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The activism of having fun:
Young Sámi in urban areas of Norway and Sweden

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Abstract:

This chapter explores how having fun can be seen as an important part of urban Sámi activism and resistance. Sámi youth today have grown up in a time when they have had the possibility of taking their rights to language and culture for granted to a greater extent than generations before. Studying fun as a part of Sámi resistance can thus give us new insight into how young Sámi negotiate ways of interacting with each other and claiming Sámi space in a society dominated by non-Sámi lifestyles. At the same time, having fun can also be seen as a way of resisting the dominating discourses of the earlier generations of Sámi activists and finding ways of gathering young Sámi that give them the opportunity to define for themselves how they want to be Sámi in new ways that fit with an urban lifestyle.

The activism of having fun Young Sámi in urban areas of Norway and Sweden

Astri Dankertsen

Introduction

This chapter explores the act of having fun as a part of Sámi activism and resistance in urban areas of Norway and Sweden. Drawing on the work of Eve Tuck (2009) and desire-based research, I argue that there is a need for research about the positive forces in Sámi society. Studying fun as a part of Sámi resistance can give us new insights into how young Sámi negotiate ways of interacting and claiming Sámi space in a society dominated by non-Sámi lifestyles. They are finding ways of gathering young Sámi that give them the opportunity to define for themselves how they want to be Sámi. Sámi young people having fun can therefore also be a way of resisting the settler-colonial elimination (cf. Wolfe 2006) of Sámi communities.

This chapter is based on qualitative data from the project ‘An Urban Future for Sápmi? The Influence of Sámi Youth Organising and Political Networking on the Sámi Policies of Nordic Cities (NUORGÁV),’² with data from cities in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Several of the researchers on the project, including me, are Sámi themselves and actively engaged in different Sámi organizations. We conducted semi-structured interviews with young Sámi, representatives from Sámi youth organizations, representatives from other Sámi organizations and institutions, politicians and representatives from the municipalities. In this chapter, I have chosen to base my text on the data from Norway and Sweden, where we conducted 73 interviews, including interviews with 25 young people.

Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen and Monica Rudberg (2007) argue that having fun has been the central element of youth cultures of the 20th and 21st centuries, when rising standards of living have given increasing numbers of young people the opportunity to engage in more than the thrift and toil of their parents’ lives. The growing importance of education, in addition to young people marrying and having children later in life, also contribute to a lifestyle in which young people can focus on having fun (Nielsen and Rudberg 2007, 101). This is also true of Sámi society. One can therefore analyze young Sámi having fun as a form of activism in their everyday lives and a way of claiming space within the space of youth culture in general. These young people are now visible in spaces where Sámi culture used to be more or less invisible.

From the Arctic to Australia, from the Americas to Asia, we also see a demographic shift among Indigenous Peoples towards increased urbanization, with Indigenous People moving to cities that are often culturally and politically

dominated by non-Indigenous groups. The same is happening in Sápmi today ([Pedersen and Nyseth 2015](#); [Dankertsen and Åhrén 2018](#)). However, one can also argue that the Sámi people have been written out of the history of cities, since the Sámi have always been present in cities, especially those that are close to the areas that are now often referred to as ‘the traditional Sámi areas’ (see also Eriksson in this volume).

The urbanization of Sápmi is also of a conceptual character, relating to stereotypes and false notions of authenticity. From the perspective of the historical discipline of Lappology³ studies, the idea of urban Sáminess was an oxymoron, because Sáminess was strongly bound to ideas of northern, peripheral and rural areas, as well as being strongly bound to nature (see also Aikio in this volume). Urban landscapes were seen as unnatural and unsuitable for the Sámi. In addition, urbanization in the north often involved a process by which the Sámi were written out of history in the new northern urban areas. Urban areas such as Umeå, Tromsø and Bodø are all situated in areas where a substantial number of Sámi individuals have always lived and still do so today ([Berg-Nordlie \[forthcoming\]](#)).

