in the face of environmental and economic shocks, due to bad winters in herding or employment loses in forestry or mining. It can also reduce the vulnerability that reindeer herders face due to the various pressures they confront. Coping successfully with such pressures will inevitably affect the ability of people to continue living in Sápmi. Indeed, place attachment to the area has been shown to be a strong motivator for involvement in tourism among Sámi living in the north (Schilar & Keskitalo, 2017). Some of the long-standing industries in sparsely populated areas in Sweden, such as those based on resource extraction as well as reindeer herding, depend on natural resources. Livelihood strategies that help maintain a viable natural resource base become critical to promoting and maintaining a sustainable livelihood. Obviously, desired outcomes vary according to specific preferences; the outcomes highlighted in the sustainable rural livelihood framework do not make up an exhaustive list nor are they necessarily weighed equally in importance. Additionally, they mostly focus on individual benefits and not any potential communal ones, shown to exist in Indigenous tourism in many parts of the world (Grünwald, 2002; Suntikul, 2007). As Scoones (1998) explains, what a sustainable livelihood should entail is highly debated and by revealing the many potential outcomes this framework makes a negotiation between these elements possible.
Methods

This study is based on 13 semi-structured interviews with Sámi tourist entrepreneurs in sparsely populated areas of Sweden, representing almost a third of all Sámi tourist companies in the country (cf. Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017). Nine of the interviewees are currently or have in the past been involved in reindeer herding. Even among those not involved in it, reindeer herding featured prominently and positively in their responses. The interviews were conducted during October and November 2016. Seven interviews were conducted in the county of Norrbotten, four in Västerbotten and two in Jämtland. Four of the respondents were women and nine were men. The youngest was 41 years old and oldest was 73, while the average age was around 53 years. Eight of the respondents were entrepreneurs offering nature-related tours, guiding or other amenities, four were artist entrepreneurs involved in the production and selling of handicrafts and one was both, offering tours as well as making handicrafts. The typical interview duration was around 30 min. This was mostly due to time constraints among the respondents, something to be expected among individuals holding multiple jobs (cf. Leu, 2018) and given that interviews took place during busy times in herding and hunting. In fact, numerous individuals declined to be interviewed citing lack of time. Three out of the 13 interviews were conducted in English, the rest in Swedish.

The interviews were recorded and analyzed by using thematic content analysis. Themes common for the different interviews were identified, topical stories connected to livelihoods, meanings and changes in their relation to the local community. While interview responses are varied according to individual experience, the focus and attention can be maintained on certain recurring narrative patterns (Sandberg, 2011). Epistemologically, interviews may “open up” the hegemonic meanings of Sámi tourism and livelihoods (Sandberg & Tollefsen, 2010). The analysis below is organized by themes. The recruitment of interviewees stopped when new themes or concepts stopped emerging; therefore, the validity of the results should not be suspect due to the relative small sample size (for a discussion on sample size and “redundancy”, see Baxter & Eyles, 1997). While, the concept of saturation can always be questioned (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003), given that the study population is fairly homogenous with similar experiences and perceptions, a sample this size is considered adequate for uncovering the most important themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Meanings of tourism work

Throughout each interview, the respondents were asked questions about what it means to work in tourism for both themselves and the Sámi in general. The responses varied but at the same time certain common themes emerged. First off, not surprisingly, for some respondents working in tourism was part of a livelihood diversification where it simply meant a source of much needed income. According to the SL Framework, diversification is a common strategy among rural households and financial independence is an important livelihood outcome. Income from rural occupations can vary both from year to year and within the year making the need for reliable additional sources of income great (Ellis, 1998). Importantly, tourism work considered a diversification strategy complementary to herding, does not have to be full-time in order to provide the desired benefits. In this study, all of those who were involved in reindeer herding mentioned income from tourism was used to some extent to support reindeer herding. In a lot of cases, all household income was pooled together so income from any non-herding source would inevitably be used for herding when required. For a more detailed analysis of livelihood strategies of diversification among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs, see Leu (2018).

