Deconstructing the indigenous in tourism. The production of indigeneity in tourism-oriented labelling and handicraft/souvenir development in Northern Europe

E. Carina H. Keskitalo, Hannelene Schilar, Susanna Heldt Cassel & Albina Pashkevich

To cite this article: E. Carina H. Keskitalo, Hannelene Schilar, Susanna Heldt Cassel & Albina Pashkevich (2021) Deconstructing the indigenous in tourism. The production of indigeneity in tourism-oriented labelling and handicraft/souvenir development in Northern Europe, Current Issues in Tourism, 24:1, 16-32, DOI: 10.1080/13683500.2019.1696285

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1696285

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 06 Dec 2019.

Article views: 900

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

Citing articles: 4 View citing articles
Deconstructing the indigenous in tourism. The production of indigeneity in tourism-oriented labelling and handicraft/souvenir development in Northern Europe

E. Carina H. Keskitalo, Hannelene Schilar, Susanna Heldt Cassel and Albina Pashkevich

Department of Geography, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden; School of Technology and Business Studies IS, Dalarna University, Falun, Sweden

ABSTRACT
In literature on tourism in northern or ‘Arctic’ areas and on regions and places in northern areas, terms such as ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’ are often used to distinguish people and places from each other. The aim of this paper is to deconstruct the ‘indigenous’/’non-indigenous’ categories as well as the geographical categories to which they are linked, using examples from tourism in northern Fennoscandia and northwest Russia, selected as areas with circumstances that vary greatly both locally and regionally. Specific focus is on the construction of labels and restrictions of use, particularly regarding handicrafts/souvenirs as a specific object of indigeneity to separate it from other objects. The study reviews the processes in tourism for constructing, labelling, and valuing – and thereby also exerting power upon – specific conceptions, and thereby also on the contesting of such processes amongst broader, but often unacknowledged, local groups.

Introduction
In literature on tourism in northern or ‘Arctic’ areas, and on regions and places in northern areas, a number of concepts serving to distinguish places and people from each other are regularly used (Keskitalo, 2004). One such pair is ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’, which serve to distinguish acknowledged indigenous groups from all others, specifying the indigenous but at the same time normalizing and equalizing all others as often unitary non-indigenous groups. Indigenous representations often aim to convey the exotic, out-of-the-ordinary image of products necessary for attracting tourists (Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017; Saarinen, 2011; Viken & Muller, 2006). In addition, indigenous groups are often linked to nature, to ‘northern’ places or even ‘the Arctic’, serving to distinguish what is seen as peripheral within advanced industrial states from their southern centres or generally non-northern locations within some sort of circumpolar discourse in northern Fennoscandia and Russia (Keskitalo, 2004).

These types of conceptions are often emphasized in tourism in order to highlight the quality of the experiences or a distinctive character of the tourist product. The evolution of the definition of ‘indigenous tourism’ has been the subject of massive discussion in the literature (Hinch & Butler, 2007; Johnston, 2000; Swain, 1989). The various definitions have highlighted the need for indigenous actors to exercise control over the tourism products and services while providing them (Espeso-Molinero, Carlisle, & Pastor-Alfonso, 2016). Many authors have reflected on the co-existence of the
stereotypical and simplified representations of the indigenous in connection to their culture and traditions, while simultaneously not giving up hope for new strategies employed through various promotion channels to further nuance these images (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003; Johansen & Mehmetoglu, 2011). Another discussion is connected to the need to widen the representations of the indigenous in tourism as being related to nature and highly dependent on it, and broadening these representations beyond a focus on nature as a means of subsistence. Studies show that present descriptions of livelihoods as ‘living in accordance with nature’ often do not highlight the manifold ways of directly utilizing it, not only through small-scale hunting and fishing practices but as part of industrialized societies (Keskitalo & Schilar, 2017). If tourists are to have less stereotypical views on indigenous practices, it is necessary to expand our knowledge of and assumptions regarding multiple ‘indigenous’ as well as ‘non-indigenous’ lifestyles (Hillmer-Pegram, 2016; Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017).

In relation to northern areas, which are often constructed as remote and known to few, it is increasingly urgent to problematize the limited nature of such conceptions. In the last few decades, literature on the Arctic and the North has increasingly problematized a Canadian and broader Anglo-American conception of these areas through a colonial lens, whereby the indigenous is connected particularly to the features of being close to, or even living in subsistence with, nature (e.g. Shields, 1991; with comparative literature on other settler colonialism states such as Australia and New Zealand, e.g. Borsboom, 1988; Carter & Hollinsworth, 2009; Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998; Tilley, 2009). In this type of conception, seen as related to modern European (Anglo) colonialism (Dirlik, 2002), as well as its resultant specific conceptions of nature-society relationships, the separation into clear indigenous/non-indigenous dichotomies and a construction of the rural have both been argued to not have developed in the same way in the states of ‘Old Europe’ (as opposed to the ‘New World’) that were settled more protractedly over longer periods and with blends of different peoples intermingling over the centuries (e.g. Aas, 1998; Keskitalo, 2004; Kvist, 1995). The ways in which categories of nature and society relations, indigenous and local relations, and rurality are presently constructed have also been argued to vary greatly between settler colonialism states (such as Canada, with which comparisons are nevertheless often made in a ‘northern’ context) and northern Europe (e.g. Anttonen, 1998; Cruickshank, 2009; Hovland, 1999; Kramvig, 1999; Saarinen, 1998, 2002).

Against this background, it is warranted to review the ways in which tourism – often oriented towards an international market – in these areas constructs or even contributes to conceptions that simplify northern areas and lives as well as societies. This would imply reviewing the processes through which ‘indigeneity’ in a ‘northern’ framework comes to be packaged and possible to purchase as an object in tourism, and how such processes are controlled and developed.

As a result, this paper takes its point of departure in questioning the extent to which tourism descriptions take into account the great variations in and between areas, beyond describing them within a ‘northern’ or ‘indigenous’ framework. The study also discusses the extent to which descriptions relate to such more complex, locally and regionally situated, descriptions. The purpose here is to deconstruct the indigenous/non-indigenous as well as the geographical categories they are linked to. The paper draws upon examples from northern Fennoscandia and northwest Russia, selected as areas with highly varying local and regional circumstances that are not necessarily the same as in Anglo or related international literature and development lines. Specific focus is on the construction of labels and restrictions of use, particularly regarding handicrafts/souvenirs as specific objects of indigeneity, which thereby separates them from other objects.