Urbanization also involves a change in how Indigenous People mobilize socially, culturally and politically to survive as peoples and how they define what it is to be Indigenous ([Peters and Andersen 2013](#)). Sámi young people today have had the opportunity of taking back and preserving their language and culture. In many areas, previous generations grew up in an environment where expressions of being Sámi were the target of forced assimilation policies imposed by the government ([Minde 2010](#)), stigmatized ([Eidheim 1969](#)) and something of which people were ashamed ([Høgmo 1986](#)).

The need for fun and desire in Indigenous research

The turn to theories on affect and emotions in the social sciences and humanities focuses not only on how people make and shape the world they inhabit but also how they feel it ([Ahmed 2004](#); [Wetherell 2012](#)). Sara [Ahmed \(2004\)](#) shows how affect circulates and ‘sticks’ to certain bodies and how affects circulate culturally, creating differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that are deeply connected to our bodily experiences and interactions with the worlds that we inhabit. She argues that ‘emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments’ ([Ahmed 2004](#), 119). Affect and emotions as objects for social analysis are therefore useful for analyzing power and resistance because they say something about how individuals are connected to communities through bodily and social space.

This chapter can be seen as a critique of the dominance of negativity in theories of affect, including my own work on Sámi melancholia ([Dankertsen 2014](#)). While it is important to acknowledge the ways in which colonization continues

to shape Sámi lives, we as researchers also need to develop perspectives that can help people imagine a future. [Tuck \(2009\)](#) calls for what she defines as desire-based research frameworks. Because Indigenous people have often been described as damaged as a result of the aftereffects of colonization, there is an urgent need for desire-based research because stereotypical images of damaged Indigenous people also shape how they understand themselves (see also Lehtola in this volume). Tuck warns us against fetishizing damage since this may lead to paralysis, ignorance and lack of responsibility. In a similar way, the Sámi scholar Rauna [Kuokkanen \(2000\)](#) points out that there is a tendency in the understanding of traditional knowledge to draw on stereotypical images of Indigenous people as belonging to cultures that were once whole and pure in the past but are now forever damaged by colonization.

In focusing on ‘having fun’ as a mobilizing affect for positive change in Sámi societies, I argue that there is a need to analyze how society can move beyond the stereotypical images of Sámi culture as forever damaged. Through desire-based research, we as researchers can focus on a present that is enriched by both the past and the future as an integrated part of our lives. In this way, we can integrate the dynamic whole into our analysis in a way that grasps both the affective and social complexity of everyday Indigenous lives. This opens up space for new ways of including young people in politics and decision making, through finding common ground related to the joys, pains, dreams and desires of Indigenous youth today ([Gahman et al. 2019](#)). This is therefore a research perspective that aims to look beyond what is broken, conquered and colonized and, instead, to make space for envisioning and mobilizing for a better future. Sámi young people are the actors of our Sámi future. The research that we do today is a practice that shapes and constructs futures. As Annemarie [Mol \(2014\)](#) argues, the mundane practices in which we interact with ontologies and politics play a crucial role in shaping the real, the conditions of possibilities that are available to us, and the political. Through the concept of ‘ontological politics,’ she underlines the active mode, the process of shaping our political realities through open and contested processes. A relevant concept in this context is survivance, often used in critical Native American studies. The Anishinaabe scholar and writer Gerald Vizenor defines survivance as:

an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy. ([Vizenor 1999](#), vii)

In this way, survivance is more than just survival; it is also a way of nourishing Indigenous ways of knowing. We need to celebrate our survivance ([Vizenor 1999](#)) in a way that considers the complexity, contradictions and self-determination of lived Indigenous lives because damage cannot be the only way, or even the main way, in which Indigenous People talk about themselves and are

described in research. This can also be seen as a turn towards Indigenizing research. It is a turn away from colonialism and the harm it has done and towards Indigenous individuals and societies. It is a way of searching for new Indigenous perspectives, foundations and theories, in which Indigenous individuals refuse to remain stuck in the settler-colonialist approach and the position of victimized and damaged cultures. Instead, they take back the life forces and experiences of Indigenous people themselves and put these at the centre of research.