One of the distinguishing factors of the SL framework, as opposed to other approaches focusing only on income diversification (cf. Blad, 2014; Kelly & Ilbery, 1995), relates to the importance given to outcomes of well-being. Another meaning given to tourism work by the respondents is that it is not really tourism per se. For those tourist entrepreneurs whose business product revolved around the reindeer, that is, reindeer sledding tours, petting, etc., their business was not regarded as a separate
occupation but looked upon as a continuation of herding. Given the cultural significance of herding to Sámi identity and culture (Nordin, 2007), such branding gives tourism work meanings that are highly relevant culturally, not just to individuals but also to an entire community. Reindeer herding in the traditional sense of the occupation is not very profitable and using the reindeer for tourism was simply considered a new direction within reindeer herding. In such instances, the respondents referred to their ability to innovate and prided themselves for figuring out how to use existing natural capital for a successful livelihood. As one respondent put it: “instead of selling my bulls to a slaughterhouse I sell them to tourists instead, and I can sell them again tomorrow [...] This way it also means that I can live off a smaller herd instead of having to build up a large one”. In such instances, tourism is presented as a sustainable livelihood strategy that brings positive outcomes without undermining the natural resource base upon which households depend on, an important component of the sustainable livelihood definition provided by Scoones (1998). At the same time, this illustrates the use of existing cultural capital, where skills and knowledge linked to tradition are used in the pursuit of livelihood strategies, which in turn induces cultural capital by advancing a traditional occupation. This meaning assigned to this specific kind of tourism work acknowledges first, the fact that a traditional occupation such as reindeer herding is constantly evolving over time, even evolving in ways people sometimes have a hard time to recognize. Second, this understanding of tourist entrepreneurship where tourism is not seen as a separate sector but as a continuation of an unrelated industry, hints at a unique versatility of tourism work, where it is able to mold and remake itself in different ways. It also gives an understanding that the line between tourism and another sector is blurred and where one occupation ends and another begins is not always as straight forward as commonly believed.

Advancing recognition and issues of power and exclusion are rarely discussed within the framework of rural restructuring and change in northern Sweden (Hedlund, 2017; Lundmark, 2006; O. Pettersson, 2002). This is likely due to a focus on individuals and households when discussing rural changes while issues of exclusion are experienced at a larger scale, such as the community. Yet, such outcomes should be investigated and debated alongside more frequent ones related to employment and the economy (Scoones, 1998), and are particularly important among Indigenous peoples, which have a history of colonization and displacement (Butler & Hinch, 2007a). An important aspect mentioned most often by the respondents regarding their work in tourism was educating the tourists, both Swedes and foreigners, about Sámi people, Sámi culture and reindeer herding. As one entrepreneur stated: “[tourism] becomes a channel through which one can inform [...] ignorance is the absolute worst enemy; the more information out there the better it will be”. Previous studies have shown that tourist entrepreneurs in the small northern town of Jokkmokk see themselves as ambassadors responsible for showing their town in a positive light to visitors (Brouder, 2012). This applies also to Indigenous culture where Sámi tourist entrepreneurs regarded visitors coming to Jokkmokk as having little knowledge regarding Sámi culture but keen to learn about it (Tuulentie, 2006). Misinformation or lack of knowledge about the Sámi everywhere in northern Sweden is common and Indigenous modernity is often downplayed while traditional Sámi stereotypes are reproduced for touristic purposes (Eriksson, 2010). Therefore, the interaction between the tourist and the Sámi entrepreneur becomes the medium through which information is disseminated cross-culturally. As one respondent expressed: “What is great [with tourism] is that it shows our everyday, the reality; we don’t live in the tent [Swedish: káta] [...] but we are exactly like a typical Swede.”