**Theoretical framework: expressions of indigeneity in tourism**

Indigenous tourism as an international development is a wide concept and is similar to concepts like ethnic and aboriginal tourism, which have in common the (re)presentation of cultural practices as different, and as typical of a certain group of people (Viken & Müller, 2017). The degree of control over the tourism products and the tourism system at indigenous tourism destinations varies, from
no control and exploitation to tourism driven through actors defining themselves and their tourism product as well as having control over their business opportunities and economic benefits (Hinch & Butler, 2007). Indigenous tourism in general, as discussed in international literature and mirroring an international rather than specifically Nordic case, tends to portray the indigenous groups and cultures as different, staging indigenous heritage and practices as authentic by focusing on traditional costumes, old rituals and religion, dance and handicrafts, and in relation to an oft-discussed tourist desire for the exotic ‘Other’ (Bunten, 2010). However, such a conception of indigenous tourism may not only produce stereotypes but might also influence the ways individuals see themselves and how they perceive their identity and culture in a more complex way (Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017). Most urgently, broader, internationally derived and touristic conceptions may not necessarily reflect numerous varying conceptions of indigenousness, ethnicity, or belonging amongst individuals. In a broader conception, Anttonen, for instance, highlights that ‘there are diverse interpretations of how to be a ‘real’ Kven or a ‘real’ Finn, Norwegian or Saami for that matter’ (1998, p. 52).

There is also great variation in how tourism is conducted and who takes part in it: tourism products may vary and be designed and staged for individuals or groups or as mass tourism, depending on the type of business operation, destination, or attraction. The motivations for the entrepreneurs and tourism workers to participate in these activities may also vary and be related to strategies of livelihood complementary to, or as an alternative to, traditional trades and industries (Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017), or the revitalization of cultural practices and traditions (Heldt Cassel & Maureira, 2015; Müller & Pettersson, 2001; Tuulentie, 2006), or be seen as supporting a chosen lifestyle (Keskitalo & Schilar, 2017). Such more supportive developments, however, are contingent on the role and involvement of potentially a range of actors in tourism, and potentially even wider destination development (Keskitalo & Schilar, 2017).

In general, nevertheless, difference and distance – which are often constructed in tourism contexts – can be assumed to be present in tourism experiences to separate the hosts (often identified by some kind of marker relevant to the tourism experience) from the guests, and the similarly marked destinations/holiday sites from the home/everyday environments. This is particularly spelled out in the branding of products and places related to indigenous heritage and culture. In this, it normalizes national centres and urban areas while specifying northern and peripheral areas as different and separate from them, often connoting the northern areas as nature, environment or wilderness, as a counterpoint to the urban. The difference and otherness of the tourist destination, in relation to the perceived places of residence of the visitors, are constructed and reinforced by default in tourism production and consumption, driven by a quest for authenticity (MacCannell, 1976/1989).

In indigenous tourism, the concept of indigeneity and the ways it relates to places, cultural practices, and heritage are at the core of the tourism experience. As indigenous tourism relies on the conceptualization of the indigenous as something different, distant, and simultaneously exotic, it also represents and constructs the indigenous peoples and places in ways that are in line with commercial opportunities and attractive from a visitor’s perspective. This often includes the reproduction of stereotypes, difference, and the indigenous people as the ‘Other’ in the production and consumption of indigenous tourism products (Heldt Cassel & Maureira, 2015; Viken & Müller, 2017; Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017; Tuulentie, 2006).

Criticism has been voiced that such conceptions that inherently disassociate an ‘indigenous’ entity or identity from a ‘non-indigenous’ one serve to simplify and stereotype complex realities (Brubaker, 2014). For instance, it has been noted that while conceptions of the indigenous often aim to make it ‘frozen in time’ by relating it directly to nature, subsistence, and tradition, this type of conception is not necessarily applied to other groups:

[we feel no obligation to drive horse-drawn carts because that was the limit of transport technology in the time of our great-grandparents. We don’t feel a duty (or even an inclination) to wear kilts, eat haggis and listen to bagpipe music, because we have Scottish forbearers. This conviction that people ought to keep to their ‘natural’ traditional lifestyle is usually aimed at other people. Especially Aborigines, in spite of the fact that the]
In this respect, any conception that determines and highlights specific groups must also be seen as political: it can have both positive and negative connotations, depending on the group and the ways the lines are drawn, serving as a basis for the social and political mobilization of certain groups, and through this serving as both or either – empowering and/or disempowering (Kingsbury, 1998). In an internationally widely used definition of indigenous people, the focus is on ‘subjection to colonial settlement, historical continuity with pre-invasion or precolonial societies, an identity that is distinct from the dominant society in which they are encased, and a concern with the preservation and replication of culture’ (Keal, 2003, p. 7, quoted in Poyer, 2017, p. 419). In this definition, the indigenous is given meaning as both an individual and a collective identity, and culture is seen as identifiable and attributable, different, specific, and worth preserving. However, competing definitions, here termed constructivist, instead take the international concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ not as defined by universally applicable criteria, but as


embodiment a continuous process in which claims and practices in numerous specific cases are abstracted in the wider institutions of international society, then made specific again at the moment of application in the political, legal and social processes of particular cases and societies. (Kingsbury, 1998, p. 415)

As opposed to more essentialist or given assumptions on indigeneity, such a constructivist agenda would entail directly confronting the power divisions inherent in the concept – of both any ethnicity (or the normalization of one) as well as any indigeneity. To this end, researchers in this vein have asked: ‘Who has the power to impose one set of categorical distinctions – in Bourdieu’s terms, one principle of vision and division of the world – rather than another?’ (Brubaker, 2014, p. 807; see also Barth, 1969; Wimmer, 2014). In the anthropology of tourism, authors have questioned the ways in which local hosts’ behaviour can be interpreted ‘in terms of seeing themselves through tourists’ eyes’ (Kenna, 2010, p. xviii). Authors have also noted that tradition or ‘folklore is made not found’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, p. 369).