Having fun in everyday life

There is a long political tradition of making everyday life a political arena in Sámi societies. An example of this is the slogan ČSV, a Sámi political slogan that appeared in the autumn of 1970 during the Sámi political event in Máze. The event was linked to the Alta controversy concerning the construction of a hydroelectric power plant on the Alta River in Finnmark in Northern Norway, in the middle of an area with a strong and vital Sámi reindeer-herding district and community. Soon it became a slogan that attracted young Sámi activists, artists and people engaged in Sámi culture as a process of awakening the formation of a visible Sámi identity (see Alakorva in this volume). It soon spread to other Sámi areas ([Kalstad 2013](#)). While the letters ČSV do not stand for anything in themselves, they are common letters in the Sámi language and can stand for a variety of phrases. The most common meaning is Čájet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa! (Show Sámi Spirit).

While this concept is particularly associated with the activists of the 1970s and 80s, we have found in our material that several of the young people refer to it in the interviews, especially on the Norwegian side. While these young people often focus on distancing themselves from previous generations, they are also concerned with how they can continue the work of these earlier generations of Sámi activists. Through both changes in and continuation of the concept of ČSV, they use it as a way of demonstrating Sámi spirit in an urban context in a fun way, including the use of social media.

An example of this mobilizing force of having fun is Marius's experiences while he lived in Trondheim. Marius, a 22-year-old man interviewed in Oslo, has lived in several cities and has a broad network of young Sámi friends and acquaintances. In the interview, he describes the process of developing a Sámi network in Trondheim when he lived there:

I had a network there from before. A Sámi milieu was established. A little bit from before, but it grew bigger when I moved there. Several [Sámi people moved there] . . . at the same time as me. It became a network with some ad hoc meeting places. It became a 'gang,' we had coffee on Saturday afternoons. People were studying different topics [at the university]. I felt that it was very nice to have a Sámi meeting place,

even though we didn't have an organisation. This was the first time I'd experienced having a Sámi meeting place. Or a meeting place where the thing that we had in common was that we were Sámi.(Marius, 22)

This quote illustrates the importance of having a social life in which one can get to know other young Sámi people. Even though, at that time, Marius and his friends did not have an organization, the fact that they could get together and have fun, just hanging out together as Sámi, became a sort of 'activism' of everyday life. He shows how this early, casual, 'having fun' activism in everyday life transformed into a more formalized activism through organizations. Through his network, he gradually became an important person in Noereh.⁴

It was [name] who suggested having the gákti day for the board. She took the initiative to have a gákti day in [her hometown], in 2013 when she was a high-school student. A lot of people participated. Then she came up with the idea that it should be national. And then it became international. The idea sparked an interest among many people. They thought it was cool. A reason to wear the gákti on a normal working day.(Marius 22)

The use of Sámi language and culture in everyday life is also on the agenda of the Sámi youth organizations. In 2014, the Sámi youth organization Noereh took the initiative to instigate a day to celebrate the gákti,⁵ the traditional Sámi clothing. Through the campaign, they encouraged people to wear their gákti or other Sámi clothes in their everyday lives, take pictures and share them on social media with the hashtag #gáktebeaivi. Other versions in other Sámi languages, such as #gápttebiejvve and #gáptanbiejje, and even Norwegian and English – #kofstedag and #gáktiday – were used to signal that this day celebrated the inclusion and tolerance of all Sámi. They called it Intergalactic Gákti Day to really stress the transgressive motivation and potential of the day.

Another aspect of youth activism is its active use of social media as a way of connecting with and engaging young people. This is something that is highly relevant among Young Sámi as well. [Vincent Raynauld et al. \(2018\)](#) show how social media plays a crucial role in the Canada-based Indigenous grassroots movement and their national and international allies in the Indigenous protest movement known as Idle No More (INM). Social media functions as mass information dissemination, opinion sharing and criticism, as well as a way of mobilizing activists both online and offline. It blurs the boundaries between the traditional and the more informal paths of political engagement since social media engagement is also a way of mobilizing and making visible Indigenous cultures.

From its being something that was stigmatized and considered shameful in the past, young people are demonstrating that wearing a gákti on a normal weekday to school, to work, at the shops or anywhere one wants to go can be 'cool.'