The respondents discussed the importance of passing factual information, information that does not perpetuate a stereotypical view of the Indigenous as age-old, traditional and unchanging but modern and comparable to any other Swede. Revelin (2013), investigating the nexus between tourism and the extractive industry in Sápmi, has had at least one of her interviewees, a Sámi tourist entrepreneur in Gällivare, Sweden, discuss the importance of having Sámi themselves present Sámi material to tourists. Information is passed from host to tourist regardless of who is delivering it, tourists come willing to learn, they ask questions and listen to what is being told to them. If a non-Sámi entrepreneur hosts tourists, they inevitable will answer questions regarding the local population
including the indigenous component. Some of the respondents in this study mentioned observing this and then also wondered why should they, the Sámi, not be the ones to educate others about themselves. “I think it is wrong to get information about Sámi and our land from a foreigner [...] that is something we should do ourselves”, said one respondent. This way they have more control over the information being passed out; making sure that it is more authentic information than would be if a non-Sámi was to deliver it:

“One has to be a herder or be member in a [Reindeer Herder Cooperative] to be able to explain; because there is so much misunderstanding and false information in society [...] I can tell my guests that which I think is true. I try to hold myself to the right facts, etc.”, explained another Sámi tourist entrepreneur.

Even if some knowledge regarding Sámi reindeer herding is present among visitors there might still be less awareness regarding the full geographical extent of it. For instance, respondents from the southern part of the study area discussed visitors’ surprise, even of those from Sweden, at finding out that there are Sámi reindeer herders in Jämtland as well not just in the far north. They discussed their desire to break down geographical stereotypes where the traditional Sámi homeland and reindeer herding are believed to exist only in the northernmost county. This shows some frustration among Sámi living in the southern part of Sápmi toward persistent images that Sámi reindeer herders, and sometimes by extension Sámi people in general, live only in the high mountain regions of northern Sweden. In reality reindeer herding encompasses approximately 50% of Sweden’s land area (Statistics Sweden, 2008) with much variety not least between forest and mountain herding areas. In addition, Sámi people in general live all over the country, including large urban centers in the south (Pedersen & Nyseth, 2012). The findings show that the respondents could tackle some of that ignorance through tourist entrepreneurship. Such proclamations demonstrate how livelihood outcomes can also affect communities and not just individuals as commonly detailed in the SL framework.

Misunderstandings and lack of adequate information does not exist only among the general public, there was expressed concern that also local politicians at the municipal level did not have a good understanding of reindeer herding especially regarding land use and predators. While not stated directly, the respondents discussing this implied that by bringing awareness to such issues and countering the ignorance that exists among the guests on the plight of herders, more public support could be rallied behind the cause leading to policy changes. In such instances, the tourist company was almost seen as a political tool:

“We hope the rest of the world can see the problem with having too many predators, [...] wherever we go, on an exhibition or we have people here, we always try to talk with them about the whole culture and but also those issues, because they didn’t know there were so many reindeer killed every year [by predators]”, stated one respondent.

Even by those tourist entrepreneurs who were not at all involved in herding it was stated that the death of reindeer herding in Sweden would to some extent also be the death of Sámi culture. The livelihood approach emphasizes that outcomes such as these are essential for rural development thinking and can at the very least serve as points to be negotiated within any rural development discussion (Scoones, 2009). At the same time, applying a framework that favors the inclusion of such elements of visibility and recognition will permit the potential understanding of other, more recent occupations as important to Sámi culture as reindeer herding.