One way of approaching this type of issue is to apply a conception in research which reviews the construction of ethnicity, privilege, and power. Such an approach would avoid ‘taking ethnic groups as self-evident units of analysis’ (Wimmer, 2014, p. 838), rather looking at how they are constructed to review and question the ways in which different practices construe them. This would include both specific historical contexts and specific practices that construe people in different ways, potentially related to assumptions from the outside as well as in relation to power and privilege (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003).

While this type of more reflective and complex understanding of identity is common in a constructivist approach, in practice it has often been limited by a focus on pre-defined groups which then comes to guide the research. In the tourism context, where the product itself depends on its being seen as ‘exotic’ in some way, these more complex types of conceptions could be assumed to be not only limited but also supressed. In particular, these types of suppression can be seen as linked to assumptions regarding ‘authenticity’. In tourism, ‘authenticity’ has been conceptualized as a value connoting something that is assumed to be ‘true’, ‘genuine’ and ‘unspoilt’, seen as ‘old’ cultural practices from a time and place distant from the modern Western world and the urban (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999). This causes the concept of authenticity to be constructed in a way similar to that of indigeneity, as a culturally and geographically peripheral and distant place and culture in relation to the urban, modern, Western (Anglo) cultures and identities. However, most scholars of tourism studies have disputed the definition of authenticity as anything objective, original, or ‘real’ (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Taylor, 2001; Theodossopoulos, 2013). Thereby, ‘authenticity’ in tourism is, in different ways, rather discussed as a value or feature of the experience, possible to reproduce or refine to suit the logic of tourism, rather than something essential or objective regarding the place or culture itself (cf. Cohen, 1988).
Taking into account this type of understanding, it is thus relevant to review how the product of tourism is constructed, and to focus on how this may empower or disempower different individuals and groups in what actions or identities become possible, in line with the notion that all definitions of this type are political. Explicit examples demonstrating such delineations and struggles over the definitions may entail, for instance, how an indigenous/non-indigenous dichotomy in tourism is used when questioning the right of entrepreneurs to promote experiences and products that are claimed by specific groups: some cases, for instance the claim to indigenous handicrafts by non-indigenous actors, and conflicts over even the definition of handicraft may indicate delineations of difference and claims to authenticity. This is related to the situation that, when specific destinations and places are represented as indigenous tourism destinations in tourism marketing, they automatically gain a connotation or label as different, genuine, or authentic in relation to the non-indigenous, in a binary way. The distance between the indigenous and non-indigenous in tourism production and consumption in northern areas, however, is not only cultural or symbolic and expressed through binary way. The distance between the indigenous and non-indigenous in tourism production and consumption in northern areas, however, is not only cultural or symbolic and expressed through the notion of authenticity; it is also perceived as physical and geographical. The northern areas where the indigenous tourism takes place are conceptualized as ‘distant’ in the sense of ‘peripheral’, ‘remote’, ‘rural’, and ‘far away’ from the places, cultures, practices, and people in the descriptive (urban) centres (cf. Keskitalo, 2004). This otherness is a basic premise forming tourism discourse, implying a constant search for the unknown, unexpected and undiscovered, but also the ‘true’ and ‘pure’. Thus, the delineation and definition of indigenous versus non-indigenous tourism activities could be regarded as exerting control and power over claims to the recognition of indigenous rights, activities and associated income, as well as to authenticity in relation to an area (Bresner, 2010).

Indigeneity, thus, cannot be seen as a given in tourism processes but must rather be seen as constructed through numerous means, and for numerous purposes, whereby it becomes important to uphold a dividing line. Thus, indigeneity in tourism must be seen as a co-construction occurring in relations between numerous tourism actors including or not including indigenous groups in different delineations, and also including a perceived tourist and the assumptions this tourist is assumed to hold in relation to what are developed and expressed as ‘authentic’ features (cf. Chhabra et al., 2003).

Given such a focus on understanding how conceptions of indigeneity in tourism are constructed, particularly relevant examples would include labelling or other processes that serve to classify a tourism experience or artefact as indigenous. Examples demonstrating such processes may, in order to differentiate them from processes relating and carrying connotations of nature (which may be subject to their own types of discourses) target cultural artefacts or ways in which culture or even a claim to an area and authenticity related to them are made objectified and made possible to sell as a specific object. Perhaps the clearest example of this may be handicrafts or souvenirs. Nevertheless, to date, most tourism research has focused on how tourists – the demand side – construct souvenirs, while much less focus has been on the construction of souvenirs/handicrafts from the side of those developing them, and particularly with the inclusion of multiple ethnic groups (for an exception see Schilar & Keskitalo, 2018). Handicrafts or souvenirs may thus, despite these particular interests, constitute a particularly under-researched focus whereby the construction of these processes and a relation to perceived authenticity can be viewed.

It has been previously noted that the labelling of handicrafts and souvenirs can be one such form of distinguishing between the ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’. In labelling souvenirs/handicrafts, it has been noted that authenticity is constructed for the consumer through English phrases such as ‘handmade in’, ‘authentic’, ‘local’, or ‘indigenous craft’. This ‘authenticity’ allows the product to become mobile across scales, serving as a reminder of other people, times, and places (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2011). Authenticity is furthermore said to be associated with the notion of past times and places (Graburn, 1976; MacCannell, 1973), where ‘goods are made by the members of a society, using materials produced by that society, made for the people of that society and used by them’ (Bunn, 2000). Geographical references are also sometimes used, such as ‘Arctic’ or ‘Lapland’, constructing a link to place (Swanson & Timothy, 2012).
Distinctions can be made here between, for instance, handicrafts that are seen as being more related to traditional methods and symbol use on the one hand and souvenirs on the other, which can also encompass other production methods and a greater variety of producers. However, objects developed as handicraft may also have their major market as souvenirs, in the meaning of mementos used by tourists to objectify a location. In this, however, souvenirs/handicrafts are thus subject to the same types of processes as discussed above: they may be linked to a specific group identity, which then becomes both politically and economically relevant to control in relation to ‘authenticity’ of expression, types of symbols used, and who is able to use them (cf. Castañeda, 2004). Identity thus comes to be linked to a specific ‘past’ or historical usage or tradition, and manufactured in objects through political processes.