While traditionally, the gákti was used both for ceremonial purposes and in everyday life, both the costume and its meaning have been transformed in the 20th and 21st centuries. And from the Sámi movement in the 1970s and onwards, it has transformed into a political symbol as well. An example is the use of the gákti at demonstrations, where activists turn it inside out as a protest ([Magga 2018](#)). This was done, for example, in the demonstrations in Tromsø in 2011, when the city council decided not to become part of the Sámi language preservation area in Norway ([Hætta and Utsi 2011](#)).

In addition to being ‘cool,’ it normalizes the wearing of the gákti and broadens the unwritten rules about where one can wear gákti and in what context, as well as challenging the stereotypical image of the Sámi as only belonging in rural areas and the mountains. The gákti day also includes people who are not members of any Sámi organizations or who live in places where there are not many Sámi people to see in everyday life, through sharing pictures on social media celebrating the everyday wearing of the gákti. The gákti has gone through a transformation, from being practical clothing worn in everyday life to becoming a political statement and back again to something that people wear in their everyday lives ‘to show Sámi spirit’ (see also Magga, S-M. in this volume). This act thus becomes a continuation of both the traditional wearing of the gákti in everyday life and the ČSV-inspired political statement. The campaign therefore connects the past and the present through links to traditional use, Sámi political history and the everyday lives of young Sámi today.

Márjá, a young Sámi woman in Oslo, comes from a Sámi area where the language and traditional knowledge have been severely threatened in the past by forced assimilation and marginalization. For her, living in Oslo is also a way of engaging in Sámi activities, using the language and expressing herself as a Sámi in ways that she did not have the same opportunities to do in her home village: It’s fun. In Oslo you meet new Sámi all the time. I always wear something Sámi like this [shows her shawl] so other Sámi can find me. Some of us wear that when we go out [to bars]. I often see people with Sámi stuff. Then I say hi and join them.(Márjá, 20)

She expresses a lot of joy about taking part in the Sámi activities in Oslo since she can meet young Sámi from different parts of Sápmi. Through retelling the story about her use of Sámi symbols in everyday life, she also articulates the hope, visions and wisdom of a lived Sámi life (cf. [Tuck 2009](#)) in the city, where the use of the Sámi language has transformed from something that is stigmatized to something useful, sociable and fun.

However, Márjá also expresses frustration about the community where she grew up, where a lot of Sámi are still hiding the fact that they are of Sámi heritage. She is therefore enjoying the freedom of being able to express herself in the way she wants to through the Sámi organizations and activities in Oslo. The use of symbols that are often not recognizable as Sámi to many non-Sámi, such as T-

shirts, shawls and jewellery, is a way for her to send signals out in the world to fellow young Sámi who may recognize them and contact her in public. Sámi young people give their Sámi clothing and accessories new functions in the urban and often anonymous environment. Traditional Sámi communities were small; everybody knew everybody else and their ethnicity. In an urban context, it is possible to strategically hide one's ethnicity and, at the same time, to use both the language and the symbols as a 'secret code' to recognize and contact another Sámi. This demonstrates the Sámi cultural flexibility and the capacity to use old objects and symbols in new ways.

The siblings Christina (13) and Robert (16) live in Tromsø. They talk about having fun as a part of their engagement with Sámi culture in their everyday lives. While they said that in their everyday lives, they are mostly occupied with activities that are normal for young people, such as schoolwork and sports, they also expressed a lot of joy about listening to Sámi music:

We often listen to Sámi music in the car. Mari Boine. Sámi Grand Prix. And Sámi rap [laughs]. That's fun! The musicians do a great job!(Christina, 13)

In this quote, we see Christina explaining how the whole family is having fun in the car, listening to Sámi music. The siblings talk about different Sámi pop artists and how they mix traditional elements with pop music elements. Having fun as a part of being Sámi can therefore be a way of articulating Sámi belonging in their everyday lives. We see here how these young people do not articulate being Sámi through negative emotions, such as shame or melancholia, but rather through positive experiences and having fun with their family.