The ambassadorship component is not limited to the physical interaction between host and guest. Respondents dealing with handicraft production and other traditional artifacts told of various exhibitions either in large cities in the south of Sweden or abroad where their products were shown. Alongside the products some of the respondents themselves would be traveling where they were presented with the opportunity to talk to people about Sámi culture and ways of life. Overall, these meanings relate to visibility at a larger scale; as one respondent declared, “all publicity is great; we can take a larger place in society [than just as reindeer herders]”.
A livelihoods-based approach to Indigenous tourism development brings into focus the various available capitals that allow the adoption of different strategies; at the same time, the successful adoption of different strategies can relate back to, and reinforce, forms of capitals. A related meaning that people attributed to working in tourism and with handicrafts is that it was a way for Sámi to express themselves and keep certain traditions alive. For example, one respondent whose products offered to guests include a variety of reindeer and traditional Sámi-related activities, has also experimented with milking the reindeer, a practice, the respondent explains, that has not been done for many decades in Sweden. While the choice to re-learn reindeer milking might not directly be linked to the tourist company, it is part of an effort to try to develop the company in different directions to see what works best. "[We did it] for our own knowledge first of all but on the other hand it’s also very important that you always develop things, you must have new products, you must have new things to tell people", the respondent explained. Keeping traditions alive was also done through the collection, preservation or re-discovery of traditional patterns and motifs. One respondent, who had the most years’ experience in handicraft production out of all participants in this study, discussed owning a large pattern assortment, collected over decades, that s/he would like to eventually have passed on to a museum. Through the tourist company, another respondent, together with the partner, discussed in detail and with pride their attempts to revitalize different patterns and traditions. For example, a story was told of finding a lost pattern in an old photograph and now using it in some of the products they make. In such ways, tourism as a livelihood strategy resulted in a positive feedback, where existing cultural assets enabling tourism development to begin with, are being further reinforced and expanded through tourism development. As a result, the SL framework as illustrated in Figure 1, could potentially also be understood as a circular loop where successful livelihood outcomes also reinforce or become part of the generating context and resources.

As already mentioned, formal Swedish institutions and national politics failed to improve and extend the livelihoods in northern Sweden, hence the lack of employment opportunities. The SL framework highlights the importance of informal institutions. Analyzing such institutions “allows the identification of restrictions/barriers and opportunities to sustainable livelihoods” (Scoones, 1998, p. 12). Among Indigenous communities, informal institutions play an important role creating a more complex institutional setting that would not be present in the population at large (Dana, 2015). None of the respondents in this study mentioned any serious problems related to their relationship with the local community since getting involved in tourism. However, the responses show that there is a reaction by the local community to emerging entrepreneurs that is best characterized as cautious or skeptical. Many of the respondents talked about certain challenges they faced at the beginning of starting their tourism venture. When asked about potential problems experienced as a Sámi and working in tourism one respondent stated: “At the beginning people didn’t really believe in it”; another said when he started “they [the family and community] thought I was a little crazy.” The resistance encountered by some as they started working in tourism could have many explanations. Even though certain aspects of Sámi tourism have a long history in northern Scandinavia (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016), tourism is often watched with vigilance by many local Sámi (Viken, 2006). One respondent felt that the Sámi community in general is more collective in nature, a lot of decisions are not made at the individual level but at a communal one. He stated: “it is a little uphill, as a Sámi one has the Sámi community to which one has to keep, to his friends, to others or […] to neighbors”. Because of that, it is more difficult to try something new that has not been done before; a problem that a non-Sámi Swede would not have, explained the respondent. He personally encountered some resistance from some individuals in the local Sámi community and was frustrated because it is not only him that needs additional sources of income besides herding, they all do, yet nobody wants to try new things. Additionally, the same respondent in regards to temporary work in mining and surrounding industry said, “that is accepted, while I who is involved in tourism is not yet properly accepted”, even as those industries are perceived as enemies to herding, and therefore less sustainable. Perceptions seem to change over time with tourism being seen in a more positive light as it develops (Revelin, 2013). This is reinforced by the results from this study where respondents have
discussed experiencing a positive change over time as people get accustomed to tourism development and see its potential. The community is becoming more accepting:

“from the beginning [...] we can feel that people are looking, the Sámi people are looking a little [careful], because there were not so many working with Sámi tourism; but today we have so much support from people around, they say that [we] are doing a great job, and it’s so important because we say that the more people know about us the stronger we will be”, stated another respondent.