Case study and method: the case of labelling processes in handicrafts

To review the processes of constructing ethnicity in tourism in relation to handicrafts, this study draws on a number of studies from different locations in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and northwest Russia. These are areas where reindeer husbandry, commonly seen as an indigenous activity, is practiced, and they also share the common feature of being seen as northern or sometimes ‘Arctic’. The areas thereby come to be linked to connotations of ‘remoteness’ and ‘northernness’ (which themselves obscure largely varying conditions).

Northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland are often seen as part of Sapmi, the Sami homeland, but are extremely diverse: the various groups there include national Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian populations and recently immigrated people, as well as smaller minorities of Kven, Torne Valley Finns, and the only acknowledged indigenous group, the Saami (with no ethnic registry but assessed to amount to some 100,000 persons, albeit with a large amount of mixing with other ethnic backgrounds). Groups are relatively well-integrated and largely have similar living and working conditions. However, in Sweden the Saami group is the only one (with the exception of certain areas) with the right to conduct reindeer husbandry, whilst in Finland this is a right of the entire population. Historical and cultural symbols related to nature and sometimes reindeer are often used in handicrafts by a wide variety of crafters, but also with Saami handicraft possible to distinguish by the Doudji brand, seen as ‘the buyer’s guarantee against imitations … [and] given to Saami crafters and artists with genuine knowledge of Saami handicrafts and arts’ [Translated from the Swedish, Sameslöjdstiftelsen, no year, www.sameslojdstiftelsen.com].

Similar to the Saami through their traditional focus on reindeer husbandry, and mainly living in the European part of northwest Russia, are the nomadic Nenets, spread across several regions: the Arkhangelsk oblast, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO), and the Komi Republic. Nenets comprise about 17 per cent of the total number of inhabitants (about 7500 in 2010) in the NAO, and there are a total of 44,000 Nenets in Russia. The beginning of the 2000s saw increased attention to the rejuvenation of the tourist space in northwest Russia in general, but particularly in the NAO where regional authorities and private entrepreneurs took a leading role in the development and in highlighting the preservation of the Nenets language as well as cultural traditions in all forms, both material (handicrafts) and immaterial (dance, theatre, etc.).

Studies have been designed to take into account handicrafts and tourism issues in these diverse regions. One comparative multi-case study was undertaken in locations that are regional and touristic centres with multiple handicraft shops (Jokkmokk and Kiruna in Sweden, Karasjok and Kautokeino in Norway, and Rovaniemi in Finland), with a focus on the large popular tourist-oriented handicraft/souvenir shops (see Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2011). The sample of interviewees included a range from those who both craft and sell their products on the one hand to those who buy products from other sources and then sell on the other, and with a large range of self-identified identities/ethnicities (as expressed in the empirical material, no pre-selection was made based on ethnicity). The interview guide and subsequent coding and analysis focused on the meaning and construction of handicrafts, with discussions on the construction of ethnicity in relation to labels introduced naturally as people
pointed out products with different origins, including under labelling frameworks. A total of 35 people (27 female, 8 male), in 32 interviews (as a second person joined the interview on three occasions), were included in the study. Interviews were undertaken in 2015–2016 mainly on location in the shops (in a back room or similar), were fully transcribed and coded, and were analyzed in relation to themes in the interview guide as well as those that emerged inductively. In addition, observations were used to, amongst other things, describe the typical handicrafts displayed in stores (as further described in Schilar & Keskitalo, 2018).

This case study was supplemented by a study of the Visit Sapmi initiative, which aimed to brand and promote Sami tourism experiences and create a system of labelling for tourism products.1 The material used for analysis, collected from online sources, is comprised of strategy and vision documents for the initiative as well as websites to inform and market the products and businesses connected to the network at the time of the study (2015–2016). The material also consists of Facebook posts, both texts and images, posted on the Visit Sapmi Facebook page up to 2017. The analysis was based on a content analysis framework whereby themes and sub-themes were detected and scrutinized, followed by a semiotic analysis (Metro-Roland, 2009) of selected images and texts, aiming at deconstructing and analysing the documents by relating the production of meaning to theoretical frameworks of the connection between nature, culture, and indigeneity (Keskitalo & Schilar, 2017).

The analysis of the case from the NAO was based on a series of fieldwork trips during the period 2011–2016. During this period, several trips to different parts of the NAO were conducted, covering northern, northeastern, and central parts of the region predominated by reindeer herding activities run by Nenets. These fieldwork studies allowed for participation in tourism activities and the collection of more than 50 semi-structured interviews with various non-indigenous stakeholders as well as Nenets community representatives connected to the process of tourism development in general in the NAO territory. The interviews with these stakeholders lasted 40–60 min, were held in Russian, and were transcribed into English and thematically coded.

Results

Creating a Saami handicraft

Studies show that locally, the question of what constitutes an ‘authentic’ Saami handicraft is highly contested and intertwined with tourism practices, particularly souvenir purchase. The interview studies in northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland illustrated diverse practices and opinions regarding how to treat Saami symbols. In a market context, the ‘Saami’ signifiers that are most commonly used are the characteristic colours (a vivid blue, red, yellow, etc., and their particular combination) and the symbols taken from the Saami shaman drum (Hunter, Sun, Wolf, etc.). These types of signifiers can be found in typical souvenired, mass-produced items (keyrings, cups, postcards, t-shirts), and have also been introduced in crafting work. More traditional items developed include knives and wooden cups, sometimes including horn features and sometimes applying engraved symbols.

‘Saami’ has thereby often been seen as representing an exotic, attractive signifier to tourists. This has led to a dynamic whereby today there is a wide range of products using ‘Saami’ symbolism in different price categories: ranging from objects handmade locally by people identifying as Saami, to products made by people other than self-identified Saami (often in relation to mixed or more area-based or local traditions), to objects mass-produced in China.