Fun as activism in Sámi organizations

For some young Sámi, being Sámi in an urban area can be quite lonely, especially if they go to school in a place where there are not many young people who are Sámi or who show that they are Sámi. During the project period, however, we found that there were more and more youth activities in the cities. While there might be Sámi organizations and activities, there might not be many arenas that are open and attractive to young people. For Inga, a high school student in Alta, this is an issue that she discusses quite a lot in the interview. She really wants to get to know more Sámi people in the city where she lives. At the same time, she does not know how to start:

Inga (17): Maybe I should start taking part in the Sámi milieus?

Interviewer: How does one do that?

Inga (17): Well, draw a sign and walk around with that, where it says: 'I am Sámi, are you?' I really don't know. We have no arenas to meet each other.

In this quote, Inga illustrates her struggles to find other young Sámi in Alta, when there is no youth organization and no meeting places where young people like her can get to know others. While there are Sámi organizations in Alta, most of the activities are not aimed directly at young people. This is something that is reported by young people in all the cities where we have interviewed people. They want to be engaged but feel that the activities are mostly for older adults or for kids.

In his interview, Marius discusses how they have focused explicitly on this in Noereh:

The biggest activity that we have is the national congress. Here, we always have a part that is a very professional programme about culture and politics, and a cultural part. We think it's important to have a Sámi meeting place. A place where you don't have to be in a minority. A place where you don't have to explain. Just hang out together. There's a survey about this, I don't know who did it. But they discovered that young Sámi who have a social milieu where it's okay to be Sámi have a greater chance of not developing mental problems. We want to strengthen the identities, the language, the Sámi. (Marius, 22)

In this quote, we see how organizations like Noereh explicitly focus on the links between the political, the social and the cultural. They want to be an organization that unites young Sámi and strengthens their identities through providing a safe space to be Sámi. While these youth organizations often involve an element of activism, they also organize activities that are intended to be merely recreational. Some of these activities do not necessarily focus on explicit Sámi expressions but tend to involve activities whose main purpose is to give young Sámi a space where they can meet other young Sámi and have fun, such as playing football (soccer), having pizza nights or throwing informal parties. Often, they recruit people through friends and family. Maria, a 16-year-old Sámi girl living in Stockholm, was asked in the interview why she had chosen to become a member of a Sámi organization:

I just went because my mum said that one must engage. I would have been happy with just being sociable. (Maria, 16)

Maria states that being sociable is the most important reason she joined the organization. However, since her mother has motivated her to become politically interested as well, she is conscious of her responsibility as a young Sámi to be active and engaged. However, there is a blurred line between the social and the political in several of these organizations and events, something that Kristina illustrates:

I've taken part in a demonstration against mining, but I wouldn't call myself politically active. I'm against the brutal attack on Sámi land, but I also attended because I want to hang out with friends. (Kristina, 16)

This quote shows that demonstrations can also be a social arena for getting to know other Sámi young people. However, fun can also be a way of coping with the more difficult sides of being Sámi and finding strength. Kristin, a Sámi student and member of a Sámi youth organization, explains it like this:

It's difficult to run an organisation when you're a student. You become aware of that when you take on the responsibilities. It's easier when there are more people. It's important to have somebody to share the positive experiences with. (Kristin, 20)

Here we can see that positive experiences are a way for Kristin and her fellow Sámi students to cope with the struggles of everyday life as a student. For young students moving to a city, taking part in activities through the Sámi youth or student organizations can be a way of giving each other support. When Kristin talks about how difficult it is to run the Sámi organization, this can be analyzed as a way of expressing the responsibility that she feels she has, not only for the organization itself but also for the Sámi people, through her activism. For her, sharing positive experiences with other Sámi students is a way of coping with the urge that she feels to be more politically active. This is also something that Simon, a young man living in Bodø, stresses in his interview. For him, the social aspect of being in Noereh is his main motivation:

It's fun to be in Noereh and go to Sámi happenings and meetings. I do it mostly for the social [aspect]. I'm not that interested in politics. I like to meet other Sámi. I often travel for a while if there's something happening somewhere. It's worth it if it's a Sámi party. (Simon, 21)