Such informal institutions of the Sámi community in the north also means that change happens more in small increments than large leaps (Rønning, 2007) and the benefits must also apply to the entire community not just to the individual (Palomino, 2012). The respondents tried hard to keep a rapport with their fellow reindeer herders and to show that there is no disturbance to the reindeer or other conflicts. As one respondent, who is a herder himself, stated, “when I started this company [more than 10 years ago] there was of course opposition, there will be a lot of people running about the mountains, and fish, etc.”; however, he explained as the years passed, people started to see that there are rules the tourists have to follow while out and there is no disturbance to the animals, then “the [critics] were quiet”. Another respondent, who perhaps experienced the most opposition out of all interviewees, expressed optimism stating that positive opinions on Sámi tourism are increasing. “It’s on the way to change” he states, “but [...] it requires strength to continue even though it is difficult, but I see a potential in tourism and at the same time to keep herding.” Overall, the respondents in this study mentioned that keeping a good relationship with the local herder community and locals in general was very important to them. This can also be interpreted as keeping a good rapport with the community holding a main touristic asset, the reindeer (Müller & Huuva, 2009) or a consequence of the informal institutions that characterize Sámi society (Rønning, 2007) or both.

Conclusions

The SL approach detailed in this study emphasizes a variety of outcomes. It specifically highlights that the effects of various livelihood strategies people in rural areas adopt should include aspects of well-being, power and exclusion besides the conventional material and economic aspects (Scoones, 1998). According to the framework, besides increasing economic capital, tourist entrepreneurs might seek to achieve various other forms of capital, namely social, human and natural capital. Guided by the SL approach, the findings in this study sought to explore the meanings of tourism work among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs. The results indicate that there are many goals and meanings tourism jobs have among Sámi Indigenous people in the Swedish north. Importantly, tourism can be a means to achieve profoundly social, cultural and even political ends. The tourist business as simply a continuation of reindeer herding, a modern way of herding, grants significant cultural meanings to tourism work given the high prestige of herding in Sámi culture. Furthermore, the use of reindeer for touristic purposes ensures a certain sustainability of the product not found in direct meat production. Keeping certain traditions alive, such as by using old patterns in handicrafts, meant a sense of pride and honor for some respondents and showed how tourism can reinforce human and cultural capital, creating a positive feedback loop between the conditions that enable tourism as a livelihood strategy, the strategy itself, and the outcomes of such a strategy. Additionally, handicraft production is a long-standing Sámi trade, and a very important part of Sámi culture (SOU, 1975). The long historical reputation of Sámi handcrafts means it is also likely that some of the respondents involved in it do not consider themselves in the tourism trade even if they own a company that sells the majority of their products to visitors coming from other localities for leisure purposes. Another conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this study relates to the possibility of tourist entrepreneurs as cultural ambassadors for Sámi issues. Through presenting information about Sámi people, by showing modernity and by making others aware of the many hardships reindeer herders face, Sámi tourist entrepreneurs attribute to their work meanings that are deeply social. These findings illustrate how tourism is able to benefit a community and not just individuals. In the SL framework, the livelihood outcomes
discussed link issues of employment and poverty with wider issues of well-being and capabilities (Scoones, 1998), at the same time the framework commonly accepts the individual and household as the default beneficiary. That is not necessarily always the case, by showing how livelihood strategies adopted at an individual scale can have significant outcomes across larger scales, the findings in this study broaden the scope in the negotiation and debate of livelihoods approaches. The findings related to ambassadorship are also important for the Sámi community in general. Many challenges to Sámi tourism development come from within the Sámi community (Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017; Zhang & Müller, 2018). Potentially, a greater understanding that tourism, done responsible and under Sámi control, can make the Sámi more visible and lead to indigenous empowerment and inclusion, can also make involvement in tourism more acceptable from within the Sámi community as well. Hence, from a theoretical perspective, it can also be noted that livelihood outcomes reach beyond the individual sphere and comprise the entire community, providing further proof for the cultural embeddedness of many Indigenous tourism enterprises.

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