In this regard, one position advocated by some interviewees was that what is regarded as Saami should be solely up to the Saami people and follow what is understood as ‘traditions’. For instance, one woman noted that:

‘I am traditional, rooted in Saami culture and I know the history; that is why I can make changes to it. Somebody who does not know the history cannot [do this], right? To be able to experiment, you need a solid background. (…) I know the traditions, but it is not my duty to preserve them’. (Interviewee [authors’ translation])
According to this perspective, it was seen as natural that people without Saami family relations cannot participate in Saami heritage or produce something genuinely or authentically Saami. This perspective can be seen to be mirrored in the establishment of the ‘Saami Duodji’ label in order to protect and distinguish ‘genuine’ handicrafts. This label is under the administration of the Saami cultural associations throughout the area, but is perhaps most commonly used in Sweden. In order to use the label, crafters must apply for permission. Whether they receive the right to use it is said to depend on:

Education, Saami background, traditional knowledge and skill. The label is for the customer and stands for quality and authenticity. There is a long list of points to fulfil. Souvenirs cannot be recognized. (Interviewee Saami cultural association, 2016 [authors’ translation])

It is notable that this quote singles out souvenirs as a clear contrast and boundary to genuine Saami handicrafts. The interviewee goes on to explain that Duodji are associated with having a use value, must be made of traditional materials, and cannot develop into something that has merely a symbolic value or is too far from its ‘original’. The notion of Saami culture as a ‘living culture’ is interesting in this interview as well, since the Saami Duodji associations, for instance, clearly define how traditional an artefact must be, and the degree to which modern forms or materials can be incorporated in it.

In this relation, the ‘Saami Duodji’ label and its associated assumptions, voiced by some interviewees, protect not only against imitation but also against abrupt, substantial change. A crafter who self-identifies and is acknowledged as Saami but makes something different could still be considered a Saami artist, but not receive the label. This has a number of different results. Some interviewees suggest that the unwillingness of Saami handicap culture to provide tourists with cheaper, smaller and catchier products that can serve as souvenirs is actually promoting the engagement of people who are acknowledged by this group as non-Saami with Saami symbols, and even stimulating the import of mass-produced items with Saami symbols from international markets to respond to tourists’ demands.

In contrast to the above perspective focused on the purity of Saami symbols and who can produce them, the interviews also illustrated many shades of depth in the engagement with symbols acknowledged as Saami, and just as numerous opinions on these developments. Those who self-recognize as Saami may describe the developments in terms of cultural appropriation (Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016), while a broad array of users of these symbols even beyond such communities may claim to treat them with due knowledge and respect. For instance, to compare with the previous interviewee statement on traditions, another interviewee noted that s/he wanted to work with souvenirs and handicraft that were ‘local, or if not local it should be from Lapland, and if not Lapland then from Finland’. Other interviewees similarly questioned whether an ‘authentic’ handicraft must be Saami, and whether for instance a knife instead be a genuine handicraft no matter what group it is attributed to, as this type of artefact is important to groups in the area in general rather than connected to ethnicity.

Hence, there is an unclear boundary regarding whether or not symbols that are acknowledged as being related to Saami culture can be partly understood as shared heritage among the multitudes of ‘northern’ people. The interviewees included persons such as a glass blower partly inspired by Saami colours, silversmiths using the symbols of the drum for their jewellery, and a knife maker who at times uses the symbols as engravings. One interesting case in the material involved (self-identified non-Saami) silversmiths. In this example, the use of acknowledged Saami symbols was not seen in terms of cultural appropriation but rather as a historically developed practice, amongst both these and other interviewees. For instance, two interviewees noted:

It’s always been like that, that Saami get their jewellery from Finnish silversmiths; today I just know one Saami silversmith in all Lapland, in Inari. (Silversmith, 2015 [authors’ translation])

We haven’t worked with silver ourselves, but we’ve been good traders, and silver was a good way of trading. Silver, for us, symbolized both protection and investment. We used to get the silver from Swedish silversmiths at the coast. (Interviewee Saami cultural association, 2016 [authors’ translation])
The discursive orientation towards the past in these quotes (‘always been like that’, ‘used to get’) illustrates how these skills’ engagement with Saami symbols is normalized as ‘historic’ in these cases. Hence, what is seen as ‘genuinely Saami’ and who is allowed to use Saami symbols may be very time-oriented issues, and may illustrate a fixed and historical notion of what is regarded as traditional and what are regarded as legitimate claims.

Another example that stood out was a case of a self-identified ‘non-Saami’ woman making traditional Saami drums, i.e. a type of item with not only cultural but also religious and spiritual connotations. In the interview she explained that she had developed a deep interest in Saami culture, had read and studied for years, and had increasingly incorporated more Saami elements into her artwork. When she initially began making Saami drums, she encountered what she described as ‘rejection’ and ‘gossip’ from local self-acknowledged Saami:

I respect drums very very much. A few years ago, there was a Saami conference here and they said that only Saami people could make the drums. They ask me if I think I make Saami drums in ‘the right way’. (Interviewee, 2015 [authors’ translation])

She later talked to different people and explained why she was doing what and with which understandings, both theoretical and spiritual. According to her, she later came to be more accepted in the community, and today there are people in the Saami community who use her drums or come to her for other crafts. This case may illustrate that while these types of expression are sometimes related to discourses on cultural appropriation, in singular cases at the local level the categories can evolve into more inclusive understandings based on dialogue and respect for the traditional symbol.

Other examples in the interviews also included a woman arguing for her right to be acknowledged as a local and traditional maker without relating her products to a Saami identity. Instead, she argued, historical local tools such as the knife or drinking cup should be acknowledged as equally traditional regardless of whom the maker is, as they represent a broader tradition amongst people in the region and are not necessarily bound by ethnicity or borders in what has historically been an area with a large degree of migration between what are today three separate countries. Or, as another interviewee noted:

I think we need to get closer and closer together, both Saami crafters and Swedish crafters, because we have a shared aim and passion. (Interviewee [authors’ translation])

These examples illustrate that the prevailing discourse around handicrafts and Duodji is indeed one of a categorization into Saami/non-Saami, but also that there are connecting features even if labelling might itself promote separation.

While numerous other ethnicities and identities exist in the area, it can be seen as significant that a main delineation to Saami prevailed throughout, as one that interviewees either agreed with or contradicted, but generally felt they needed to relate to. The tourist’s hunt for a Saami souvenir and the categorization of Saami/non-Saami handicrafts may thus largely obscure that there is not a single Saami culture but rather diverse local variation, for instance in the different patterns used by Saami people from different areas, and in a widely varying basis of conceptions of artefacts and their cultural underpinnings (such as knives or cups).