In this quote, we see that Simon is expressing how he enjoys being part of the organization and that his motivation is mostly having fun. For him, meeting other Sámi young people and having fun is the most important part of being a member of Noereh. However, from talking to him in the interviews and observing him at Sámi events all around Sápmi, I argue that his participation can clearly be defined as activism, even though he does not articulate an explicitly political agenda. I have often observed him at events in Sámi clothes, yoiking⁶ and speaking Sámi as a way of claiming Sámi space in public. I ask Simon what he thinks is important for engaging more young people, and he answers:

I think it's easier to attract young people if there are some parties. I think it would be great to have a Sámi house, a meeting place. That would have been great for the whole region. (Simon, 22)

The way in which Simon talks about Sámi organizations, festivals and meetings reveals the potential aspect of having fun as part of recruiting young people into organizations. In the interviews, he mentions a few names of young Sámi politicians and says they show that Sámi politics is important. When they see that other young people are engaged in politics, it is an eye opener for its importance. During the last few years, I have also observed that Simon has clearly moved from attending ‘just for the fun of it’ to explicitly engaging in political activities with a clear political motivation. Through his engagement in organizations, meetings and festivals, he has learned a lot about these organizations and Sámi politics through activities that, while aimed at creating space for fun activities for young Sámi, still have an underlying political motivation. Stina, who lives in Stockholm, says something similar when she talks about the importance of the Sámi association there:

It’s a place where you go to see other Sámi, but it’s not always that one dares to strike up [conversations]. One goes with those Sámi whom one already knows. It’s not easy to create a bigger network here. Even if one knows almost everybody. . . . I often show up to meet other Sámi. That’s what it’s all about. Social togetherness.(Stina 23)

This link between ‘the social,’ ‘having fun’ and activism is not coincidental, but something that several of the youth activists focus on in the interviews. The phrase ‘you don’t have to explain’ is something that we find in several of the interviews, a quote that shows how being Sámi often involves being different and therefore entails explaining to other people who you are, why you do things in certain ways and what Sámi culture is. Daniel talks about his positive memories from when he was a student in Tromsø:

This is why I had such a great time in Tromsø. It was so natural, it was easy to make acquaintances, there was always an event. It was easy to be Sámi in Tromsø. (Daniel, 29)

In this quote, Daniel explains how having fun, or ‘having a great time,’ is linked to the feeling of being at ease with oneself and others. Being a student in Tromsø was great for Daniel because he got to know other young Sámi in a fun and inclusive environment. While most of the young people whom we have interviewed say that they are proud to be Sámi, they also talk about the stress of being a minority and having to cope with the stress of being different. For them, having a place where they can be Sámi without having ‘to explain’ things is something that is important. However, they also want to hang out with other young people and have fun.

Creating space for a new generation of Sámi activists

In the interviews, several of the participants discuss earlier generations of Sámi activists and how they influence their work today. The Alta controversy and all

the activities related to that during the 1970s and 80s are things that several of the participants discuss, among them Káre (about the Alta controversy, see Nykänen in this volume).

I wish that young Sámi today could be even more engaged. I sometimes think that I would have loved to live under the Alta controversy. But it's a little bit the same thing with Kallak.⁷ There's a fighting spirit among young people today too. I know a lot of people who are politically active, both in Kamp Kallak [the activist group], language revitalisation or Norwegian organisations. I have a lot of friends who are members of Nature and Youth [Natur og ungdom – a Norwegian environmental organisation].(Káre, 23)

In this quote, we see that, on one hand, Káre is inspired by the earlier generations of Sámi activists and wishes that young people in Sápmi could be a bit more like them. On the other hand, Káre and many of her friends are, in fact, active in many different issues that are relevant to young Sámi today, but on their own terms. Káre says that most of her friends are members of Noereh. As young people in the city, they want to create something new and find their own ways of articulating Sáminess. Kristina in Stockholm demonstrates something similar in the ways in which she talks about Sámi organizations and their activities. She often travels to attend Sámi events in other places. However, she is not always content with the Sámi events and activities in Stockholm:

I try to attend the Sámi events in the city, but often they have over-18 age restrictions, and that excludes the youngest. For example, concerts. But even when there isn't an over-18 age restriction, one sometimes feels excluded. It could be that they serve alcohol, or that most people are kind of 100 years old. But it's difficult to find activities that are only for young people. . . . I go to most events, even though it feels like it 'grows moss' on the event of the Sámi organisation.(Kristina, 16)

In this quote, we see that Kristina is trying to distance herself from the other people in the Sámi organization in Stockholm. She feels that she is excluded because she is much younger than most of the others who attend these events. This is something that other young people talk about as well – for example, Márjá, who lives in Oslo:

The Sámi House, it doesn't work as a meeting place for young people. There are a lot of old, grumpy people there. If we go there, we end up sitting in the corner, talking with them about all the problems they have at the Sámi House. It's difficult to say. To be honest, if the ambience had been a little bit better. There are a lot of conflicts there. Especially if there are a lot of NSR [Norgga Sámiid Riikkasearvi/Norwegian Sámi Association] and non-NSR people there. If we as young people come,

it's a lot. One has to sit and listen to people saying: 'you, who are young, have to do this and that.' (Márjá, 21)

Both Kristina and Márjá describe a kind of alienation in the ordinary Sámi meeting places because they feel that there are too many 'old' people there. Márjá's quote describes a situation in which she feels that there are a lot of conflicts. The description of the Sámi House in Oslo as a place with 'a lot of old, grumpy people' can be analyzed as a way of distancing herself from the conflicts that arise there, which can be linked to more general disagreements and conflicts within Sámi society in general, due to political divisions, and personal conflicts specific to the Sámi House in Oslo.

While this description might be motivated by a specific discontent with the situation at the Sámi House, it can also be analyzed as a way of making space for youth organizations. Through a process of distancing herself from 'the old, grumpy people' at the Sámi House, Márjá also motivates herself and other young people to engage in the youth organizations and youth activities. In the interview, she continues by explaining that Noereh, the youth organization, has started having gatherings at the Sámi House so that young people can feel at home there, too. In this way, she is continuing the work of the older generation, while at the same time making space for young Sámi to define their own activities and activism.

Anna is active in the Sámi queer movement in Sweden. She talks about the importance of the Queering Sápmi project⁸ and says the project has united Sámi people, enabling them to get in touch and establish networks. The project has also made this issue visible to other Sámi people and reveals a more nuanced picture of Sámi people to outsiders:

At least in Umeå, I think people have an understanding that there is more than one type of Sámi. We're a whole society. . . . A performance that was based on colonialism, heterosexuality and our dreams about something better. The book and performance from the Queering Sápmi project . . . had the intention of showing what unites the minorities rather than what divides them. (Anna, 20)

Initiatives like the Queering Sápmi project are ways of opening up opportunities for new conversations about what Sápmi should be in the future (see also Kyrölä in this volume). Several of the participants talk about similar issues: That it is important to open up space for a more inclusive Sámi society and focus on the diversity within Sámi society as something that can unite people, rather than dividing them. Several of the participants are active in various organizations, including non-Sámi organizations, and issues like feminism, LGBT+ issues, climate change and environmental issues are topics that young people and the youth organizations are interested in.

However, the young activists and organizations are also using these issues to change Sámi society from within, through participating in organizations, events and conversations from a young Sámi point of view. Through their activities, they create space for new conversations about Sápmi, about rights to land and water, about language and culture and about who is included in Sámi society.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored how young Sámi perform resistance through activities in their everyday lives and through organizations and how their personal, social and political lives are often interconnected through stages of activism. While some do not see this as activism, I argue that it is important to analyze the act of having fun and showing Sámi spirit in everyday life as a different way of resisting the often taken-for-granted silencing of Sámi perspectives in the majority-dominated society. Their acts of resistance are not only resistance against this majority-dominated society, but they are also a way of creating space for being Sámi and distancing themselves from the older generations.

Through the three sections ‘Having fun in everyday life,’ ‘Fun as activism in Sámi organizations,’ and ‘Creating space for a new generation of Sámi activists,’ I have analyzed three different aspects of having fun as a form of activism for young Sámi today. In the first section, I have shown how having fun through Sámi everyday life activities and networks is not only done for entertainment but is also a political act by which they are breaking through the taken-for-granted silencing of Sámi languages and culture in everyday life situations in an urban context.