Thus, to provide an understanding of their context or the wider region and the objects they produced or sold, many interviewees also emphasized the role of storytelling or educating the consumer: to construct or place the artefact in a context. The constructivist nature of tourism was thus explicitly acknowledged by many interviewees, noting that the value of the tourism object had to be signalled or told in some way (itself a basis for labelling systems as an attempt to control such expression and value).

Another parallel example of labelling a tourism experience – and illustrating a potentially broader applicability of these types of varying discourses than in handicrafts alone – can be taken from the label ‘Sapmi Experience’ and the self-descriptions on the promotional label website and in associated documents. Compared with the case above, this label most clearly identifies with an understanding
of Saami as pure and authentic. The label was developed within a project run by a network of self-acknowledged Saami tourism operators, Visit Sapmi, to distinguish tourism products providing ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ Saami tourism experiences offered by local Saami hosts. The label was designed to be granted to companies that offer products and services in line with the ethical standards and basic values defined by the Visit Sapmi organization:

Our ambition is to join forces with Saami in Norway, Finland and Russia to create a common organization. We also seek cooperation with other indigenous tourism organizations in the World. Therefore we took part in creating the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA). (www.visitsapmi.org)

In the texts and images on the Visit Sapmi website, Saami culture was largely constructed in relation to closeness to and knowledge about nature, for instance emblematised in the slogan on its front page: ‘Where nature and culture is one’ (eng.visitsapmi.org). The connection between nature and the mountain landscape of northern Fennoscandia was used frequently in posts on social media, through photographs showing vast, open spaces and outdoor living highlighted in the narratives presented in the strategy documents and online website material.

Furthermore, a key idea of the organization was related to the agency of Saami over tourism products and activities: in addition to being assessed as ‘genuine’ and in line with Saami heritage, they also needed to be controlled by Saami entrepreneurs (www.visitsapmi.org). The Visit Sapmi guiding principles expressed the importance of Saami power and ownership over the narrative of Saami culture and how it should be represented to the world:

The Sami tourism entrepreneurs themselves choose what they wear and what tools they use. Dressing people up for marketing purposes and creating fake Sami experiences may be misleading to the international target groups as well as to the Sami themselves. [Translated from the Swedish, www.visitsapmi.org/värdegrundsdokument]

Hence, Visit Sapmi communicated that tourism businesses should be in charge of their products and the ways in which they communicate the Saami culture and heritage. Apart from the guiding principles, a particular certification label was awarded to businesses entering the network and running their tourism operations according to the label’s criteria.2

The framework of labelling through the Visit Sapmi network generated discussion about where to draw the line between different businesses and tourism activities. One entrepreneur describes the network and marketing platform as an initiative that protects the Saami culture and practices from exploitation by ‘non-Saami’ entrepreneurs wanting to capitalize on Saami traditions and livelihoods through tourism products sold and marketed as Saami experiences (Entrepreneur, interview). However, according to the interviewee, this viewpoint was not shared by all the actors in the network. For various reasons, including the fact that the various actors were not able to fully agree on the criteria and the organization of the network, the Visit Sapmi framework was recently reshaped and no longer runs a marketing website, instead mainly operating via the Slow Food Sapmi network and social media.

Nenets handicrafts and ‘true indigeneity’

The Nenets case differs from that of northern Norway, Sweden and Finland, in that there are no acknowledged labelling processes for indigenous experiences or handicrafts/souvenirs adopted to date. The area has also been seen as a relatively sparsely developed tourism area compared with Nordic and international examples, for instance, and can thereby provide a contrasting case illustrating the role of producer and market networks in tourism and souvenir development. Recent years, nevertheless, have seen a rising awareness in the public debate concerning these issues in the NAO (see for example Pashkevich, 2013, 2017).

In the NAO case, the interview studies illustrated that given the relatively sparsely developed market for souvenirs, a specialized knowledge of both makers and products was needed, and handicrafts of this type mainly became accessible to those who were aware of and sought out these
products. What served as a marker of ‘authenticity’ and good quality in this case was word of mouth, focused on acknowledged Nenets women from remote settlements who specialize in handicraft production (as it is women who are traditionally engaged in the making of handicrafts). Given their handicraft nature, these pieces were also regularly on the more expensive side compared with what would have been paid for more ‘souvenir’-like products.

Nenets women (in particular) with traditional handicraft skills and knowledge of traditional symbols were thereby able to engage in informal exchange with the results of their own individual production, in order to generate additional income. As the processes of differentiation and delineation are thereby drawn on the individual level, their linkage only to ethnicity was thereby also not emphasized per se: it is not a given that the maker is indigenous (but could instead be in-married); rather, what is seen as the desired feature is the skill and the use of specific symbols. The possibility to make a living from these practices was also regularly limited. Several indigenous and non-indigenous entrepreneurs mentioned that in comparison to the Nordic countries, especially Finland, which was often looked upon as an example of ‘best practice’ in promoting handicraft, local makers had so far not been able to develop their craft into a basis for fulltime self-employment.

Thus, the geography of the origin of the handicraft pieces and their high price have been decisive for the appreciation of handicraft. However, this does not mean that crafters have not seen competition with international products. The system of governmental support in the Russian Arctic has resulted in the support of initiatives assisting, on the one hand, the development of exclusive handicrafts by renowned artists from the NAO. At the same time, this support disrupts the possibility of the market forces to dictate the rules of the demand from occasional visitors to the region in order to decide what types of souvenirs they would like to take home with them. According to interviews with several tourism entrepreneurs from the NAO, the tourist’s choice more often falls to reindeer meat products, or refrigerator magnets which could have been mass-produced anywhere in the world. A discussion of the producer-driven processes in northernmost Norway, Sweden, and Finland that both produce and are able to offer a great variety of handicraft/souvenirs, as well as the networks to ‘story’ or construct them, may thus not yet have developed. Another aspect hidden in these stories that there is still an assumption that the indigenous products are not assigned a value as art objects and that the mass production of simple souvenirs is preferred. The consumer demand has thereby been seen more as targeted towards culturally appropriate objects that are not costly to purchase and are easy to relate to.

An example of these processes is the knee-high winter boots *pimy*, made of reindeer hide and traditionally one of the most popular items, often seen on the streets across Russian Arctic settlements. These boots vary in quality depending on the type of crafting method: more exclusive types (often skilfully decorated) could only be purchased via private networks with acknowledged makers. Mass production of the boots took place during the Soviet era but was not entirely successful, as the boots were made using industrial sewing machines rather than being individually ordered and made for customers. To revitalize traditional local knowledge and broaden the markets for handicrafts from the NAO several initiatives were supported by the central Russian government, but also through EU-regional cooperation programmes, at the beginning of the 2000s (Development programmes and institutional setting for tourism development, see Pashkevich, 2017). However, at the same time, mass-produced Chinese copies began selling at much lower prices, resulting in a lowering of the quality standards of the product. This also affected consumer behaviour and was seen in an unwillingness to buy more expensive original pieces by an acknowledged maker. One of the experts from the ethnographic-cultural centre in Nenets Okrug recalls, from a visit to the largest exhibition of indigenous handicrafts:

> I was very curious and went around the exhibition to find our Nenets shoes. When I finally found them, I’d say that we [in the NAO] would never wear them, but would just throw them away due to their bad quality. (Interview with expert ethnographic-cultural centre NAO, 2015 [authors’ translation])
This case thus highlights some of the problems that have existed in transferring a known and established product to a new, market-developed context. While it does not per se illustrate potential local conflicts around marketing, it instead illustrates the difficulties involved with translating indigenous and local products for a larger Russian context, resulting in what was seen as a discrepancy between local products available only through networks and material constructed for a more remote, urban tourist.

Also since the early 2000s, in order to provide income to local Nenets women and teach schoolchildren local traditions, efforts were made by the municipal governments of the smaller NAO settlements to revive local handicrafts. One of these is the making of Nenets dolls, nykhyko or the shorter yko, today sold in craft shops in the region’s capital Naryan-Mar. This doll, traditionally made by Nenets girls, has a body made from a decorated piece of textile and a head made from a duck beak (to represent a female) or a goose beak (to represent a male). These dolls were used as a child deity; both geese and ducks were also part of the Nenets diet, and could thus easily be used as raw material for doll-making (Zabolotzhkich, 2014). Thus, the yko doll can thus be seen as a representation of the traditional way of life and traditional beliefs, as well as a connection to the natural environment of the region. However, despite the fact that the doll is produced in relation to traditional heritage and can be seen as ‘authentic’ and thus relevant to tourism, when it was made available for purchase in a tourism context it sometimes instead evoked uneasy feelings. The doll was instead seen as ‘creepy’ as it used actual animal parts, something that led one interviewed tourist to consider it ‘too indigenous’ (interview with business tourist from Moscow, 2015).

In itself, this example may illustrate the way tourism objects need to be packaged or even storied so as to become desirable to the tourist: ‘authenticity’, in terms of actual linkage to historical artefacts and types of artefacts, may not be sufficient.

Perhaps speaking to such a context of the need to create a souvenir product that would be palatable to the intended type of tourist and market, in 2013 a soft toy reindeer calf called Avka was designed in order to represent the indigenous traditions of the NAO to tourists. The idea was developed by one of the very few self-acknowledged indigenous artists Tamara Ledkova, who created four prototypes using the skins of newborn reindeer (Ludvig, 2013; Zabolotzhkich, 2014). The process of making such a handcrafted toy is extremely time-consuming and requires skilled labour, which is reflected in the high price of the final product; the Nenets artist’s idea was to use the skins of newborn reindeer for the toy in order to make it a high-end market product (Ludvig, 2013). However, in this case, as with the traditional shoes, the destination developers from the region wanted to have a cheaper version of Avka as tourists were assumed to not be prepared to pay for a higher-quality product. In this case, aiming to cater to an assumed tourist preference was thereby not sufficient for making this type of recently developed tourism artefact into something sufficiently desirable to motivate its price.

Thus, when contrasting the cases from the NAO above with the examples from Fennoscandia, it can be noted that the struggle in the cases of northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland concerned the power over making a ‘legitimate’ and valued souvenir; that is, the power to determine ‘authenticity’ and whether or not it should be ethnically linked. At present, the concern in the NAO case may instead relate to how existing handicrafts/souvenirs should be produced to also introduce well-known makers as well as a variety of products to a broader audience, and to make them packaged and ‘storied’/constructed for such an audience. Tourism so far, compared to the Nordic cases, is sparsely developed and has not been able to provide significant economic input, which also makes it less contested with regard to access to a market. While the struggle in the Fennoscandian case concerned representation, value and power, as well as the ethnicity of the souvenir, in the Russian case it could be said that the existing handicrafts were in fact ‘too authentic’ and thus too expensive to speak to the market; they had not yet been packaged for tourism consumption or gained the market recognition as ‘high-end’ products that may provoke further contest over authenticity claims.

So far, this topic of developing Nenets tourism products has attracted relatively limited attention in both research and practice. Locally, the primary focus in main and more highlighted traditional
occupations such as reindeer husbandry is on increasing direct revenue connected to meat and meat products, and considerations regarding handicraft or souvenirs have thereby played a more marginal role.

Discussion and conclusions

These studies in northern Fennoscandia and northwest Russia, reviewing examples of use and contestations of use and interpretation related to the Saami and Nenets cultures, illustrate examples of how indigeneity is constructed in a tourism context. The aspects of this process that are highlighted in the examples are connected to the construction of indigeneity as exotic, authentic, natural, etc. in tourism representations; local negotiations of indigenous/non-indigenous categories of representation; and even cases in which representations are seen as ‘too indigenous’ for tourism, in that they are insufficiently re-oriented towards a tourist market with experiences other than those relevant to the heritage of the artefact. Thus, despite relatively great differences between the Fennoscandian and Russian cases, tourism representational processes were based on broadly similar categorizations of what was valued in handicraft and in constructing an ‘indigeneity’ related to nature or tradition, with variations but also contestations regarding any boundaries between groups of makers. The examples thereby illustrate not only how labels and products can be used to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic as well as indigenous and non-indigenous, but also how fluid these boundaries can be locally, and that any use of simplified clear-cut categorizations can be problematic and locally contested. However, they also illustrate the crucial role of the way the market is constructed and even managed to provide purchase and role for souvenirs, and thereby the roles of the tourist and also marketing in souvenir construction.