In the second section, I drew attention to how, by creating a fun and inclusive environment, youth organizations are bridging the chasm between everyday life activities and the political sphere, whereby fun activities aimed at young Sámi function as a way of recruiting them to Sámi activism. In the last section, I analyzed how youth organizations are actively building on the work of earlier generations of Sámi activists through their active use of symbols and events that serve as a way of strengthening Sámi society and fighting the effects of the assimilation policies and marginalization that took place in the past. However, they are also actively trying to achieve this on their own terms, often in opposition to the Sámi organizations ‘for adults.’

Through analyzing the links between activism and having fun, and inspired by [Tuck’s \(2009\)](#) desire-based research perspective, I argue that there is an urgent need for further research that focuses on the positive sides of Indigenous societies and the potential for growth and positive development. I argue that, through fun activities both within organizations and in their everyday lives, young Sámi are making space for new and positive ways of being Sámi and are thus breaking through the silencing of Sámi voices in the majority-dominated

societies in which they live. Rather than repeating the stereotypical images of Sámi culture as something that is forever damaged or that only existed in the past, having fun as Sámi generates a mobilizing affect for positive change in Sápmi. From an ontological perspective, these young people are constructing new Sámi realities as well as new understandings of what it means to be a Sámi and what is included in Sámi life today.

Notes

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¹ For more information about the project, see <https://blogg.hioa.no/urbansami/>. Also check out the forthcoming book *An Urban Future for Sápmi? Indigenous Urbanization in the Nordic States and Russia* (Berghahn Books), edited by Mikkel Berg-Nordlie, Marte Winsvold and Astri Dankertsen.

² Other researchers who have been involved in the project: Mikkel Berg-Nordlie, Anna Afanasyeva, Marte Winsvold, Tanja Joona, Christina Åhrén and Jørn Holm-Hansen. For more information about the project, see <https://blogg.hioa.no/urbansami/>.

³ Lapp is the old name attributed to the Sámi by outsiders and is now considered derogatory.

⁴ Noereh was established as a Sámi youth organization in 2009 in Romssa/Tromsø. The group has been active in several different forms of Sámi activism, such as Sápmi Pride, the fight for rights to land and water, festivals, meetings and other events. It defines itself as a politically independent organization that has as its main focus the creation of safe spaces for Sámi young people to meet. During our

project period, it developed from being a mainly national organization to also having local branches, such as Oslove Noereh (Oslo), Romssa Noereh and Ávjovvarri Noereh (Karasjok and Kautokeino).

5 **Gákti** is the North Sámi term for traditional Sámi clothing. Other terms are used in other Sámi areas, such as *gaep̄tie/gá̄ptoe* in South Sámi, *gá̄p̄pte* in Lule Sámi, *má̄áccuh* in Inari Sámi and *má̄áccak* in Skolt Sámi. The cut, colours, patterns and decorations can signify a person's gender, geographical origin, family and marital status. They have developed historically, from being made of reindeer skin and wool to cotton, silk and synthetic fabrics in modern times. There are also numerous different accessories that are often used in a specific way in different regions, such as belts, jewellery, footwear, silk scarfs and shawls. Today, these clothes are mostly worn in ceremonial contexts, but traditionally, they have also been worn in everyday life and while working, something that is still normal, especially among elders in areas such as Kautokeino in Norway. It is called *kofte* in Norwegian and *kolt* in Swedish. (For more about *gákti*, see Magga, S-M. in this volume.)

6 **Joik** is traditional Sámi way of singing.

7 The Kallak-Gállok controversy concerns a mine in Kallak/Gállok in Jokkmokk/Johkamohki in Sweden, where one of Scandinavia's largest known iron ore deposits is located. Beowulf Mining acquired the Kallak north licence in 2006, and since then, there have been Sámi protests, including cultural events that have mobilized many people, including young people, in Sápmi.

8 **Queering Sápmi** was an equality project that ran from 2011 to 2015 about Sámi people who challenge norms concerning gender, sexuality and identities. It focused on photography and storytelling.