Thus, cases reveal local negotiations of indigenous/non-indigenous categories of representation, as well as a paradoxical situation whereby certain products meant to represent a connection to the indigenous and created for tourists can come to be considered ‘too indigenous’ for tourism. The use of labels supports the categorization of a division between indigenous and non-indigenous, but at the same time illustrates local contestations and possible re-negotiations of these categories. The actual indigenous or local can sometimes be unsuited, uncomfortable, or unfit for broader tourism markets with different experiences or assumptions (for instance, concerning the use of animal products), and in this sense is not in line with market demands. Cases thus illustrate the clash of seeing cultural products both as important markers of identity for indigenous and non-indigenous actors, as well as in relation to commercial opportunity, with the diverse issues this double situation brings about (Bunn, 2000).

An example here is that the paradox of stating that there is a ‘real’ Sapmi experience and that some tourism experiences are more authentic than others – while simultaneously disputing and trying to resist the touristic objectification of the Saami culture – mirrors theories on authenticity and tourism (Bresner, 2010; MacCannell, 1976/1989). For instance, the example of Visit Sapmi illustrates that the question of what the indigenous represents within tourism and how the indigenous experience should be packaged and sold is a matter of distinguishing the ‘real’ indigenous from groups that are sometimes related and intermixed, with similar or blended historical heritages (cf. Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Taylor, 2001; Theodosopoulos, 2013). The label and the guiding principles of this organization defined the ways in which Saami culture and heritage should be represented as well as how they should not be represented, thereby making Saami experiences an exclusive category. Hence, defining features of the ‘authentic’ Saami experience, in relation to the natural, traditional and locally owned, is also a way of exerting power and excluding unwanted representations and entrepreneurs (e.g. Heldt Cassel & Maureira, 2015). Power is exerted by both ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’ actors, contesting or enforcing as well as narrating labels and handicraft artefacts.

Here, the case of Nenets handicraft is quite different from Saami tourism development, in that any internal market for high-end products connected to the Nenets handicraft where these types of symbols would be contested in a market framework is yet to be established. Instead, illustrating
the role of the (assumed) tourist and market construction for creating a ‘souvenir’, the study illustrated that important artefacts within Nenets handicraft are not always accepted by the intended end users. The creation of a market for exclusive indigenous art pieces – in a region where tourism has been developed for a shorter period than in northern Fennoscandia – is constantly challenged by mass production, and also exhibits less of a focus on story-building and the education of customers than in the Fennoscandian case. However, through this less framed and contested development so far, the experienced and acknowledged maker and her experience and skill seem to be what is valued, more than the ethnic label that is (or is not) attached to the maker. This may illustrate the empowering processes that are necessarily associated with creating value, and how it has not been necessary to enforce such a differentiation in the Russian case – potentially, as there is less of a need to distinguish what is seen as traditional value to indigenous populations only (cf. Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2011). Another explanation could be the differences regarding the functioning of the economy and the level of introduction of strict market principles, whereby the construction of values through commodification and sensitivity to market demands may have somewhat different meanings in the two contexts (cf. Castañeda, 2004).

Here, of course, we must then reconnect to the fact that both Fennoscandia and Russia are examples where the construction of these processes, and the delineations within them, differ from those in Anglo areas particularly. Both Fennoscandia and Russia are part of ‘Old World’ Europe: interactions between multiple groups existed in these areas before the process of modern European colonialism in other parts of the world created sharp distinctions between ‘indigenous’ and ‘Other’ populations (Keskitalo, 2004). Processes that divided ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’ into two imagined groupings (a modern-traditional, culture-nature counterpair that has been criticized in a great deal of literature on modernism, cf. Latour, 1993) may thus not have been as pronounced in these areas as in later settled areas (Dirlik, 2002). Nevertheless, they have become crucial in differentiating groups from each other in relation to an international tourism context, as this itself has developed in relation to assumptions on ‘authenticity’ and what is modern or exotic (e.g. MacCannell, 1976/1989).

The fact that applying clear-cut or unified identities in this area is thus sometimes uneasy, not least in relation to tourism, has been emphasized in a large array of literature. For instance, Tuulentie notes that negotiations of identity are ‘done not only in relation to the group of their own but also in relation to the outsider opinions’ (2006, p. 35), as seen here in relation to labelling systems, for instance. Similarly, Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2011, p. 323) also note the ‘delicate balancing act that takes place in … practices [for labelling souvenirs] between authenticity and mobility’.

In this study, these understandings in the Fennoscandian case are supplemented with examples in the Russian case. Taken together, the cases strongly demonstrate the role of explicit construction, storying, and other systems to create, explain and thereby also develop value for specific items with an intended purchaser group. In the case in which such a value is established and the systems for supporting it exist, a struggle is also visible over the ownership of and access to such systems, and the role of ethnicity in them. To this extent, it might be noted that tourism and souvenir construction in relation to internationally established indigenous/non-indigenous distinctions and an international tourism market do not necessarily capture the many variations reflecting the multiple and blended situations in northern Europe, but may instead reinforce distinctions between groups: they form, and not only reflect, reality.

Notes

1. Visit Sapmi is a tourism organization created by the Swedish Reindeer Herders Association (www.sapmi.se) that operates together with the Gaaltije Information Centre for South Sápmi (www.gaaltije.se/).
2. According to information on the website, the criteria are divided into ethical, service, and sustainability criteria, developed according to the same principles as for the Swedish label for eco-tourism, ‘Nature’s best’, together with principles of the programme Eallinbiras, developed by the Saami parliament, which is a ‘sustainability and environmental programme with a holistic approach in tune with Saami philosophy and traditions’ (www.visitsapmi.org/criteria).
Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding
This work was supported by Svenska Forskningsrådet Formas.

ORCID
Susanna Heldt Cassel  http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4919-4462

References


